

Oneonta Mayor - Hometown Oneonta Column - 533 words - June 2023

Who Will Write Our Next Chapter?

Problems and solutions.

We expect the first and we hope for the second.

With each column written, every video recorded, every meeting attended, and each item of social media posted, or podcast dropped, it's been my goal to provide a clear explanation of the challenges we face, as well reason to have faith that our community can and will address and solve our problems.

It's been a narrative intended to help build an understanding of what's gotten us here, and a foundation for discussion of our future path.

While I maintain (and endeavor to share) an upbeat perspective, I haven't minimized the concerns. They are real and some have been with us for a while.

Oneonta's population hasn't much changed in 75 years. If the world hadn't, that would be fine. But that's not the reality.

This is our existential challenge; and one that left ignored will doom us to hard times and worsening quality of life.

Our population is aging, and as was made clear by a recent survey provided by the Housing Commission's Senior Housing Workgroup, the preference for many is to "age in place".

Longer lives and diminishing physical capabilities are already combining to put new layers of stress on our seniors' often fixed incomes. To ensure continued quality of life, it's easy to project the need for varied and ongoing support. So, it's imperative that we're able to maintain and grow all the exceptional services that Oneonta currently provides.

But there is no guarantee of that.

As this generation of Oneontans leaves the workforce and enters retirement, they aren't being replaced in similar numbers on the front end. That's not sustainable without consequence, and the consequence is frightening.

Without a robust younger workforce, the burden on our businesses to operate at an efficiency that would invite growth could be too much. You're

already seeing it in the shorter hours and fewer days that some businesses are open.

A lack of staffing is the cancer eating away at our economy. It's reasonable to assume that few business owners and their core staff will be willing to endure the stress of working harder and longer to "cover" open positions indefinitely.

That's a hard reality, and you can extrapolate from it the potential impact on so many things we enjoy and take for granted.

From community services to volunteer produced events, there must be a new generation to take the baton from the old.

And batons are already being dropped.

Add to this equation the diminishing numbers of those providing professional services - dentists, lawyers, electricians, plumbers – and the impact becomes frustratingly clear.

But the problem has an inarguable solution.

There's no path to surmounting this challenge that does not include increasing our population. So, as a city, we're targeting and inviting young families and young professionals to join us.

(We happily welcome and embrace every age, but...) Our best future will be determined by the success of our efforts to infuse our community with new vitality in increasing numbers.

Because it would be a poor column if I didn't leave you with some good news, I can proudly tell you that we are *definitely* making progress!

And there's more to come.