



City of Leavenworth

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May 22, 2020

Community Members,

I think it is very fitting that the first national holiday since the start of the pandemic is this coming Memorial Day weekend. It is appropriate because this holiday is one that specifically honors those who have sacrificed their lives for our country, for you and for me. It is a reminder of our deep dependence upon one another, and upon those who have gone before us. In July, we celebrate our Day of Independence. This weekend we celebrate our Day of Dependence, or more aptly, Interdependence. We have such a strong independent streak in our culture. We celebrate that mythical “self-made individual”. But while there is much to be said for individual effort, and the rewards of hard work and risk-taking, the fact is, not one of us is purely “self-made”. Anything we do is within a context of others. Our families have a big part in shaping who we are (and not always for good). Teachers, other adult mentors, the community we were born into, and the opportunities we were given to learn and develop, and try out our wings before we flew the nest, all had a role to play. Each event, whether a success or a failure, continued that process. Not one step of it was totally alone. And to the extent we were on our own, without support, without guidance, our growth and development was stunted.

Early in my career, my wife and I ran a social service agency and feeding program in The Bottoms of Shreveport, LA. This was an area of extreme poverty and unemployment. We were one of only a handful of neighbors who had steady employment in the four block area known locally as The Bottoms. Our neighborhood was full of “street kids”, those who were too young for school, or who simply did not attend because the local schools were too crowded, and no one missed them, or required their attendance. I recall noticing right away how sad and empty their eyes looked... lifeless. And I also remember how, by just giving them some adult attention, doing simple things like taking them to the park, or playing games with them, the light started coming back into their eyes. We watched them literally come back to life. We got them to play educational games, and they wanted to play so badly they found themselves learning things! This was amazing to them. Because these were kids where their environment, their surroundings, and their previous interactions with adults, all seemed to shout at them, “You are worthless, you are dumb, don’t even try!” It was a life-changing experience to see the impact we had, simply by being present to them in simple, not very profound, ways. We are not, not even one of us, self-made. Someone, somewhere, supported us, gave us hope, gave us direction, gave us a reason. It might not have been everyone, or even most, but after my experience in the Bottoms of Shreveport, I saw where the road led that was barren of any support whatsoever. It was literally a dead end!

As we have been battling this pandemic, we are reminded of this truth. We really are in this together. We did not build apart from the support of others, and to return to the health and vitality of body, soul, and our work, will require the help of others. This weekend we acknowledge that fact. We wouldn’t be where we are today without the sacrifice of lives given on our behalf. That was true in defending our country in war, that is true in defending our country during this war-like pandemic. We have all heard of the courageous stories of lives lost in the battle against this disease. It is a battle that makes us all safer, even if we have not had to make that sacrifice ourselves. It is a time to pause, to remember, to give thanks, for all those who have given us so much, who have made the ultimate sacrifice upon which we are able to build our lives. And then, we honor that sacrifice, by recommitting ourselves to the truth of our interdependence. It is not about me, it is not about you, it IS about us! Let us ponder that this Memorial Day. Let us be dedicated to moving forward carefully, and as safely as we can, in their honor!



Carl J. Florea, Mayor

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