

From the Editor

Not A Local

It's hard for me to fathom, but I've called Salida home for 16 years come this November. This is the longest I have lived continually in any one place including the town I was born in.

Yet, I don't yet consider myself a local. I reserve that title for those who were born and grew up here, who raised families here, whose ancestors are buried here. I know quite a few locals, those who decided to stay here for their own particular reasons. But there are many Salida natives whom I have never, nor will ever meet. They left the city long ago for better jobs, more culture, bigger cities -- for any number of reasons.

I've been pondering this because we are headed for another contentious local election, one that, on the surface, pits the old guard against the newcomers -- those of us who've only been here 20 years or less. But there are currently officeholders who have lived here not nearly as long as some of those who are considered "newcomers," many of whom I know personally and are hard-working members of the community. They volunteer, serve on boards, raise children and own businesses which employ others.

They may have come from elsewhere, but they have thrown their lot in with the city and are valuable contributors to it in so many ways. I then look at some of their opponents, those currently serving and those who have recently thrown their hats in. I think of them as "grudge" candidates, because that's how they seem to approach the role of governing in this remote mountain city, with some sort of grudge -- against newcomers, against change, against anything that might cause them to reconsider old patterns of thought. There seems to be a longing for the "old" Salida, when houses were cheap, downtown buildings were only half occupied, sidewalks were empty and graduating students couldn't wait to skip town in search of real opportunities.

In my eyes, Salida in 2017 is experiencing a golden age: business is booming, construction is on the rise, tourists all want to live here and the vacancy rate downtown is almost zero. Young families are moving here and there are suddenly children everywhere. To me, these are signs of a healthy community, especially in the early part of the 21st century United States, when so many towns in the rust belt are dying, and towns in the midwest are being abandoned, when the cities are becoming overcrowded and the suburbs or giving way to soulless exurbs.

Of course, there are serious growing pains that accompany the changes Salida is experiencing. The most obvious, and, to me, most urgent, is the matter of affordable housing (see page 14*). With skyrocketing real estate prices, how can a young family starting out even begin to consider owning their own home? Where are the service workers supposed to live? In their cars or camped out on surrounding BLM land? These problems are slowly being addressed in the political realm, but not with the urgency required, especially on the part of the current majority council members, who I'm sure all have nice homes in Salida and are far removed from the realities of the waitress who serves them their steaks.

More people also means more points of view, more cars and trucks on the road, more users on the area trails, longer lines at the downtown grocery chain. Those who have always revered Salida's small-town charm are understandably concerned with the sudden growth, but you cannot put the proverbial genie back in the bottle. You have to be proactive, to recognize change has already come and there is an opportunity to steer and finesse that change, to develop long range plans instead of trying to put out every brushfire that comes along. It requires a certain amount of vision, of sacrifice, of playing the long game and envisioning the community you and your neighbors all want to live in 20, 30 years from now. A place where young people have real opportunities and don't have to leave town to find them. A fertile market for entrepreneurship and commerce.

In the past few years under the current council majority, we've had three city managers, lost our developmental director, our deputy city clerk and our public works director, and are now looking for a third city finance director. This upcoming election seems like a good opportunity to clean the council slate, to toss out the old, ineffectual ways and allow for some new blood, with entrepreneurial spirit, fresh ideas, and most of all no chips on their shoulders.

-- Mike Rosso

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