
IN PRAISE OF OUR COMMUNITIES

by Steve Roth

A speaker at a conference I attended recently challenged the crowd to, in so many words, be positive. We undervalue the things we have, she said, and overvalue those things we don't. We compare ourselves to others and, in the municipal government arena, we can end up envying the resources those other cities have, the big salaries they must be making, their robust sales taxes and gleaming new streets, their fun-loving mayors, and downtowns full of tourists.

Meanwhile, we look at our own towns and see only the streets that need fixing, the derelict buildings that need demolishing and the employee(s) who need an attitude adjustment. We cuss our critics and naysayers while taking for granted the friendly neighbor down the street. We brood over our town's problems while the strong points get filed away and forgotten.

The conference speaker hit a nerve with me and I returned to my town on a recent Friday afternoon determined to see it with new eyes. While I did have a few minor fires to put out upon returning, I also had the pleasure of seeing some of our town's best strengths in action.

I was greeted at City Hall by the very cheerful and competent staff. I drove out to a street project in progress and was amazed at the work that had gotten done in the few days since I was gone. The crew was still working on it, finishing up; a couple of them were putting in overtime to make sure the construction area was safe for the weekend.

Then I saw the mayor, who was complimenting the street crews as well. After hearing a few tales of rogue mayors at the conference, how nice it was to see ours in action – one who makes his rounds with the best interests of the community at heart.

Later, I visited a local business owner who was literally making a special "Key to the City."

"Are you here about the key?" he asked when I came in. I just grinned and nodded. He invited me back to his

workspace and together with his associates we worked out the plan. "We'll get it done!" he assured me, and I had no doubt that he would.

Then I walked down our beautiful historic main street, a place of pretty shops and galleries and the best grain alcohol money can buy (Pinckney Bend Distillery). I took a glance at the Missouri River, our constant companion (friend and sometimes foe), its muddy water ever rolling. It was good to be home, walking our quiet streets and feeling positive again about all the good things we have going on here.

It is easy in municipal government to dwell on the bad. Our town is small and of course we have our problems, but we also have attributes we should never forget. We have police officers who literally put their lives on the line for the safety and betterment of our community. We have streets and utilities workers who take seriously their duty to the public and the taxpayers. We have a wonderful city staff who take the best care of our customers, our citizens and taxpayers, as we can.

We have excellent people working hard every day to provide for their families and to help strengthen their community. We have city officials and staff who have made a true commitment to public service, and do their best at it. We have the beauty and charms of living in a small town that most of us wouldn't trade for anything.

In municipal government, we truly do work in a noble profession. It is an honor to serve our fellow citizens, to work with our staffs and colleagues for the betterment of our communities. Often, in the day-to-day grind, we can forget this. We should remember why we got in this business in the first place, for the love of our communities, and never take for granted all the good we have in them. □

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