

Community Comment
July 1, 2016
Sam Pennisi

Graduation and our future

Those of us with children probably remember how connected we felt to our kids and their friends. In my case, I got to know my girl's friends quite well. Many would often take their lunch at our house with or without my girls being here. Since I ran a Bed and Breakfast, I was home most of the time so I was also the parent that was here for lunch and after school. I watched these kids struggle with homework and their busy schedules. They had all the issues we might expect but they had dreams and hope for their future. Some were off to college with lofty goals. Some were off to college not knowing what they wanted to do. Some joined the military or took a job that would get them started.

I remember hearing locally and on the news that the youth of today just won't amount to much. They were lazy or didn't want to be tied down to a job. They seemed to have no interest in their community or country. The country was going to heck. At the time, I use to think "who do these people know?". My kids and their friends were certainly not like that. They were serious and hard working and wanted to do something that made a difference. My girls were gone for about 10 years before they decided to come back. But we were only part of the reason. They had Master's Degrees and decided they wanted to teach. They came to Humboldt and registered for the Credential Program. After completing the program they both substitute taught for two or three years. One was finally hired at Arcata High and the other at Sunnybrea Middle School. One is working and raising her kids in Arcata with her husband. The other is single but with a great young man with a professional career. They are devoted teachers and give more than required. They both take part in school and community events. I don't have to drag them to Rotary Events; they know it's a good cause and happily join in. I didn't think what I heard about the kids was true then and I don't believe it now.

One of my favorite things that I do in Rotary is give scholarships to graduating seniors for their college or vocational education. Our club can support about 5 students at 1000 dollars each. It's not a lot in today's world but it's something. If you haven't done something like this recently, you might be in for an eye opener. We had about 17 applications this year. More than half had earned more than a 4.0 GPA. That's straight A's plus. We also ask how they spend their free time. You might think they do nothing but study but no. They are in choir or the band, they volunteer for projects that benefit the community. They tutor other students, and they are in sports. We often wonder how they find the time. When they write about what their plans are, they almost always include church or community involvement. The idea of being a part of something bigger than they and improving the lot of those less fortunate is a common thread. These kids seem to get the big picture. They have an interest in a quality life and are willing to work for it. They appreciate their elders but are confident they can take it a step farther. As a whole, they understand the importance of environment better than any generation that has gone before and want to make it better.

I know Humboldt County kids are special but I think they represent their peers. If so, our future is in good hands.

Congratulations to all those who graduated these past few weeks. We are proud of your accomplishments. *Have a great 4th of July.*

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.