

The DOWN TOWN CRIER

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BLACK RIVER FALLS, WISCONSIN.

ONE DOLLAR.

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LEAVE THE POLITICS OFF MAIN STREET

By TYSON CLARKE

How many of you saw the parade over the weekend? Firstly — before I complain incessantly — I want to thank the participants and the organizers for their execution. In no way is the following an effort to discredit their hard work, especially when it was done voluntarily and I did nothing to help them! Thank you for organizing our event!

Myself and a couple other business owners downtown noticed something pretty jarring, and I think it speaks to our discourse, our community involvement, and what actually creates change in our lives.

There were a lot of political floats, right? Maybe it's my general disdain for politics — but it seemed as though our floats were 60–70% politically motivated, and I thought that was a sad state of affairs for us.

I have never been so happy to see a retired ladies' knitting circle in my life! What a refreshing change it was compared to wave after wave of “elect me!”, “vote for me!”, politically themed floats. Thank goodness for the knitting ladies, the beauty queens, and the other local, non-politically themed floats for their efforts and contributions too.

Being the husband and father of women who crochet, I am probably not intelligent enough and I certainly lack the patience to learn the discipline — but it wasn't knitting itself that was a relief. It was that it wasn't political.

Now, I'm not so sure that political discourse is absent during knitting circles; for all I know it's predominant. And that is their right — just as local businesses and business owners

have their political opinions and biases too. But as an advocate, patron and Main Street “enthusiast,” it does deter me to see politics brought onto Main.

A few years back I was approached by the DNC to rent one of my buildings on Main. When I declined, some of my friends chuckled, because they understand I usually vote GOP. But truth be told, were I approached by the Republicans I would have turned them down too. Not because I disagree with them politically, but because I just don't want that crap on Main Street.

Main Street is a marketplace for commerce and American flags. It's for petunias and friends and the occasional mural. It's for meeting each other for coffee or ice cream or getting your eyes tested. It's for getting your hair done and buying knick-knacks or antiques for your house. It's for eating tacos and buying your first .22. It's for getting a workout and a healthy shake, or buying a sandwich, or getting a tan. It's not that having politics on Main is illegal or “wrong” — it's that it doesn't bring us together. It does precisely the opposite.

Several times a month people tell me I should run for local office, and my response is always the same: “Why?” Why would I run for office when I can impact the community far more effectively by just doing the things I want to see changed? Why would I go to a political position — with restraints, policies, pre-determined roles and responsibilities — when I could just go do things?

A few years ago I was roped into a politically motivated meeting about youth issues in our

area. The organizer, knowing I'm involved in such endeavors already, invited me along. By the second meeting I realized that sitting around talking about issues was far less productive than me picking up a leaf blower and cleaning the dust and leaves off Main Street. So I left the meeting and did just that.

The organizations of people that do the most to positively impact an area for the long term aren't politicians — they're the entrepreneurs and volunteers who get off their duff and do things. The Karner Blue Club. Lunda Construction. Hoffman Construction. Moe's Hardware. If we look at the last 50 years of our community, and the changes we need and want, we're much more likely to see positive change come from people starting businesses, picking up trash, or watering petunias than from advocating for policy.

And that is not to minimize our local politics. I do occasionally work with our local administration and police, and they're wonderful — but they'll tell you themselves that their hands are tied by policy about what they can and cannot do.

It reminds me of a quote from the original “Bobby” policeman, Sir Robert Peel: “The police are the public and the public are the police; the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.”

The reason our recent parade saddened me so is that somewhere along the line, we seem to have forgotten this. Anytime you catch yourself

uttering “the government should do something about this,” I want you to imagine that you just handed over a million dollars to Trump or Biden — or whoever you are most politically against. Because that's essentially what you're doing. You are minimizing your own utility in favor of a force that is ten times less effective at getting things done, and a hundred times more expensive.

“In polite conversation, omit religion and politics” was a maxim for a reason. At the end of the day we're neighbors, not opponents — sharing the same Main Street, the same petunias, the same small town we all love. A little more “together,” a little less “vote for me.”

— Tyson Clarke, Black River Falls

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