

Mayor's Column for the August 10, 2011 Review

As our family was making preparations for participation in last weekend's city-wide garage sales day, we found an autographed copy of award-winning local author Helen Smith's 1975 book entitled "You Can't Cry All the Time." The book belonged to my mother and is a collection of essays, some of which were published in the Evansville Review as part of its "Main Street" series of the time.

Helen Smith lived down the block from our family during my youth. She was a quiet neighbor lady, and my own recollection of her is quite vague.

In the Forward of the book, Mrs. Smith points out that all events, good and bad, provide the impetus for living a full rich life. She also mentions the importance of perseverance. Her essay "Want to be an Adult?" suggests that "looking at life squarely is most helpful" and that responding to adversity by "picking oneself up after each fall, and pressing relentlessly forward toward one's goal" is the best avenue to achievement.

Helen's ideas resonate with me as I watch the current situation and feel the mood of our community. The financial stresses from our country's extended economic problems are apparent here in Evansville. Citizens are uncertain and edgy at a minimum. Some families directly impacted by job loss are in extremely serious trouble.

The poisonous political environment in Washington and Madison is disheartening. The current dysfunction of our political system is unbelievable and, frankly, disgusting. The Wisconsin recall elections this month are indicative of the turmoil we are experiencing.

I have said before that there is no playbook for local elected officials. There is certainly no standard game plan available for our current situation. Helen Smith's practical view of handling adversity is a good course of action.

Two weeks ago we had a Committee of the Whole meeting. Our agenda was too ambitious and we worked through about half of the items in three hours. Remaining topics will be placed on agendas of upcoming Common Council and committee meetings. Importantly, there was consensus about continued commitment to providing outstanding service to our residents, maintaining and improving our community's quality of life by careful, efficient use of scarce tax dollars.

The past several years have been filled with large infrastructure projects. The complete rebuild of the East Main Street Bridge is currently underway. There was agreement that maintenance of our infrastructure is essential to prevent problems and minimize the scope of necessary future projects. Again, we will work to stretch our valuable tax dollars.

I want to share several things that happened to me in the past couple of weeks, rays of sunshine in the midst of many serious days. I attended the Madison Trust for Historic Preservation annual awards ceremony that honors significant restoration projects—the

Grove Society and the City of Evansville received an award for the terrific rehabilitation of the Baker Office Building at the entrance to Leonard-Leota Park. In presenting the award, the Madison Trust focused on the perseverance of our community in accomplishing this ten-year project, with well over a hundred families and fifty businesses and local organizations supporting the effort.

Over this past weekend I spoke with many individuals. I was pleased to talk with Tammy Splittstoesser, a former resident and past business owner of Inside Out Expressions that was located on Main Street. Tammy recently returned from her second deployment and is now living in Oshkosh. It is important to remember that our troops continue their mission and work day-to-day regardless of the current political winds.

I had a brief conversation with Luke Johnson, an EHS alumnus visiting here to celebrate his mom's birthday. (Happy Birthday Annette!) Luke commented on how great our city looks and how visible the improvements are.

I attended an open house for Agrecol on Saturday afternoon and had the opportunity to talk with Kathleen Falk, retired Dane County Executive. Kathleen has been campaigning for recall candidates throughout the state. Kathleen's niece and nephew were with her—her young niece contributed to the campaigns of recall candidates with money earned from running a lemonade stand. Political commentary aside, I was struck by the active involvement of these children in the political process. We need our children to be educated in the responsibilities of citizenship—they are the future of our community, country, and the world. It is important to talk with our youth about current events and citizen participation; it is necessary for our country's well-being!

Finally, the highlight of last week was an unexpected e-mail I received from the former mayor of Bawlf, Alberta, Canada, a community of about 400 people. Jerry Iwanus and his wife visited friends in Evansville last month. In his e-mail he described Evansville as an attractive, welcoming place, and referred me to his blog. Here is an excerpt from his blog posting.

“The 4th of July (Independence Day) was fascinating; our friends . . . happen to live on Main Street in Evansville (pop.: 4800), so we were able to sit on their veranda and watch the parade go by. It was positively idyllic: both small-town pride and American patriotism writ large were in full display, although perhaps not any more than they would have been in a small-town Canada Day parade here at home. What really made us realize we were in the US on July 4th, though, was the fireworks display that evening. The **vast** majority of townspeople were at the park where the display occurred and I can promise you you've never seen anything like it. It was jaw-dropping spectacular. I don't think we Canadians are any less patriotic than our American neighbours but they sure know how to celebrate what matters to them. Do it big and do it right, seems to be the American way (if you don't believe me, go visit Mount Rushmore, which we also did) and it was thrilling to be part of it.”

Repeating Helen Smith, life is full of good and bad things that “provide us with the incentive to live our lives to the very fullest.”

I am being asked often about whether I will run for re-election again next spring. I sense unease in the frequency of the question. To be honest, there are challenging days where the thought of retiring is appealing, and I have many deferred interests and activities that call to me. (I’m sure many of you feel the same way in your jobs.) However, this is a time that I believe requires experience, knowledge, and political insight at the local level that would be difficult for a new person. Therefore, I will run for re-election and serve if that is the decision of Evansville voters. I have been honored to serve you and I will continue to work to the best of my ability to make Evansville the best it can be.

Community Announcements

AWARE in Evansville is collecting school supplies for our local students. The need is great for the new school year. Glue sticks, #2 pencils, spiral notebooks, large erasers, 3-ring binders, and scientific calculators are basic items needed. Collection bins are located at Bank of Evansville, M & I Bank, Union Bank and Trust Company and all of our local churches. Thank you for your generosity—every student needs the tools for learning!

The Wisconsin Historic Preservation Review Board will consider the nominations of St. John’s Lutheran Church and Leonard-Leota Park at their August 19 meeting at the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison.

Community Congratulations/Thanks

Congratulations to Agrecol as they celebrate the completion of their new office building on Casey Road.

Stoughton Trailers celebrates their 50th anniversary with a public open house on Saturday, August 13, from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the production facility located at 101 County Highway M. Evansville congratulates STI on this company milestone.

Our community thanks Barb and John Willoughby for their many years of organizing the annual city-wide garage sales day. There were visitors from throughout the region again this year—an oak table travelled from our garage to a new home in Rockford.