

The Gift of Civic Responsibility

By Afton Sullivan

After attending a four-part civics class, I was asked to write about takeaways from the series. This article captures how I relate to what I learned about civic responsibility, ideas that are up for debate within any circle of people.

I learned that civic duty involves each citizen's duty to follow laws, while civic responsibility involves what we can do to improve our community beyond the laws of society. To me, civic responsibility includes positively contributing to the local community. This could be as simple as returning your shopping cart to the cart corral at the grocery store. This could also involve giving back: trash pick-ups, volunteering at the local food bank, or voting in the local election. Interestingly, voting is a civic responsibility, not a civic duty, as it is not mandatory.

Tools for civic responsibility also involve healthy communication through active listening, respect, and cultural awareness. Civics class participants talked about de-escalating verbal confrontations and conflict resolution through mediation. Considering the current political divide in our nation, with people aggressively supporting opposing views, opinions, and beliefs, resolving conflicts peacefully is important. There are many careers that revolve around civic responsibility, such as teaching, working for a nonprofit, or being a mediator- a conflict resolution professional who meets with disputing parties, and helps improve communication.

I decided to apply civic responsibility to my own life. The previous mayor of my town is my neighbor. He has a giant smile and gives me a thumbs up when I see him from across the street. In the fall, I hung a bag of homegrown corn on his gate and quickly retreated to the safety of my own home, being the antisocial hermit that I am. This small act of civic responsibility, sharing the fruits of my labor, helped nurture connection and peace between neighbors in my community. My gift of corn resulted in meeting my neighbor at the local coffee



Image titled "It Takes a Village," Courtesy of Ruidoso artist Deborah Wenzel and hangs at The Ruidoso Convention Center.

shop, discussing how I can give back to the community, and volunteering at the library's youth program.

I feel I made a difference in the local election because I live in a small town in Lincoln County. The smaller the town, the more impactful my vote. The Civics class covered voting intelligently: doing your research, understanding what each candidate is hoping to achieve in the community, and making educated decisions about your vote. Most of us have busy lives involving children, grandchildren, full-time jobs, hobbies, medical appointments, and more. How do we find the time- if we are not intrinsically motivated to keep up with politics- to make an educated vote and contribute to our society through democracy? Many of us struggle with the lack of time to pursue education around local politics, but in these trying times, we could use our voices locally to support our ideals.



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