

Our City

It is interesting what can be learned when you are on vacation. Last week Sally and I celebrated our 40th anniversary and took a bit of a vacation in Oregon's Willamette Valley and the community of Sisters. I had to excuse myself from multiple meetings to make the time available; but the one meeting I was able to proxy to Councilwoman Kristen Jensen and Parks and Recreation Superintendent Chris Fehringer mirrored exactly what I experienced and witnessed in the Willamette Valley and Sisters.

I have written previous about the Community Health Academy (CHA) sponsored by the Blue Cross Foundation that I have been privileged to be a part of. The meeting I missed last week that Jensen and Fehringer took my place at focused on community food systems and the local, regional and even global importance of locally sourced foods. "Buy Local," it's real and it works. However, it doesn't happen by accident.

As a community we have more in common with Sisters than most of the towns in the Willamette Valley. Both Sisters and American Falls are surrounded by agriculture and numerous recreational opportunities; while the Willamette Valley is primarily agriculture with a focus on viticulture. For seven days we shopped and dined in the two Oregon communities and not once did we buy or consume foods that were brought to the table from more than 150 miles away; that one item happened to be fresh salmon, all other foods were actually sourced locally or within 35 miles.

What Councilwoman Jensen and Superintendent Fehringer had confirmed for them at the CHA was that healthy citizens and communities are dependent on a healthy agricultural base. Fehringer quoted the owner of the Red Feather restaurant in Boise, Dave Krick, when he told me, "Healthy urban areas are dependent on healthy rural areas, their farms and farmers." Krick buys from over two dozen local farmers to supply his business. Many communities in Idaho get it. And, to a degree we get it too, but we could do a better job at supporting and buying local. Yes, American Falls has a local farmers market that is open every Thursday next to the old Ken's building from 5:00 pm. to 7:00 pm.. For those of you who commute there is one in Pocatello every Wednesday and Saturday.

"As I participated in the Community Health Academy High Five! Project," Jensen shared, "I was happy to learn that the City of American Falls is already off to a good start. We have a Farmer's Market, which is one of the food systems referenced many times during the academy. By supporting our local Farmer's Market we encourage people to produce food. A thriving community has access to healthy food and residents are encouraged to have a supply of food should an emergency arise. I also learned that programs like 4-H, FFA, and classes like Teen Skills which is offered at the Middle School allow youth to be exposed to food related topics. These programs and classes are important so that young people can learn about healthy food, how to produce and prepare it. The importance of eating healthy and keeping food safe is something we can all work on to make our community a healthy, happy, place to live and work."

Fehringer also shared further, "The subject matter may have been about helping our children become healthier, but in all reality it was about our community as a whole getting on board

and being healthier. It was about supporting local farms and put money back into our local community. It's about offering healthy choices for parents to provide fresh not processed meals for their families.”

The next CHA meeting is on October 3rd and 4th in Twin Falls where walkability and bike-ability of communities will be the focus. We are doing a lot of things right in our city. For me it is what makes living here so cool. Is there more we can do? Absolutely! The fun part for me is being a part of making the improbable reality; it's almost better than being on vacation.

Until next week...