

## **Tough times can be good times**

A column by Mayor Dave Bartholomay for the Quad Community Press Newspaper (4/6/2010)

Don't misunderstand me – these are indeed tough times. The last couple year's economic downturn continues to drag many of us down, myself included as I was recently laid off from my 'day' job as an executive at a small software company. Remember that being the Mayor of Circle Pines pays \$4,000 a year, so a full-time job is also needed! Like many others across the community, I've had to prioritize my spending, resolving to continue my contributions to Our Saviors Lutheran Church, but putting off a car purchase and not taking a vacation during my son's spring break.

There's an old saying in politics that the only person who likes change is a baby with a wet diaper! Change can indeed be tough, but it also causes us to reflect and prioritize on what's most important to us, a discipline that positions us for an improved future. We do that as individuals, we do that as a church congregation, and we do that as a city government. I believe the key to success is the manner in which we do that reflecting and prioritizing.

I try to be an optimistic and a 'glass half full' type of guy. Using my passion and energy in a positive manner is the only way I can get through what can sometimes be disheartening situations. I believe we all need to bring solutions, not simply restate the problem over and over again, only louder and louder. And while I appreciate that everyone doesn't always support the same positions I do, it is critical that we all hold our discussions in a civil manner. It doesn't help us solve problems together when folks are threatening and even lying as they work themselves into a lather listening to the fringe voices of the day. How can you possibly be part of a solution that usually requires compromise, and is nearly always someplace near the middle, when you've been so nasty and staked a claim so far out of the mainstream (right or left-wing), or when you just say 'no' to anything and everything? The fact is you can't.

As change comes to government, some only see a future focused on cutting and not being able to afford to do some important things. Yes, we definitely have to live within our means, but I would challenge all of us to use these tough times to be bold and to look at doing things better and smarter than we do right now, not just doing with less. I would contend that now is the time to broaden the tax system and lower some rates to make it fairer; aggressively drop programs and tax breaks that don't work; trim unfunded mandates and identify efficiencies in sharing services among governments; and work to actually improve our education system rather than allowing its continued slide into mediocrity.

The American success story is one based on innovation and risk-taking, on using new information to try fresh approaches, on justice and fairness, and on caring for those in need. Our long-held tradition of encouraging diverse people and viewpoints to respectfully work together to find solutions for the common good will always make for a strong, forward-looking America.

Just as I and many others optimistically look for new job opportunities that are challenging and rewarding, the community also needs to look towards the future with optimism. Let's all use this time wisely to reflect on our priorities, tighten our belts, and then reinvest in what's most important, both in our homes and in our communities. That approach can help turn tough times into good times.