

editor's message



Bloomington Exceptionalism

I think it is fair to say that America is in for a rough ride for as long as Donald Trump is president.

The pain will be felt by women, minorities, and the LGBTQ community for sure. And it will be especially hard on the most vulnerable among us — the disabled, the ill, the aged, the poor and homeless, children, and new immigrants.

I have never been sold on the idea of American exceptionalism. But if it does exist, it must certainly have been on hiatus this election season. How else could such a noxious flimflam man get elected president?

I do, however, believe in Bloomington exceptionalism. In my 70+ years, I have lived in 10 cities in three countries and none measure up to Bloomington. This is an exceptional community in many ways, but in this column I want to talk just about our safety net.

We look after one another here. Middle Way House, Shalom Community Center, Planned Parenthood, Habitat for Humanity, PALS, CASA, Meals on Wheels, New Hope for Families, Girls Inc., Area 10 Agency on Aging, Stone Belt, Community Kitchen, Centerstone, LIFEDesigns, Stepping Stones, Big Brothers Big Sisters — the list goes on and on.

While all cities have many or most of these or similar agencies, they are not front and center in people's consciousness the way they are in Bloomington. Middle Way House is perhaps the best example. It is one of six National Domestic Violence Model programs in all of the United States. It owns its building; maintains a 24-hour crisis line for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault; operates an emergency shelter; offers transitional housing (The Rise!) for families who have experienced domestic violence; offers legal advocacy to victims; and works in the community teaching violence prevention. And for years it operated a catering business, Food Works, employing women who sought services at Middle Way. Its recently

retired executive director, Toby Strout, is as well known in town as Mayor John Hamilton, John Mellencamp, or Lil Bub. And because of Toby and Middle Way, domestic violence has been a priority here long before wife-beating football players made it a national cause célèbre.

Although Bloomington is not a rich city, it is a generous one. Individuals donate, companies and fraternal organizations donate, clubs form for the express purpose of donating (like 100+ Women Who Care and 50+ Men Who Care). Through United Way of Monroe County and the Community Foundation of Bloomington and Monroe County, dozens of agencies and tens of thousands are helped.

It is also a place where people truly believe it is their civic duty to aid their less fortunate neighbors by volunteering and serving on boards. The City of Bloomington Volunteer Network matches individuals, businesses, and organizations to the programs that can best use their skills.

Our talented entertainers — people like Sylvia McNair, Krista Detor, Malcolm Dalglish, and Carrie Newcomer — put on fundraising shows and lend themselves to worthwhile causes.

And in ways big and small, the students and faculty members of Indiana University and Ivy Tech Community College–Bloomington assist our social service agencies with everything from IT training and maintenance to business guidance to simply lending a hand.

I fear the nation's disadvantaged are going to suffer mightily under a narcissistic, uncaring president, but our exceptionalism can minimize the damage here if those who have and those who can dig deeper.

More than ever, we are going to have to look after our own.

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