



## Get off the internet and buy local

by Tom DuBois, Monday, July 13th 2020

How has your view of community changed with the disruption of COVID-19?

Twenty years ago, I chose to leave the hectic, acquisitive metropolitan life to find community here. After just a few months of living here, I sat down with my two young daughters to write a list of things we loved about Ashland ending with 112 reasons — everything from lakes, rivers, trees, Lithia Park, music, art, etc.

The theme running through all of them was the importance of connecting with people. That you would have the time to stop and say hello or help someone struggling to lift something into their car was so special, unique to my experience. Somewhere along the path from then until now, I lost some of that special connectedness. Was it me? Did I start taking it for granted? I can't say.

How has the pandemic changed my view of our community? Over the past weeks, small courtesies have returned, are noticed, and their importance has been magnified as our lives have slowed down.

"You, firsts" are everywhere. What's touching is to see the eyes of a grocery clerk light up (above their mask) when you show your deep appreciation for the job they are performing. It's why we moved here, so we could take the time to talk, visit, connect.

Time and again, I have seen our community step up and help out: feeding and housing the less fortunate, gifting meals to frontline workers, buying gift cards from local businesses to help them through tough times, over tipping our delivery folks for a job well done. I have a new appreciation for the generosity of our amazing community.

An example close to my heart is that during the early days of COVID-19, Louie's partnered with Ashland Community Hospital. In an effort to support our local health care workers, we developed a program that with every \$10 gift from the community, Louie's would deliver a "Gratitude Bowl" to the hospital staff. We were absolutely

overwhelmed by the generosity of the community when we ended up delivering over 500 "gratitude bowls."

One of our daily activities was walking the many neighborhoods of our lovely town, marveling at the industrious gardeners and homeowners. The quiet strolls gave us an appreciation of the pride of place and community. Did we ever have so many birds? Or are we just hearing them more because we have quieted our ways? And spring. Was it always this beautiful?

When our quarantining began, trees had not yet woken up from winter. With more time to watch, sit and quiet myself, this may be the first spring that I really saw the majesty of this annual renewal. I make a vow to forever appreciate the gifts that our Earth never stops giving me.

How has your life changed, and how do you see our moving forward from the major impact the coronavirus has had on all of our lives?

The pandemic has shown me how important it is to focus on those closest to us. Tell them you love them, and care for and about them. Value the joys and peace they bring to your life ... thank the universe, god and them for being in your caring circle. Never let your gratitude be unspoken.

Family, friends, local businesses they all need our appreciation now more than ever. We all remember that time when each of us decided to move to Ashland; such a special city. Such friendly people, such a quaint downtown. It doesn't take much to notice the pre-COVID-19 store closures which still remain shuttered. Regrettably, this may be just the tip of the iceberg in a post-COVID-19 world.

As a member of this amazing community, every single reader has the ability to change this. Your town needs you. The next time you get on your computer to buy something, stop, close your device, stand up and get in your car and drive downtown. Yes, you may spend a few extra dollars, but this is about our Ashland culture, our Ashland community. Get in your car, be willing to walk uncomplainingly a bit for parking (increase your steps, so good for you) and shop locally for everything. Stay off the internet.

Consider a staycation. When was the last time you played tourist in Ashland? Yes, we will all deeply miss Shakespeare and Britt, but let's not let that stop us from rebuilding. Together we can recreate our beloved Ashland.

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