

Manchester Message column, November 1, 2021

Mike Clement

Ten down and Two to Go!

You're receiving this issue of the Manchester Message about November 1. That means this year is ten months complete. We have two months left to close out this year. I think we could argue two points of view; that is, it has been a good year, and at times, not such a good year. This column is focusing on Y2021 images and initiatives that have, in spite of difficult pandemic challenges, moved Manchester forward. After reading this column, I hope you feel as proud of this City as I do.

Lessening the Distance is a key phrase that came out of a facilitated book study based on the Peter Block book, "Community, the Structure of Belonging". This book study, facilitated by a retired pastor and resident, started last year and ended late spring, this year. The book, while written eleven years ago reminds us/ME that to build community we need to know our neighbors, recognize them, hear them and value our differences. For those of you who have attended my Conversations with the Mayor, you have heard me talk about the importance of lowering barriers. I sometimes ask the question, "Does Manchester feel like home?" That's an important question to ask. Its answer (yes or no) identifies the strength of our sense of community. My plan is for key concepts from this book to be introduced to more of our City staff. If you ever feel I'm not living up to this value statement, please call me out.

Fourth of July and Manchester Homecoming 2021 were, for me, celebratory gatherings that signaled a community ready to gather again and claim these two traditions as foundational for a city seeking to regain our sense of normalcy. I wrote about the Fourth of July celebration in the last Manchester Message. Our Homecoming celebration over Sept 10-12, was equally huge, fun, and loaded with pent-up energy as folks sought to reconnect and party again with friends and family. It's a beloved tradition! If we needed a sign that Homecoming was missed last year (Y2020), it was that Friday night's full-house crowd drank all the available beer before Homecoming closed down for the night. Yep, the City was left scrambling to refill the taps. (Many thanks to all City staff for making these community-building gatherings safe, well-run, and filled with great music, food and drink!)

Memorial Day, POW-MIA Day, and Veterans Day 2021 Ceremonies symbolize one of this City's core commitments. We value and remember veterans! Manchester's Veterans Commission, City staff and I are active in our respect for all veterans. We work to address local needs, even individual veteran's needs. I am a Vietnam War-era veteran. Like most of that era, we don't talk much about our experience. American didn't value our service. The point here is

Manchester recognizes with appreciation all veterans! We are here to serve, help and advocate for them! We do, and we will!

At our Memorial Day 2021 ceremony, I was approached by Mr. Rick Randall, the inspiring visionary and organizer for Flags of Valor 2021, who asked the City to form a Manchester team that would support the regional initiative, Flags of Valor, the Heartland Remembers. The huge flag installation on Art Hill, this year, remembered the 20th anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attack on America. Our answer was borne out of a sense of duty and we said, “yes”, but didn’t understand what we would do or how we could accomplish our mission. In fact, we were unsure that we could even find enough volunteers to help. We trusted! That response leads to the next 2021 highlight for our City. . .

Flags of Valor on Art Hill, Sept 4 – 12, 2021. We Remember! America remembered on September 11, the twentieth anniversary of the Sept 11, 2001 attacks on America. On Saturday, September 11, we paused, remembered and offered thanks for the great sacrifice from so many men and women.

The City team’s experience remains a highlight for 2021. My experience with this team is a personal highlight for the year. Ultimately, Manchester’s team numbered almost 110 volunteers! Collectively, they/we volunteered 500+ hours to pair up 7,200+ dog tags and photos. We delivered our work on the early-morning hours of Sunday, September 5 to the flag teams installing flags with precision on Art Hill. I hope most of you had the opportunity to visit this awesome installation below the City Art Museum. You saw individual flags memorializing the 7,600+ veterans and first responders that gave their life during, and since the September 11, 2001 attacks and the war on terror conflicts that followed. This team’s work will continue into next year as the team will identify family members and send them the memorial flags with dog tags and photos.

ManchesterCares is the branded name of Manchester’s ongoing citywide initiative to provide help, support, volunteers, and care to those in need throughout the region. This defining compass for our City includes a host of food, personal need items and back-to-school drives that go to our local partners (Circle of Concern, Parkway Food Pantry and local schools). Besides personal needs, I hope we all recognize the importance of donating blood. As a City, we have hosted seven blood drives through end-of-October with two more scheduled before end-of-year. The American Red Cross regularly approaches the City seeking support for blood drives when blood supplies are perilously low. Many of you respond regularly to the call for blood! Thank you! In recent months, the City has begun to partner with West County EMS and Fire to support their community drives and they, in turn, support our programs. It’s a healthy and growing partnership.

Earlier in the year, the Board of Aldermen authorized the City to legally create and fund a new, ManchesterCares non-profit (501c3) to help fund specific help for in-need residents. The non-

profit's formal creation will continue into next year with the formation of a board of directors to give direction to its focus.

A new City Hall for Manchester continues to move forward. In late spring of this year, the City "closed" on the purchase of the former Manchester Commerce Bank building located at 14317 Manchester Road. Since closing, the City has been working with its architectural firm, Archimages, on the redesign of the new space. The new City Hall will replace the current City Hall, housed in The Lyceum building, which was built in 1896. The final move-in schedule will probably be in May or June of next year and is dependent on the availability of contractors and materials. We hope that today's labor and material shortages will have resolved by then.

New Homes and New families are coming to Manchester. McBride Homes has two new residential developments opening in Manchester. The first development, behind the City's Justice Center, hosted its grand opening a week early because interested buyers had already started camping out to be first or second in line to purchase a new home site. Of its 60 homesites, 39 sold in the first weekend, making it the best grand opening that McBride has ever hosted. They were thrilled! The second development, going in where the JFK High School used to be, will open next year. It will offer homes for an additional 68 new families. The City is excited to offer our community's amenities to 128 new families!

City finances are strong and healthy. Our budget this year will see a surplus. The City has managed its costs through the COVID experience, while our business community has weathered the challenges. Big retailers and grocery markets have seen robust sales. Our sales tax revenues have held up better than we anticipated. The City has, as have all government entities (state, county, municipality), been the recipient of federal funding (CARES Acts and ARPA funds). Those funds are designed to offset a City's loss of revenues from last year and through part of this year.

If you'd like to talk some more, please join me at my next "Conversation" on Wednesday morning, November 17 at 7:30 a.m. We gather at the Manchester Justice Center. It's a relaxed and humorous hour of dialogue. (See the related story in this Manchester Message issue.)

I conclude this column with a holiday wish for you and your family: may the last months of this year be healthy, fun and appreciative. Let us not forget our good fortune to be living in a land of ongoing opportunity and freedom! And, let's work at "Lessening the Distance" with those we don't know.

