



Impact Team member Kenny Lofton uses a pressure washer to remove the remaining graffiti on a TROSA warehouse wall. Lofton has been a member of the team for more than three years. (Staff photo by Abby Moore)

# The Impact Team: Durham's unsung heroes

**By Abby Moore**  
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Kenny Lofton slips his gas mask's elastic band over the back of his head. The pink gas mask, red earmuffs and protective goggles may give him an alien-like appearance, but for Lofton they're normal work attire.

Lofton is one of the eight members of Durham's Impact Team, a city-funded group of dedicated individuals who remove graffiti, clean up trash and even return misplaced shopping carts. A Durham native, Lofton has been removing graffiti off city walls for almost four years.

"It helps the community look nice and also helps deter crime," Lofton says. "Because if you leave it there it will continue."

He sprays a corrosive called taginator across a white warehouse door where someone has painted the words "nitty gritty city" in black graffiti style. The letters begin to smear as the acid soaks in. After a few minutes, Lofton uses a pressure washer to remove the rest of the paint, and all signs of damage vanish. But he quickly points out that some jobs — such as his next one — aren't always this easy.

"I've already tried to remove some of it and it's just hard getting off," Lofton says. "Sometimes you just can't remove it."

Daryl Hedgpeth is the Impact Team's manager and a Durham native. He says the team stays busy, but still manages to do its job well.

*"These days everyone is so busy and you don't often get to know your neighbors. We want to take part in building neighborhood associations and try to get more cooperative citizenship by asking the neighborhoods where the problems are."*

- Daryl Hedgpeth, Impact Team manager

"Most cases you can't tell where we've been except for the lack of graffiti," Hedgpeth says. "And I can't think of a week where we didn't have to do any graffiti."

In 2011, the Impact Team removed graffiti from 442 sites. Hedgpeth says, there are some "very brave souls" who get creative about where they paint, which includes the sides of highways.

"Someone actually tagged the [Interstate] 540 curve where you exit to get on I-40. It was a 10-foot area right at the very top," Hedgpeth says.

The Impact Team removes a lot more than graffiti. Hedgpeth says that in 2011 they cleaned up 1,106 illegal dump sites, areas where people have left their trash without permission. Illegal dumps are prevalent now and a constant headache for the team.

Another issue the team faces is shopping carts. Hedgpeth says, community

members roll their grocery-laden carts home and don't return them.

"We're trying to take care of the shopping carts," Hedgpeth says. "We just have to get them off the street corners, out of the neighborhoods and back to where they belong."

With a large amount of work cut out for them, Hedgpeth is grateful for volunteers. Many community members partner with the impact team to do neighborhood projects, such as tree plantings and creek cleanups.

"These days everyone is so busy and you don't often get to know your neighbors," Hedgpeth says. "We want to take part in building neighborhood associations and try to get more cooperative citizenship by asking the neighborhoods where the problems are."

During the summer, Hedgpeth hires a control team made up of 22 members that concentrates on litter control efforts and provides jobs for young people in the area. Last summer the team removed 8.99 tons of trash.

Hedgpeth says he's proud of all the work the team and volunteers have done. When a graffiti site is called in, the team usually responds within 24 hours.

"We do this knowing that they could come back the very next day and put it right back," Hedgpeth says of graffiti artists. "We have to be committed enough to get right back out there as quickly as possible and remove it again. Usually we win."

*If you would like to report a graffiti site in Durham, call (919)560-1200.*