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A VIEW FROM HARBOR STREET

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Lest We Forget

By David Buckingham, City Manager



Most of us have not been where I was that day – and most don't need to. About this time last year I spent three hours slogging around our wastewater treatment plant. My visit had nothing to do with our work to build a new facility, and not even so much to do with knowing how our 62-year-old relic is operating. I was mostly there to visit with some great folks who spend their working days in a stinky place so that when we flush our toilets, the environment does not suffer and public health is protected. Then there is a whole team that keeps the sewer lines clear and the stuff moving to the WWTP – another job somebody has to do well. Lest we forget, to Dave and Dane, and Chad and Alex, and all the team at the WWTP and in Waste Collections – thanks for your service.

One lovely day last spring I spent an afternoon driving and walking around the City with several of our police officers. In the span of four hours they engaged three different homeless residents in various states of need (our officers knew each one by name), they responded to an accident in which a resident had nearly driven their Buick through the front door of a storefront, and they provided an hour's worth of assistance to a resident who had become over-medicated and lost. Lest we forget, to Jody and Maria and all our officers, and Bonnie the support staff (and Xello too), thanks for what you do – to keep this a wonderful community.

Remember "Bobby"? Our lifeguards found him on the beach this summer, left behind by his Central Valley school group field trip. The school group was somewhere past Kettleman City when our Harbor Department team found and cared for Bobby – then reunited him with his classmates. You may also have missed the news when our Harbor Patrol rescued an overwhelmed surfer being drawn to sea far beyond Morro Rock. Lest we forget, our gratitude to Becka and Scott and Kyle, and the entire team on the waterfront – for the safe harbor you provide.

"I like to pay my water bill in person at City Hall, because I always know I'll get a cheerful greeting from the gals at the counter." That's a quote I heard a few months ago, and a fact I've observed a hundred times this year. And behind those great folks up front, is a whole team who keeps the bills paid, and the network running and public records accessible and the City staffed appropriately. Thanks to Charlee and Brooke and Laurie and all the rest at City Hall – lest we forget.

Six weeks ago a 50-year-old valve failed, nearly knocking out water to all of north Morro Bay. What our residents did not see was the water team working through the night to fix the problem, including calling water department contacts in Atascadero, Paso and SLO after midnight to try to find a replacement part. While it was certainly inconvenient for some of our residents to be without water for a couple hours while the fix was made - after our guys found the right part about 5 a.m. – in retrospect we can be thankful our pros found the problem, and created a fix, before the water tanks on Nutmeg Blanca and Elena ran dry. To Jamie and Trevor and all the guys with the shovels, wet boots and tired eyes, lest we forget, we give thanks.

It thankfully doesn't happen often, but earlier this year our Fire Department responded to a devastating house fire in the City. Unsurprisingly, the fire was quickly contained, sparing a number of adjacent homes. What does happen hundreds of times a year is our well-trained and highly skilled firefighter paramedics respond to medical emergencies of all types, from elderly residents suffering in their homes to a serious traffic accident this week on Highway 1. Our thanks to Todd and Jeff and Travis and the whole of our Fire Department. Oh, and lest we forget, they also rescued those naughty kids who got stranded trying to climb the Rock.

Even play does not happen without work. The weekend before last I was at a soccer game in the City. I was enjoying a gorgeous Morro Bay day, sitting on the grass, watching the kids play hard. Then I looked over my shoulder and there was Bob, moving from one venue to the next, all over town, keeping the whole network of part-time refs and volunteer coaches and multiple games on various fields across the city moving – all to make Morro Bay a great place to be a family. Lest we forget, Karen, Edward, Angelica and all the Recreation team, including an army of wonderful volunteers, deserve our thanks.

When you actually consider how much work our small maintenance team has on their plate – it's amazing they keep up with it all. Our streets need a serious rebuilding effort, but these guys keep them patched up, while keeping the grass in the parks cut and minor maintenance on public bathrooms and buildings performed. It was this time last year we received a grateful note from a visitor who had lost a wedding ring down a drain – and it was one of our maintenance team who had disassembled the pipes to recover the ring. Lest we forget all the little things Matt, Raul, Roland and their whole team do to keep the city running – and the big acts of kindness and service – we say thanks.

In the middle of last year obtaining a building permit might take several months. Our average now is about three weeks. Our Community Development Department does meet the three week standard every time, but the average has dropped from three months to three weeks and for this, lest we forget, many business owners, homebuilders and homeowners can be thankful. We are grateful for Cindy, Joan and Pam and the rest of our small but hardworking team in our growing Community Development Department.

Like each of us, our city staff – both individually and corporately – is imperfect. Imperfect, but caring, professional, hard working, courageous, thoughtful, firm, friendly, skilled and serving. They call it public service because we are servants.

Lest we forget, though, those who serve also deserve gratitude. So, thanks, team, for making Morro Bay a great place to work, live and play.

This week, and in the weeks ahead, consider stopping a City employee just to say thanks. And, I'd love to hear about the great service you receive, along with the ways we can improve our service, at dbuckingham@morro-bay.ca.us. Have a wonderful Thanksgiving.

Note: This editorial first appeared in Bay News on November 24, 2015.