

Tuesday, July 7, 2015

This is Erin Dunn of the Fortuna Chamber of Commerce with a Community Comment.

I was reading a local blog over the weekend and they were commenting on a post on Craigslist from a writer who had moved to Arcata a few years ago because they had heard it was a great place to raise their family. They moved to the area, were employed by a local business, worked hard to buy local and fit in. Two years later, they are moving.

The person shared their concern over the “locals only” attitude that seemed to make the place unwelcoming. It wasn’t about the pervasive pot culture, they were aware of that before coming here. They point out that without non-locals moving here, we are doomed.

I agree with their assessment in part. I think the word “doomed” is a little harsh, but I think we do need a wake-up call.

First, without moving forward—which does not mean becoming a county of strip malls and chain restaurants—we will not be able to keep our young, talented people here. Outside Humboldt County exciting innovations are taking place—smart planning and inventive solutions to existing problems are being executed.

I heard a presentation by the mayor of Napa last week and she showed before and after photos of downtown from 20, 15 and 10 years ago. And the difference was stunning—the new construction was inviting, original and forward thinking. They had a flood area downtown that they dealt with in a remarkable new way.

Why isn’t that happening here? For one thing, we lack collaboration. The people who say NO to progress don’t provide viable alternatives.

It was pointed out to me when I first moved here that the most vocal environmentalists against expansion were the last ones to move in to the neighborhood.

Second, we are a County of competitors, not collaborators. I've lived here 12 years and still can't understand why there are disparaging things said about Fortuna—alluding to it being backward—by people who don't live here and seem to have no idea what a great community it is. How is that helping our County?

And the Eureka bashing needs to stop. I have visitors coming through the Chamber asking how to bypass Eureka because they have “heard” about it. We need to solve the problems in Eureka, not put up barriers to making it better. Who are the worst bashers? Humboldt county residents.

And for Arcata, I think the pan handling law suit from a few years ago sums one point I'm trying to make—one or two people stopped a community from making the plaza a more hospitable and safe place under the guise of trying to preserve free speech. Oh come on.

One consequence of that lawsuit was keeping other communities in Humboldt County from moving forward with panhandling laws for fear of being sued.

And on it goes. We need to wake up and work together as a County. We need to welcome new people to the area and consider new ideas. And most importantly, we need to create unity from within. I know we can do it.

This has been Erin Dunn with a Community Comment.