

Our City

As City Council President Dan Hammond drove the truck that pulled the trailer that held our City's police officers in the American Falls Day parade, I was very pleased to have been asked to ride along. As Dan and I chatted throughout the route, I realized there were just as many Home Town Heroes watching the parade as were in it. Of course Police Chief Brandon Wilkinson and his police officers and Sheriff Jim Jeffries and his deputies who followed us in the parade are heroes; they put their lives on the line every time they go to work just as the men and women in our military do. And, of course the volunteers in our Fire Department and Search and Rescue are no less important and crucial as first responders. I am thankful daily that there is that special type of person who willingly chooses to do so. As we were waiting for the parade to start and folks were milling around and visiting, I had the opportunity to talk to citizens I had not seen it quite a while. It was good to catch up. As I was talking with Doc Miller I saw someone wearing a t-shirt walk by that summed up a lot of what I think about our community and our country.

Typically, I don't get caught up in slogans or labels but the one I saw on the t-shirt fit the theme of the day very well and it summed up what I think of all those hometown heroes I waved to throughout the parade. Too often I think we as a people lose sight of the contributions we all make and write them off daily as insignificant. Not true. No, not true at all.

As the parade started the first thing I noticed were the sheer number of families; some with multiple generations, standing together. I saw families I recognized in which both parents worked at least one job to make a better life for their kids and whose kids have learned the value of an honest day's work, who have been raised to be polite, respectful, and productive. Therein lie the heroes who built the very fabric of this nation and our community. I saw families in which only one parent had to work outside the home but the other was no less dedicated to the betterment of the family. I saw families with only one parent; a parent no less dedicated to the very principals of family, but doing it largely by themselves. I believe for most of us it is that love of family, that commitment to making a better life for our kids, that willingness to sacrifice for the greater good of the whole, that makes hard working parents and family members all heroes. And strangely enough, it is not the level of financial security of the family that makes it a hero in my eyes, nor is it the values and work ethic passed on to the next generation that is the true measure. It is that measure that makes this country and our community what it is today.

I saw small business owners who have built much from an idea and hard work. Community members who while providing for their family have built businesses that have grown to the point that multiple families and our community benefit from their vision and efforts. It's not everyone who will put it all on the line and dedicate their life to an idea and invest all they have to make it successful. But, it was that entrepreneurial spirit that also built this nation.

Along the route I saw teachers and coaches who have dedicated their lives to service, to the education of our youth, to filling in the blanks that are left void in many of our homes. Contrary to popular myth, 'those that can't do teach,' it is damn hard work. Teaching is not a path for just anyone and it's not a path easily followed. I saw teachers I know who change the

lives and foster the strengths in their student to believe that dreams can come true through hard work and dedication. Even in our community, regardless of family background, not all students have had the right role models to teach them the value of honesty, respect and a dependable work ethic. No, if some students are to learn those ideals sometimes it is left to their teachers. As such it has been my honor to have worked with so many heroes.

If you live in our community it is hard to drive far and not see another hero. A hero no less extraordinary than our law enforcement officers, military veterans, entrepreneurs and teachers. These hometown heroes supply each of us with our life's blood, yet largely go unappreciated like those described above. Often we only truly appreciate our local police officers when crisis confronts us. Seldom do we extend the respect and gratitude to those who have chosen to wear the uniforms of our country's military except on occasions marked conveniently on our calendars. Teachers remain largely thankless and are considered inept by many. Yet, we have reason to be thankful for our local farmers and ranchers daily, for many three times daily, as they provide that which we need most to survive. The American farmer and rancher makes up less than two percent of our nation's population; however, their efforts and products serve as the basis for nearly one quarter of our nation's workforce and jobs, their productivity to the general good of our community and nation is rivaled by none on this earth.

For some, that which they do daily fulfills their sense of obligation to home and community; yet, for others it is just a good start. In my opinion, community volunteers are some of our most under recognized and unsung heroes. Growing up I was fortunate enough to have several extremely good role models but none better at modeling the effectiveness of volunteerism than Floyd and Ruth Johnson, along with my Mom and Dad as they served as leaders of the Flying Banner 4-H club in Bannock County. As the parade concluded on Saturday, I headed back out to the fairgrounds where I had spent most of the week helping with the Power County 4-H and FFA Fair. For the past 27 years I have had the good fortune and privilege of working with perhaps the most selfless and dedicated volunteer I have ever known in Bill Schroeder, our Fair Board Chairman. And, to a similar degree, Stan Gortsema our retired county agent who even when fully employed donated far more hours than he was ever paid for. Volunteers like Bill and Stan are what makes the Power County Fair so perennially successful for all the youth who are fortunate enough to participate. Volunteers like Bill and Stan are what help make American Falls the best place to live. Volunteers like Bill and Stan who give freely of time and effort with no thought of thanks or personal gain are no less the super hero than the person who dons the badge or uniform, no less the hero than the parent who struggles daily to provide the best for their family, no less the hero than the teacher who works diligently to educate every one of their students and no less the hero than the ones who get up every morning and go to work so we have food on our table.

A hometown hero should be seen every time you look in the mirror. The potential is there in all of us. But, each of us has to choose to live up to that potential. Like the t-shirt said, 'Choose to be a hometown hero.'

Until next week...