

# RICK SMITH: Are you a good neighbor?

By Rick Smith

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I confess: I'm not a good neighbor.

My house needs paint, my yard's more zero-scaped than xeriscaped and my dogs bark at the drop of a Milk Bone.

But I am surrounded by good neighbors, and I'm hoping some of their goodness may gradually rub off on me.

Over the years, I've hauled off our beloved (but junky) "antique" car, dredged our stretch of the alley and quit building bonfires in the backyard. (Except on special occasions.)

In an earlier life, when my wife and I moved every few years, neighbors didn't matter so much. They were roadside stops on the highway of life.

But now that we've been settled into the same house for almost 20 years, our neighbors feel like an extended family. (Or, at least, like an extended family's reunion where all the faces are familiar but the names can be trouble.)

Once a year, Shirley Floral Company reminds us that, no matter where we live in San Angelo, we're all neighbors.

For 13 years, Joel Paul Shirley has given away bundles of roses so we, in turn, can give our neighbors a rose to show them we care. This year, he was helped by sponsors Johnson's Funeral Home, Kwik Kar Lube & Wash, Names and Numbers, San Angelo Real Estate and Waterford Day Spa.

Tuesday, Joel Paul and friends again reminded us of what good neighbors do: They make the place we live a little bit nicer. Friendlier. Sweeter.

I'm not a good neighbor, but in hopes of becoming a better one, I've made up my own list of dos and don'ts.

Good neighbors don't play loud music late at night.

And they don't call the police when you crank it up.

Good neighbors are friendly folks who may not always know your name, but they wave and smile just the same.

They don't let their lawns turn into jungles.

And, when your own lawn "gets a little on the high side," they find a kind, gentle way to drop a hint. ("Would you like to borrow my lawn mower/edger/pasture shredder?")

Good neighbors don't let their dogs rampage through the neighborhood.

And when your own dog escapes from the backyard and runs up and down the alleys, they'll help you track her down.

Good neighbors watch your back - and the back of your house while you're on vacation.

They share their prize-winning iris bulbs and gardening know-how.

They are the first customers to show up at your children's lemonade stand.

And the last to leave after a neighborhood get-together because they're helping with the clean up.

They keep an eye on the kids who live and play in the neighborhood.

And they keep an eye on suspicious cars or characters passing through.

Good neighbors help you pull rolls of toilet paper from your pecan trees after your place has been TPed.

And if their kids positively, absolutely must TP your yard, they enforce the "three-roll limit."

Good neighbors are there when you need them most, bringing plywood to nail over broken windows or casseroles to feed grieving families.

They bring you news they've heard, weather reports, a funny joke, a feeling of belonging. And, every August, roses.

