

The Power of Community and Why it Matters



Recently when ringing up my purchase, Amy Reynolds, an owner of Horizon Books, said something that touched my heart.

I had shared with her that I appreciated her service, her “book smarts” and that Horizon Books has prevailed for over 60 years when national chains like Borders had come and gone.

As she was verifying my membership, she made the connection that Althea Petritz was my mom (now deceased) and said that she had enjoyed my mom’s frequent shops there.

It was a simple but powerful example of why Horizon Books has “staying power,” and why it continues to be one of the jewels that keeps downtown Traverse City vibrant and authentic. It also reminded me about the power of community.

In “The Third Pillar: How Markets and the State Leave the Community Behind,” Raghuram Rajan elaborates on the crucial role that communities play in maintaining societal balance and individual well-being. A strong community ensures that the benefits of economic and state activities are distributed more equitably and sustainably, leading to a healthier and more balanced society. An imbalance, when markets and the state overshadow the community, can lead to social discontent and economic instability.

The role and power of community in our region is an underpinning of the quality of life we cherish and reflects a legacy of leadership dedicated to maintaining this balance.

This year’s recipient of the Distinguished Service Award, Gil Bogley, is a great example. In the early 1960s he helped frame the mission of the Traverse

City Area Chamber to include “the preservation and enhancement of our natural resources as the cornerstone of our successful economy.” This led to the Chamber becoming a regional collaborator that with its four bordering counties, all committed to stewardship of our natural environment.

Another visionary who helped incubate organizations that support the third pillar is Rob Collier, executive director of Rotary Charities from 1985-1995. He credits the Traverse City Rotary Club for conducting listening sessions in our region that overwhelmingly affirmed a love of land and natural resources. The outcome was the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy.

With Rob’s leadership, Rotary Charities applied this approach to creating the Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation (GTRCF). Today GTRCF guides investment of approximately \$3.5 million dollars annually in direct grants, as well as collaborating with a network of public and private partners to leverage investments to support a thriving and equitable regional community. In Rob’s words, “This spirit of cooperation and collaboration demonstrated in part by these two permanent nonprofit organizations will continue to provide lasting benefits throughout our region.”

There are so many organizations, programs and events in our region that build and sustain a healthy community. One of my favorites is Shop Your Community Day sponsored by the Downtown Development Association, when downtown Traverse City retailers (including Horizon Books) donate 15% of their sales that day to a list of 40 area non-profits that shoppers designate. Last November

it raised \$20,000 for local nonprofits that former DDA Executive Jean Derenzy said “underscores the impact of small businesses and independent retailers in their communities.”

As owners and developers of Crystal Mountain in Thompsonville, our family has had the opportunity and privilege, in a small way, to build community. When Jim and I joined the business in 1985, we thought that our mission was to develop and operate a year-round resort. Fifteen years later, we realized that not only were we developing a magical place for people to visit and play, but also, for some, a place to call home.

Today, in addition to approximately 400 vacation residences, 70 families live here year around in neighborhoods that blend in with the Up North setting. But this community is more than sites, structures, and luscious landscaping. This community seems to share a common quality: Not only do they seek healthy, active lifestyles, but they also want to give back to the greater community. Their contributions range from supporting local school systems, to nurturing gardens in Thompsonville, providing well-paying jobs, and serving in units of local government.

Crystal residents Phil and Cindy Cook created Mrs. Mullen’s Closet of Benzie County, a partnership that provides a “closet” at each elementary school for school staff to quietly help kids and their families when they need it most. Kim and Chris Pickell established the Crystal Scholarship Foundation that awards scholarships to Crystal employees or dependents to pursue a post-secondary education.

Another example of a partnership that builds community is Michigan Legacy

Art Park. Thirty years ago, local artist and architect Bob Holdeman brought to us the concept of locating Art Park at Crystal on 30 acres of steeply sloped and forested land within our 1500-acre campus. Today the Park welcomes over 18,000 visitors annually to discover 50+ sculptures on a 6km hiking trail; to experience concerts at the amphitheater, and to celebrate art that students have created there.

Marsha Smith, executive director of Rotary Charities for 24 years and recipient of many awards including Lifetime Humanitarian by the State of Michigan, described the impact of community eloquently.

“I have been thinking about community-building since I visited Taliesin West, built around Wright’s principles of architecture, space, site, materials, and democracy. It’s the last design principle that is the most important: democracy – about places that work for everyone,” she said. “Yet, it is more than that. True communities are based on honest connections, mutual respect, acceptance and tolerance of differences and a commitment to good old-fashioned common courtesy. These are the things that we can all bring to truly build our communities.”

Thank you Marsha, Amy and so many others in our region, past and present, for your dedication to building true community – one that sustains a healthy, well-balanced society now and in the future.

Chris MacInnes is president of Crystal Mountain. In 1985, she and her husband Jim moved from California to join this business and together have led its evolution. She is also active in state, local and industry organizations.

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