

A Manchester Christmas Story!

Friends,

The New Year has started! Best wishes for a healthy and happy New Year. As I write this column, we're just emerging from the season of busyness and activity. I hope December 2019 was a time that offered fun, activity or quiet times, determined by your choice.

From a City perspective, last year (2019) was a very good year. There were so many activities and achievements that can be celebrated. I thank City staff for moving us forward on a broad front of issues and needs. They do awesome work! I thank the Board of Aldermen for their support of new initiatives, while being mindful of community values and collective cost. And, residents, you share your praise and concern when needed. Your voice always needs to be heard. Keep it up! A special thank-you goes out to volunteers! The City is the recipient of hundreds of volunteer hours every year. Your time and passion enrich us in so many ways. You help make us a strong, healthy community, which means we care for others.

A Manchester Christmas story. It's a story of a community that cares.

I am sharing, what is for me, one of my highlights from last year. This story began in early October, when I received a phone call from the wife of a Manchester veteran. The wife, I'll call Mrs. C, shared with me the news that their family, which included two young children, was being evicted from a Manchester apartment complex. They had till the end of October--less than three weeks--to find a new place to live. Their desperate search for new housing was not having any success. Her question to me was whether I, as a representative of City government, might have any suggestions for help. Her call was worrisome. I had no suggestions for help. I could only listen.

Her phone call also revealed that her husband came home from his overseas duty with PTSD, and was being treated for it. Their eviction was a result of his over-response to the apartment management's regular delays in making needed and promised repairs. A faulty refrigerator was the flashpoint that prompted a confrontation that included yelling, obscenities and provocative behavior. Manchester Police were called to help. The officer responded quickly and immediately diffused the situation. His response was a superb job of policing!

Mrs. C's call to me was the result of two recommendations from: 1) the responding police officer; and, 2) H.E.R.O.E.S. Care, an active veterans non-profit operating out of Fenton. They both told her to call me saying, "Manchester is working hard to help the needs of local veterans. Reach out to them." (Their recommendation is a significant recognition of what Manchester is doing today to support local veterans' needs.) At the time of the call, the family's greatest need was immediate housing. With less than three weeks before eviction, I saw little hope of success without government agencies

stepping in with help for the family.

My immediate response was to seek a meeting with the apartment management and ownership group. I asked the responding Police Officer and another Alderperson to join me at the meeting with the apartment management. We advocated for a compassionate reversal of their eviction decision. We failed in that mission, but had some success when the apartment ownership gave them an extension till the end of the year to find new housing. Their new date for eviction was December 31. The additional time was an improvement, but there was still little time to find new housing and get them moved. But, we began the work.

In this family's situation, veteran agencies offered little help. But, kind friends who did not even know the family wanted to help!

Because of the screening process that apartments use to check out new tenants, there was little hope that the family would find new housing in a different, close-by, apartment. And, they didn't find a new apartment.

Neither government agencies nor non-profits offered much relief. By late October, I turned to good friends for help. Two different ones each began to search for housing for the family. Both individuals, realtors, gave considerable heart to the search. Both had some success. Both of them deserve praise and appreciation.

The veteran family had a limited budget and desperately wanted to live where their kindergarten daughter could continue to attend Hanna Woods Elementary School. The veteran family needed the right house, in the right area at the right price and their pets had to be welcomed. One of my friends found an investor wanting to purchase a new home for rental purpose. Besides a good property, the investor needed good, quality renters. After a meeting with them, the investor liked and trusted the veteran family. He then needed to find the right property for them.

Amazingly, it all came together in mid-December! The Veteran family moved into their new rental home on Saturday, Dec 21! The home is close enough to Hanna Woods elementary that their daughter will be able to continue attending the school, being with the friends she knows. And, the house has a yard and space for pets and playing kids! Mrs. C was so excited when she told me their family had put their Christmas tree up in their new home!

But, there's more to this story. There was an additional setback. In November, the apartment complex notified the family that, besides eviction, they were going to lose their apartment deposit of \$1400. For them, that amount of loss posed a major setback. The family's financial health was just one of the myriad of problems that they, like many veteran families, particularly those living with the effects from PTSD, have to deal with. At a November Veterans Planning Team meeting that I chair, I acknowledged this

setback for the family. After that meeting, a wonderful local couple came up to me and quietly said they wanted to cover the “loss of the deposit”. When I informed the veteran family late in November of that news, they were in disbelief.

Just before Christmas, this wonderful Manchester couple delivered a check for \$1400. They met the veteran, his wife and their two young children (and pets) in their new home! **Mrs. C shared her joy in a recent e-mail, “The sheer amount of blessings and good that has come out of all this has blown me away, time and again.”**

As a City last year, we did important things for veterans. For me, this story is at the pinnacle. We all should be so very proud of what’s happened, particularly in those closing months. I hope in this New Year, we share kindness generously, and if we need the same, may it come to us as it did Manchester’s veteran family. (Thanks to all the players in this awesome Christmas story!)

What a community we have here!

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