

MEMO FROM THE MAYOR

SUBJECT: The Proper Role of Humanity

At a Glance:

- Nature's stern discipline enjoins mutual help at least as often as warfare.
Theodosius Dobhansky (1962)
- When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me. Henry Francis Lyte (*Eventide*) 1847
- Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others...
1 Peter 4:10

Emmett Valley Friendship Coalition: Getting by with a Little Help from Its Friends

In the last several memos, we looked at the proper role of local government. Let us now turn to the proper role of humanity in this current existence of ours. What role do we play? Do we even have a role to play? The answer to the last question is an emphatic, Yes! The proof is in how the Emmett Valley Friendship Coalition responded to the Great Recession of 2007-2010.

For those who can remember back that far, recall that in 2008 housing prices fell which, in turn, caused a terrible domino effect around the capitalist world. Many asked how such a thing could have happened. The answer is an easy one. Greed and manipulation that takes place at levels us common folk have no access to or, typically, knowledge of, took place. Hence both the Crash of '29 and the Great Recession of 2007-2010 were contrived. The latter caused by low interest rates on mortgages (aka toxic subprime mortgages), easy credit for those who previously would not have qualified for a normal (i.e., "prime") mortgage, exacerbated by insufficient oversight of lenders accomplished the opposite of what the federal government advertised. In other words, the usual result.

Like dominoes, this caused the banks to go into a crisis when home owners could not make their payments; thus, causing the stock market to nose dive, and thereafter erasing what had been up to that point an enormous accumulation of wealth. Whether contrived or pure market machinations, when economic downturns happen, good people go hungry. At about this time, the community pantry previously operating at the Methodist Church, ceased to operate, exasperating the problem of those lacking food security in the Gem Community.

In mid-January 2008, a number of ordinary citizens decided to do something extraordinary. They came together to discuss the problem. At the end of the meeting, Tom John, Don Mackey, Sue Towery, Janet Monti, and John and Linda Biggs became the first board of directors to form

what is now known as the Emmett Valley Food Coalition. And that's all they were—a coalition. They had no 501(c)(3) designation, no restaurant experience, and no real assets other than a desire to feed the hungry.

With assistance from the West Central Highlands organization, the Coalition acquired its 501(c)(3) non-profit status, and, through the Idaho Food Bank, learned all about food safety. Ultimately, through the Senior Center, they had a place to serve meals and distribute boxes of food to those in need on Tuesdays.

In those early days, just as in the present, the community responded in a most generous way. In fact, major contributors to the Coalition have remained consistent throughout the fifteen years of its existence: the Gem Community, Albertsons, the Idaho Food Bank, along with the Southwest District Health, WICAP, the Senior Center, the Little Family Endowment and a dozen other active partners, topped off by a plethora of volunteers over its decade and a half.

The Current Board and Its Challenges

Daniel Brice, Alan Crabtree, Annette Smith, Gina Banister, and Janet Monti comprise the Coalition's current board. While they have learned much over the last several years about running a local food bank, this does not mean they no longer have major challenges to overcome.

In the beginning, the Laura Moore Cunningham Foundation helped the Coalition purchase its first truck with a refrigeration unit. This constituted a requirement by the Idaho Food Bank in order to obtain their support. But that was fifteen years ago. Coming forward to the present, after several rehabs of the truck's refrigeration unit, parts became too hard to come by, or in many instances, non-existent.

Thanks once again to the Laura Moore Cunningham Foundation in an encore performance, together with the Idaho Episcopal Foundation, the REALTORS Community Foundation, a fundraiser breakfast and silent auction, coupled with the Emmett Presbyterian Church holding a sale by donations of items left at their former church (now owned by the Gem County Recreation District) with a match of those donations made by the Presbytery they had enough to go forward with the purchase another used refrigeration truck in California. Soon, the Coalition will have another truck. This does not mean the old truck will no longer have a mission. It just might; but we will have to wait and see what that could be.

Both the dinners of the Coalition and the pantry have seen an over 30-per cent increase from last year in the number of people seeking food at year's beginning. While the Coalition has

been able to meet these increased needs to date, no guarantees are in place for the future. Friendship Coalition pantry services and dinners are offered each Tuesday at the Senior Center, 719 S. Johns Avenue. The pantry operates from 3:15 to 6 p.m. and the Coalition serves dinners from 5 to 6:30 p.m. In addition to the weekly programs, the Coalition also sends weekend food for students to Black Canyon High School and still provides monthly supplemental boxes of food for senior citizens. One additional duty acquired by the Coalition in recent years includes overseeing the annual Christmas Cheer Baskets with assistance from WICAP.

This writer's experience through volunteering at the pantry has been positive and worthwhile. I volunteer in my capacity as a member of local VFW Post 4900, and it proves the theory that doing volunteer work is actually a benefit to mental health. Worldly pressures seem to dissipate when helping others. I heartily recommend it. For more information call 208-369-7915 or email emmettfriendship@gmail.com. One can also check out the Coalition on its Facebook page. You won't regret it.