

Erin Dunn  
Community Comment  
April 10, 2018

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

Fortuna is again without a City Manager. I thought this one was in it for the long haul. We lost a good one. I think Mark Wheatley was born to do this job. But it was not to be.

When Mark was first announced as our City Manager, I read comments from around the County asking how could a guy coming from the city that started with an A be successful in the town that started with F-O-R. How could that dichotomy even begin to work?

After having an interim City Manager—Randy Mendosa—and a one-year City Manager—Mark Wheatley, both from Arcata, it is clear that—as much some may not like to admit it, Arcata and Fortuna are more alike than they are different.

Both have hard working City staffs. Fortuna has managed to keep moving forward in spite some challenges in the past few years. We are positioned with strong personnel—like our Public Works Director, Finance Director, Chief of Police and City Clerk, and with our new hire for Parks and Rec. Mark Wheatley never missed an opportunity to let people know that Fortuna's staff was top-notch. We can weather this storm. The staff is dedicated and talented. We will get through this.

Both communities are passionate about what they believe in. We don't have a problem with a McKinley statue, but we match that passion in other things. Maybe on opposite sides of issues at times, but still the same passion.

Take the Cannabis grow that had been permitted in what was technically the county, but backed up to a Fortuna residential area. The residents organized, the residents were vocal, the residents didn't give up.

And the town worked together to find a solution. It took an individual, our Supervisors, Council and staff, as well as vision from other participants to convince the grower that it was in their best interest to take an offer and sell the property. It was then donated to Wild Souls Ranch.

And we both have city councils that are trying to do the right thing. And trying to do the right thing doesn't mean that all of the council members agree with each other all of the time, but it does mean that both Councils move forward with respect and civility.

And our Chambers have a long history of working well together—we exchange ideas and build on each other's successes. And one of our most popular speakers at Chamber in the past few years was Larry Oetker when he was heading up Arcata's Economic Development division. He was so popular, we had him back for a second engagement.

Are we alike because we think the same about current issues? No. But we are the same when it comes to wanting the best outcome for our economies, for our kids and visitors.

I enjoyed working with Randy and Mark, and learned a lot from our collaborations. It's hard on organizations like the Chamber when the City Manager position is in flux, but we too will regroup.

Fortuna and Arcata are alike in a lot of ways. And that's a good thing.

This has been Erin Dunn with a community comment.