

Community Comment - July, 21st, 2014
By Jon Sapper

A bit of old fashioned Americana is good for the soul. If you attended the Rodeo activities in Fortuna last week, you got a glimpse of it. If you attend the Auto Xpo in Fortuna this coming weekend with hundreds of classic and vintage cars, you'll see more of that small town nostalgia. If you ride the hay wagons, drink that great Clendenen's Cider and munch down on bar-b-que'd old fashioned franks at the Apple Harvest Festival in October, you'll know that celebrating small town history is alive and well in the Eel River Valley.

There's a comfort in reflecting on the past and celebrating a sense of place that anchors us to our heritage. I think of my grandmother, who was born in Fortuna in 1896. She watched the Rodeo parade from her front porch for 64 straight years. She could tell you what's coming next without looking. You gotta love it.

But as we reflect and celebrate the past, we need to look forward. The economy of the Eel River Valley, rooted in the past-welcomed paternalistic timber industry, is a pittance of what it used to be. The future health and vitality of communities in this part of the county, especially Fortuna, will be determined by the success of new leadership that is starting to surface. A leadership where government, the private sector and philanthropy work together, in partnership with local businesses and all citizens to create a vibrant community. Under the leadership of the Fortuna City Council, the City Manager has created a vision for 500 jobs; jobs that can sustain a family and a diversified economy that can withstand the ups and downs of normal economic cycles. There is land available and a recent poll of citizens confirms they are ready for this leadership. We need to support him as he works to strengthen services that are truly supportive of those who want to create, grow or attract businesses.

The McLean Foundation has hired staff to help with this economic revitalization in Fortuna. Investments will be needed and helping to create a strong economy is a priority for the Foundation as a testament to the legacy of Mel and Grace McLean.

A part of this effort, already underway, is quality healthcare, a critical part of the community. A plan for the modernization or new construction for Redwood Memorial Hospital needs to start now. And, Open Door Community Health Centers needs to have a Fortuna facility for primary care. Success with these ventures should not be up for discussion. It needs to happen.

It's an exciting time for Fortuna. The stars are aligning. The leadership is there. Now's the time to get on board and be a part of this work. There's room for everybody. See you at Auto Xpo.

This has been Jon Sapper for Community Comment.