

Mayor's Column for the May 5, 2010 Review

John and I enjoyed a few days of needed "R & R" in Mineral Point last week. We spent an hour chatting with Joy Gieseke, Executive Director of the Mineral Point Chamber of Commerce. She gave us a sneak peek at the outstanding \$1.5 million restoration of their opera house, which was re-opening last weekend. We exchanged stacks of community marketing brochures for our respective visitors' centers.

Mineral Point is home to the first historic district in Wisconsin listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Our historic district is the second oldest Wisconsin district National Register listing. Joy suggested that our two communities plan a joint program/event. It is a great idea that we will pursue in the coming months. A collaboration showcasing the history and art in our communities would be really special.

Mineral Point has "done ok" during the recession, according to Joy. We did see a few closed businesses since our last trip there about a year ago.

We spent several hours exploring the southwestern corner of Wisconsin. We drove through Platteville, Beetown, Belmont, Cassville, studied the Civil War memorial in Lancaster, and had a tasty lunch and libation at the Potosi Brewery Restaurant. Economic distress was clearly visible in rural Wisconsin.

As a local government leader, I am really concerned about the current situation and events occurring in our state and country. While we were in Mineral Point news broke about Harley Davidson discussion of reducing operations in Wisconsin. News of the growing threat of devastation to the Gulf Coast is disheartening. Fresh in my mind is the recent mine disaster in West Virginia. The testimony of Goldman Sachs executives before the U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations about the recent financial crisis is sobering.

I was disturbed by an April 27, 2010 article in the Wall Street Journal entitled "States Bristle As Investors Make Wagers on Defaults." Reporter Ianthe Dugan writes that credit default swaps (CDS) "are basically insurance contracts that protect bondholders against default." They can drive up the cost of government borrowing and affect credit ratings. She states, "Dealers say many of the contracts are being bought by bondholders looking to hedge their investments. Investors, however, don't have to own bonds in order to buy the contracts, and traders say much of the activity is coming from hedge funds speculating that municipalities will default."

Dugan reports, "Municipal CDS are documented by the Depository Trust and Clearing Corporation, which settles derivatives trades. The contracts are currently trading on California, Illinois, Michigan, . . ., Wisconsin, Maryland and Texas (emphasis added)." She writes that CDS are "the investment products that play a starring role in the federal case against Goldman Sachs Group Inc. and have served as a tool for investors' misfortunes, such as the collapse of the housing market."

The headline of last Sunday's Wisconsin State Journal Opinion Section is "State leadership lacking." Gubernatorial candidate Tom Barrett speaks of "adult" supervision and conversation. On ABC's This Week program, columnist George Will spoke of our country's ravenous appetite for energy. Our challenges are really great.

There has been much debate about political gridlock in Washington and Madison. Campaign season is upon us. As I have thought about the current natural, economic, and political environments, three distinct truths seem apparent to me.

First, the status quo is not sustainable. What will be the tipping point required to move our federal and state leaders beyond partisan gridlock to productive engagement in problem-solving of the huge issues we face? As our problems multiply, inaction results at best in crisis management instead of proactive crisis avoidance.

Also, the public needs to become informed and engaged. As citizens, we need to voice our expectations and hold our government officials accountable. We must take seriously our civic responsibility and exercise our right to vote. The silent majority needs to become vocal to counterbalance the extreme messages of citizens at the political fringe.

Last, and of most concern as a mayor, local government activity is impacted by the financial decisions of state and federal legislatures. At some point fiscal austerity will be required, and it will affect our local services and costs.

This week I will be spending a significant amount of time drafting the annual State of the City report. The municipal code provides that the mayor, in consultation with the Common Council president, will prepare the overall plan and recommendations for the city for the next two years.

The challenges I have identified in this column, as well as others, and the way they are addressed by the federal and state legislatures, will certainly impact the future state of our city. Local governments will need to be nimble, flexible, and innovative to respond effectively. We will be required to maximize the services provided to our citizens in the most cost-effective manner with currently undetermined reduced revenue. In Evansville, we will accomplish this task while protecting our financial security and stability.

Discover Wisconsin Update

The program script for the Evansville episode of Discover Wisconsin has been reviewed and edited. In the next two to three weeks the video portion of the program will be reviewed. It is less than six weeks until the show air date of Saturday, June 12, at 6:30 p.m. on Channel 27.

Energy Saving Tip

Unplug cell phone chargers and laptop adapters when not being used. They continuously draw power.

Community Announcements

Curbside pick-up of yard waste occurs the first full week of each month. For May, pick-up is May 3-7. Brush and debris should be placed on the terrace, not in the gutter where it can clog storm drains.

The beautiful weather has increased outdoor activities, including walking our pets. Please be considerate of your neighbors and visitors by cleaning up after your pets.

Yard signs for garage sales and other promotions are not allowed on terraces. Do not attach signs to light poles, traffic signs, and other city property.

Community Thanks

Evansville thanks the National Honor Society for their recent participation in the United Way of Northern Rock County and Rock County 4-H Youth Service Day. Evansville students collected trash strewn along Water Street and Territorial Road.

Butch Beedle of the Evansville School District, Jim Brooks of Evansville Community Partnership, and community volunteers Nancy and Phil Kress deserve special thanks from our community for coordinating the outstanding Energy Fair. Dozens of other individuals spent hours of volunteer time ensuring the success of the event. It was the best yet.

I am grateful to the many Evansville organizations and families that assembled Kids Against Hunger Meals the evening of the Fair. Well over 7,000 meals were packed that night. Dave Warren of Ace Hardware told me that recent shipments of the food were sent to Haiti and Guatemala, as well as being distributed in Rock County. Awesome!