



A Call to Service for Centennial High School Seniors

A column by Circle Pines Mayor Dave Bartholomay for the Quad Community Press Newspaper (11/14/2017)

As you work through your last year of High School, I'd like to issue you a challenge: Begin living a life of volunteerism and service as the first step in living a life of meaning.

Why am I bothering you with such big concepts when you are just trying to finish high school? Because a personal goal of mine is to help young people learn important lessons that can sometimes be hard to grasp or understand. Lessons that, if learned earlier in life, can help you avoid some of the mistakes and wrong turns many of us older adults have taken in our journeys.

Why the focus on a meaningful life? Because a life with meaning, with purpose, with belonging, will lead you to success and achievement. If you are valued for who you really are; if you have worked to figure out the 'why I am here?' of your life; if you understand that YOU are the author of your own story and can make choices along the way to change that story; then you have taken control of your destiny in a way that others will notice and admire. You will be on a path to becoming the best person you can be. You'll be a better partner, a better parent, a better co-worker or neighbor, and the kind of person who receives respect and admiration for how they treat people as well as how they live their life.

So why is serving others such a key to a meaningful life, when many people think the goal is to find 'happiness'? Because happiness, as you already know, can be fleeting. Some days you have experiences that produce happiness, and some days you are stuck in a state of despair. Happiness is not a permanent state and often happens due to outside forces (think of your boyfriend/girlfriend, job or family). When those outside sources of good or bad are gone, you are once again on your own. Happiness is a result of living a meaningful life, not the cause of it.

I would contend that you build yourself a meaningful life by connecting and becoming part of something larger than yourself, by thinking of how you will contribute to your community. Community could be a neighborhood or city, or a group of supportive friends, or people in need. Because it is in those contributions, in the volunteering to help others and those in need, that you find a real sense of satisfaction and purpose. You realize that you do, indeed, have important gifts to offer unrelated to things like grades, money or youthful fame. By truly caring and contributing, you can elevate your mood and be appreciated for who you are, not what you have.

The world becomes a closer and warmer place when you realize it isn't all about you. Rather, it is about what you have to offer others. It may be as simple as a smile and a nod to a lonely person; a random act of kindness that lifts the spirit of someone in need; an act of courage to stand up for someone being bullied who needs support; or an act of true compassion to someone struggling.

You are growing up in a fast-changing and often nasty and negative world. Yet one simple fact has remained the same through the ages: finding meaning in your life is the most important task anyone undertakes. Serving others is a big part of the answer, so if you haven't already, I challenge you to start now.