

The Responsibility of Citizenship

By Mike Barhorst

Even the casual student of ancient history knows the story of Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, perhaps best known simply as Cincinnatus (for those who are uncertain, I will confirm that Cincinnati was named for him.) Cincinnatus, a citizen of ancient Rome, was an aristocrat and statesman. His service as consul in 460 BC and as dictator in 458 BC and again in 439 BC made him a model of civic virtue.

Without belaboring the point, due to circumstances not of his making, Cincinnatus was living on a small farm and supporting his family through the work of his hands. An invasion forced the Roman Senate to request that he return to Rome as dictator and defeat the enemy.

He agreed to do so, and then abruptly resigned two weeks later, having completed the task for which he had been invited to return to Rome. He had successfully defeated the rival tribes of the Aequians, Sabines, and Volscians. At the time, few people could understand how anyone would be willing to give up absolute power to live as a modest farmer.

Citizenship is the common thread that connects all Americans. We are a nation bound not by race or religion, but by the shared values of freedom, liberty, and equality.

New citizens are advised that they have responsibilities as citizens. Those responsibilities include: 1) supporting and defending the Constitution; 2) staying informed of the issues affecting one's community; 3) participating in the democratic process; 4) respecting and obeying federal, state, and local laws; 5) respecting the rights, beliefs, and opinions of others; 6) participating in one's local community; 7) paying income and other taxes honestly, and on time, to federal, state, and local authorities; 8) serving on a jury when called upon; and 9) defending the country should the need arise.

It is participating in one's local government that I would like to address today. Citizens participate in local government in a number of ways. Voting during elections is probably the most widely recognized form of participation, but there are numerous other grassroots ways in which citizens can have a say in the way their local government is operated. Within the City of Sidney there are many opportunities for residents to become more involved.

The City has approximately 82 volunteers that serve on some twenty different Boards and Commissions. Those include such diverse groups as the Municipal Airport Advisory Board, the Tree Board and the Zoning Board of Appeals. In fact, there is either a Board or Commission for nearly every aspect of governmental operations.

Boards such as the Tree Board or Recreation Board are advisory boards. Advisory boards are designed to provide advice and recommendations to the City Council on a variety of matters of public concern.

Quasi-judicial boards, such as the City's Zoning Board of Appeals, perform functions in a manner similar to courts, but more informally. Their powers are limited to a very specific area of expertise and authority and usually depend on a pre-determined set of guidelines or criteria to assess the nature and gravity of the permission or relief sought, or of the offense committed.

The time and expertise these numerous volunteer citizens lend to our governing process have been greatly appreciated over the years. Our local government will continue to require the assistance of all citizens to address the challenges and opportunities facing our community.

When a Board vacancy occurs, the appointing authority uses several methods to find a suitable candidate. One of those methods is a review of volunteer forms kept on file.

Individuals interested in being considered for a Board appointment should complete and submit to the City Clerk the Board and Commission Member Volunteer Form. Those forms are available online (www.sidneyoh.com/PDF/Council/Boards_Comm_Volunteer_Form.pdf).

In most cases there are a few simple requirements to fill a Board vacancy. Some boards require prior expertise necessary to accomplish the board's objectives, while others allow for a broader background. A reputation for integrity and community service, along with an enthusiastic interest in the board's area of service is critical for long-term success.

Finally, some boards require a greater time commitment than others and citizens should have sufficient time available to prepare for and attend meetings. These volunteer positions, all unpaid, give citizens an opportunity to serve their community and provide valuable input to activities which affect Sidney's vitality, both today and in the future.

Sidney, like every community, requires individuals willing to give of themselves unselfishly, like Cincinnatus. The British statesman Edmund Burke stated it very succinctly when he said, "the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

Those individuals interested in learning more about the City's Boards and Commissions or in obtaining a Volunteer Form should contact the City Clerk's office by phone (937.498.8143) or by e-mail (kegbert@sidneyoh.com).