

Reflecting back to my State of the City address in January I said. *"2020 is the start of a new decade, a decade of changes that seem to be coming faster than any decade before this time. Change isn't easy and it certainly isn't quick when it comes to government"*. Oh how I wish I hadn't said it like that! Within a matter of weeks our life as we knew it was tipped upside down with all the changes our Federal and State Government thrust upon us as well as all the changes we as the City of Renville had to make during this Coronavirus Pandemic. We all know that change is unavoidable in our life but this? Whoaa! Who could possibly have prepared for everything we are experiencing! A pandemic certainly wasn't the kind of change I was referring to in my State of the City. Having to shelter in place, shutting down businesses, public buildings, school buildings, wearing masks out in public, canceling gatherings, funerals, weddings, meetings, church services, parties, going out to eat, the loss of income, the worry about getting the virus itself and the craziness about toilet paper!! —A challenge even the toughest among us are having a hard time with is not seeing and visiting grandparents, grandkids, family and friends.

We have relied on our connectedness to do our jobs, run our businesses and maintain our social and family life. How do we adapt to that all being disrupted by something out of our control?

Socrates said "The secret to change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old but building on the new". Because of the Coronavirus and the challenge it presents, we are learning new ways to connect with each other and do our jobs. We still provide essential services, guidance, and encouragement to keeping going. New ideas are emerging to implement our plans and goals for 2020 that we had to put on hold. We have to focus on what we can still do and what we still *have to do* from where we are. We have to adapt to the requirements that we are told will help keep us safe. Careful consideration of our most vulnerable people continues to be our responsibility. Some days are worrisome when we listen to the news of how this virus could spread throughout our community and that it could be months before enough of us have built immunity. We will still encourage events that implement new ideas and ways to interact safely. Our parks are still open, but we will rely on the common sense of our people to follow social distancing practices and sanitary hygiene to use them. We are social beings who rely on the positive energy our interactions create whether in person or through social media and technologies. Our mental and spiritual wellbeing is just as important as our physical health. We are forever changed in how we interact with each other. We are developing safer healthier habits which are a positive step in keeping the spread of colds and flu to a minimum. Kids are being made more aware of how germs at home play a big part in getting sick.

We have seen people volunteering more to help others in need. Working together for the betterment of humanity has always been a goal, but it takes a pandemic to realize how fragile life and our earth really are and how important we are to each other. With April being National Volunteer Month, I want to give recognition to the many folks and students who are helping and volunteering above and beyond during this time. Also to those who volunteer on a regular basis throughout the year whether in your church, school, or community- Thank you to all!!

The “good ol’ days” we all look back on now have just as much meaning to us as our ancestor’s version of their good ol’ days. We can relate and just as they couldn’t go back, neither can we. The one thing that can’t change throughout all of this is our freedom to choose how we respond to any of our different situations. A famous book, “A Man’s Search for Meaning” by Victor Frankl, is a great example of how we can choose our response to any devastation or event in our life. Losing his wife and family in the Nazi death camps, and in the midst of complete despair and grief, Victor realized that the one thing they couldn’t take away from him was his right to choose how he felt. He could choose hope... Our reactions to events have a greater impact on our health and mental wellbeing than the actual event itself.

We are adaptive leaders and citizens. Setbacks are a natural function of our life and can be viewed as opportunities rather than an end. This time is basically a turning point in our life for the way we work, play, and learn. We have gained new technology skills through virtual platforms such as Zoom, GoToMeeting and other applications that suit our work or situation. Working from home or off site will become more common and a part of our new normal as we adjust after the virus is over. Businesses will adapt to new technology trends that allow them to combine their brick and mortar store with an online “store”.

This pandemic has caused us to view our lives through opened eyes and a different lens to see that we can survive with less. It has brought about a new paradigm of wellbeing for us that only something as restrictive and serious as a pandemic could provide. It has opened our hearts to the value of “community”. We are slowing down to enjoy things we didn’t take time for. In the future, instead of an outmigration to the larger cities, we could see a reversal as families, workers, and students discover the value of a more relaxed lifestyle here in rural Minnesota. Add to that the bonus of working remotely from our home. Utilizing high speed broadband is closing that gap between city and rural. Promotion of our natural assets in Renville and Renville County such as our family farms, school, parks, gardens, clean air and the Minnesota River valley is that dangling carrot that could just bring that digital divide to a close.

As city leaders we will continue to serve our constituents while we focus on how we will thrive in the future. Our current goals and commitments remain strong as we “behold the turtle.” Just as a turtle sticks its head out to move forward, so do we --continue to move Renville forward. “Slow and steady wins the race.”