

Our City

You may recall me writing about “growing our own.” I find it interesting that it seems to be catching on. What I find even more compelling is that it is very difficult for me to meet the current demand. I have received three requests in the last two weeks from business owners looking for motivated students who don’t necessarily just want a job, but who are truly interested in growing the job into a career. I also have a request from last March that has still not been filled. Beyond those four requests, I am looking for a student or two to assume the management of our Ag program’s greenhouse. The requests pose a twofold challenge for me, and I think to a larger degree, for society as a whole. As I originally wrote, the challenge is finding students who first want to work and second possess the motivation and soft skills to be a valued employee as opposed to a liability and worry. It is a real conundrum for any business but again I believe with any challenge comes opportunity.

I announced two weeks ago in my University of Idaho dual enrollment plant science class that I was looking for a new greenhouse manager. The previous two have graduated and are pursuing an education at the U of I. When I made the request, four hands went up. After class four young men came up to ask me about the job, which I found interesting as I have only had one male greenhouse manager since the greenhouse was built 14 years ago. All four are great kids and according to their grades and my experiences with them, they are excellent students. But something happens when I assign even the simplest of tasks in the greenhouse; something like deadheading the geranium baskets from downtown. For one or two the cell phone comes out and the ear buds go in and the music and texting commences. For another, the student is content to sit on the bench and pick at the basket beside him. The last just does the job assigned and then looks for something else productive to do. In a class of 22, it is difficult for any student not to get distracted by talking, a cell phone or anything else, for that matter. Many teenagers have the attention span of a gnat; not all, but many.

When students begin taking classes from me as freshmen I tell them all continually to consider the class as a job interview, to be mindful of their actions, work ethic and integrity because one day many of them will come to me for a job reference or scholarship recommendation. About half take it to heart. Of that half, only a few mirror the young man in the greenhouse who anyone would hire. Of those few, their interests in a career seem to be more beyond, on-the-job training or a technical degree. They tend to be like the two who just started at the U of I; which is not to say they can’t come back home and begin a career. But traditionally college graduates end up finding careers elsewhere. Not all, but most.

I found my greenhouse manager this past week and I am hopeful I can fill the four requests in the weeks to come. As a group of FFA members have been helping to clean up the equipment yard at Stotz John Deere these last few weekends, I have been doing an interview process similar to my greenhouse one for that very business. That kids will show up three weekends in a row and pull weeds physically bigger than they are is a pretty good indicator of motivation. If they do it without having to continually take a break, talk excessively to their friends, or be on the phone, is another, and a spot-on example of work ethic. The challenge then becomes for me to match the students with the work ethic and motivation to a local request in which they have an interest. That is typically the hardest part.

If everything comes together, I can place students in a career where they will have the opportunity to learn and grow. A place where they can find something they love doing for a lifetime. Something like John and Eldona Lounsbury found at Union Pacific and in education. Careers they both began when they were young and from which they ended up retiring. Who now are assistant directors for the Good Sam Club; the world's largest organization of recreational vehicle (RV) owners. To me that is what "growing our own" should be about. Getting young folks started in a career here at home that they love enough to eventually retire from. I have high hopes that at least a few of our home grown talents will find that. And, like John and Eldona, find a passion to pursue later in life.

John came to see me at City Hall last week. He came to inform me that the City of American Falls would be invaded by Good Sam members. Well, over 60 RVs will be converging on American Falls begin tomorrow, Sunday, September 11, with the majority showing up Tuesday and Wednesday. I know that John and Eldona have been to our local businesses garnering door prizes and the like, but as general citizens you may well wonder by Wednesday what in the world is going on. As a City we appreciate the Lounsbury's efforts to bring business to our community and as such I have extended the half-price greens fees at the Golf Course now offered to Willow Bay campers to any of the Good Sam Members who will be staying with us this week.

Speaking of Willow Bay, my neighbor Brandon Wilkinson and I found ourselves batching it last night, so we decided to have dinner at Willow Bay Café. While we were there, a small group was leaving from Salt Lake City. They told us they were on a trip but had specifically scheduled dinner on Friday night at the Café based on the reference of a friend. Leaving, they said the meal and service was great and that they would be back. I couldn't agree more. Well done Chef Scott Ploussard!

Also while at Willow Bay a few of the locals stopped by our table and commented on how well streets were being maintained and the very visible improvement in the lack of long term parked cars in our downtown area. Yes, Daren Dalhke and the Street Department do great work and yes the new parking ordinance seems to be working for the most part. I say for the most part because invariably someone finds a way to circumvent an ordinance. To those willingly complying, again I extend my thanks. To those very few who seek to continually circumvent the intent of increased commerce, safety, and street maintenance written in the ordinance, I can only wonder why. Yet, again with any challenge comes opportunity. I look forward to working on this one.

In talking with our Building Administrator, Jeff Nelson, it appears we have an opportunity to revisit our Class A Residential Zoning Ordinance, much like we did the parking ordinance, making it slightly more inclusive for some of our local business interests. Currently law and medical offices are permitted under the ordinance, but administrative offices are not. Perhaps that should change? If it makes American Falls a better place to work, live and raise a family, I think it has to be considered; for if we don't we can endeavor to "grow our own" until the cows come home and it won't make a lick of difference. Progress happens when opportunities find a way forward.

Until next week...