

April 6, 2018
Sam Pennisi
Community Comment

Politically Active

I came to Humboldt State College in 1966. I was a transfer student from Cal Poly at Pomona where I was majoring in Aerospace Engineering. Four years before I started, Cal Poly had been an all male engineering and ag school. The campus was quite conservative at the time which fit the character of the student body. Humboldt was known for its resources management fields. I was excited to try something new that seemed like a better fit for me. I had been working for the forest service for the summers and wanted a career with the service. Humboldt was also a conservative campus at the time. I felt at home.

My interest in public service had its foundation at Humboldt. Not only did I enjoy the work involved in the forestry program, but the opportunity to do something for the city came to the forestry club. We wanted to do a project that would increase the awareness of the community for the redwood forest that was in our own back yard. We proposed building a nature trail about half a mile long that would loop from the meadow back to the parking lot close by. Students would build the trail, bridges to cross the various streams, identify major trees and shrubs, and write a brochure that would point out certain things that would illustrate the forest ecosystem. We would include natural and manmade elements in the story.

We worked for about 18 months enjoying great cooperation from the city council and staff. They loaned tools and contacted companies that would donate gravel and woodchips. We had a great learning experience and the city had a nature trail.

This was my entry into volunteer service projects. Working with the city council, speaking at public meetings, and working with top city employees opened my world to local government. I wanted to do and learn more and soon, when I was on the faculty, I was appointed to the planning commission. My Masters Degree was in environmental planning and land use was my interest. This eventually led me to run for a seat on city council.

During my time as a student at HSU, the anti war movement erupted in opposition to the Viet Nam War. I went to one protest and felt uncomfortable with the anger in the group and the public. I found other ways to oppose the war but protesting was not for me. But those protests slowly became more mainstream and with the ouster of Richard Nixon, that war ended. We are still paying the cost of that war in the way we treated returning vets. The very people affected by the war helped to stop it.

Recently, I attended the local March for our Lives protest for sensible gun regulations. This event was international with the largest rally held in Washington D.C. The whole

idea was the brain child of the high school students who suffered 17 killed in Parkland, Florida.

This group of young people are demanding reasonable changes that , to date, have been illusive. The March I was at was calm, attended by young and old alike, and focused.

Many of these people will be able to vote in the 2018 midterm elections. I think they will change our world. And that change will be for the better.

This has been Sam pennisi for community comment.