

Community leadership pays off



Dr. Dean Gruner, For Post-Crescent Media 8:29 a.m. CST December 19, 2015

I've been feeling especially grateful for our community lately. Maybe it's the time of year — the holidays tend to inspire a sense of appreciation and awareness of blessings. Maybe it's the energy I soaked up at the December meeting of the Board of Directors of the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center (PAC).

Maybe it's the recent experience I had with a team of committed people from throughout the region, working with the Institute for Healthcare Improvement to address poverty in our area. Maybe it's the dedication of the many local leaders who are so deeply committed to the annual United Way campaign that we raise remarkable amounts of money. Or maybe it's all that — and more.

Where we live is pretty special. Newcomers can't believe we have amenities like the PAC. They wonder, how does a place like that end up in downtown Appleton? How do we get Broadway shows before they get to Milwaukee?

They ask about our many other arts and cultural opportunities, our diverse fitness and sports events, our many scholarships for higher education. They want to know how it is that competitors come together to address community health needs, or why local businesses consistently support ThedaCare-led initiatives like the Community Health Action Team or PARTY at the PAC.

The answer is that it doesn't happen by accident. Pick what you love most about the Fox Cities, and it's likely that a core group of business executives is before, behind and all around it. Importantly, those leaders embody a key characteristic of this community: a spirit of collaboration. That spirit and those people make good for everyone. Their efforts are good for all of us, and good for business.

These leaders know that reviving a blighted neighborhood opens the door to economic stability. They know that kids who experience the kind of support offered by a Boys & Girls Club are more likely to complete their educations, get jobs, buy a home and a car and participate in community life. They understand that preserving local treasures like the Appleton Boy Choir enhances life for everyone.

They appreciate health and health care, and connect socio-economic factors like poverty to poor health — and they want to make improvements. They connect with one another, often picking up the phone to say, "We've got to work on this."

Above all, they set an expectation among themselves for a high level of service, involvement and support.

What an amazing community. What fine people. What a good place. No wonder I feel grateful.

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