

Community Comment  
August 30, 2016

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

Volunteerism has been on my mind—the challenges of volunteerism, the sometimes lack and the beauty of volunteerism.

The ultimate volunteer action is to serve on a City Council. It's a public, high profile volunteer position, but we only see a fraction of what the job entails when we watch a Council meeting, either by tuning in to public access or attending in person.

In Fortuna, we have two seats open this fall. And two candidates are running. An incumbent, and someone who served before on the Council. In other words, we have no choice to make when we cast our vote in November.

Why aren't people running? I have a few theories after talking with people in and out of office, reading the local blogs, and personal observations.

First, it takes a great deal of time, effort and money to even run for office. I remember having an 18-year-old counselor at Girls State in Oregon who had just been elected to the Coos Bay City Council and all she did was make home-made signs with poster board and felt pens and walk in a parade. That was in 1975.

That probably couldn't happen today.

And politics are so polarized right now, even in a local election, it can be gut-check time every minute of the campaign. Do I want to put yourself—and your family—through it?

Second, once elected, you are a council person 24/7—on the dais, in committee meetings and in the grocery store. If you own a business, you run the risk of alienating customers with your votes. Talk with your local elected officials about the number of meetings they have to attend—not just in our towns and County, but State mandated meetings as well. It's mind boggling. If you don't a flexible job, or are retired, it would be difficult at best.

I'm not surprised more people don't run for office, but it sure is great to have a choice.

On another note, I belong to a volunteer organization that has been losing members in North America for the last 15 years. In an effort to find a solution, the powers-that-be determined five or so years ago that recruiting young professionals—Millennials—is where our energies should be focused. They are, after all, the future of the organization.

This past month, my organization changed direction. Or as they say today, they have pivoted. No longer is the priority the younger generation. Their current suggestion is to recruit people in their 40s and the Baby Boomer generation—my group. It's a smart move. After all, who has time and money to give back to their community? People over 40.

Humboldt County relies heavily on volunteers. So a big thank you to those serving non-profits, our City Council and School Board members, and those appointed to boards by elected officials. We couldn't function without you.

This has been Erin Dunn with a Community Comment.