

Why do you live here?

If one were to fire up google and type in define community, many definitions would come up but this one seems to embody what Madrid is all about to me. A social, religious, occupational, or other group sharing common characteristics or interests and perceived or perceiving itself as distinct in some respect from the larger society within which it exists.

I live in Madrid because it represents home, friends, family, and yes community. When my father was growing up they moved a lot due to my grandfather being in the Navy as well as his other jobs. So when an opportunity came for my dad to receive a large promotion with the promise of having to relocate he turned it down to keep his family here, so his kids could be kids and his family would be close. Several months ago it had been ten years since cancer stole my dad from me. When my family went through that ordeal we received massive amounts of help from many of the great citizens of this town and I will forever be indebted to them. In case I forgot back then, THANK YOU! I love Madrid because of its people and the way we come together to help out and support one another when the times are good but especially when they are bad. That's what separates us from the larger society. That's why I live here.

There are many volunteers in this community who use their talents, time, equipment, and even their own money to help out with any long list of projects ranging from the several parks in town to the Labor Day celebration that most of us have come to cherish each year. When a cause comes knocking for donations they're often the first to dig into their pockets and drop a few bucks into the hat. So to our local volunteers and businesses; be it from running youth sports programs or helping out with a construction project. THANK YOU!

Personally I have decided to give back in several ways. First and foremost I am a Freemason. Each year we raise money through our dunk tank and several other smaller fund raisers to pool enough funds to present a scholarship to a graduating senior each year. We also donate a large sum to the Madrid Public School System each year to fund field trips and address any other needs the elementary may have.

I have also spent quite a bit of time at Edgewood Park. So two years ago I heard the park board had a vacancy and stepped in to fill the void. In those two years Madrid's facilities have had a lot of growing pains. A few new parks coming up, who's in charge, who's paying for this, and on and on and on. But with hard work from volunteers it's all getting done. To my knowledge there has never been an issue about the way the park board has handled anything until now.

As I'm sure you've all heard at the gas station, the grocery store, the barber or anywhere else in town Ragbrai came through town several weeks ago and it resulted in great exposure for our small community. An estimated 5,000 bicyclists cruised through town that day. It wasn't even a scheduled stop on the route but many wanted to see our new gem West of town, The High Trestle Bridge. Unless you live under a rock or just don't get out much you also know there is a new business near the recreation trail, Flat Tire Lounge. In anticipation of the thousands of potential bikers that day the ownership group from Flat Tire contacted me about using the picnic tables to accommodate the swarm that was about to stroll down the recreational trail. At first I was reluctant but I called the board president to see what he thought. He was also a bit reluctant but we talked about it for a bit and came to the conclusion that as long as the tables were clean, put back where they belong, and if any were broken they would be replaced, it would be fine. Well Ragbrai came and went and over 3,000 stopped in to Flat Tire to enjoy some breakfast, a drink, or just to catch their breath. The tables were returned the next day meeting all of the criteria that we had set forth, to include the tables being dramatically cleaner than when they had been borrowed.

There has been some outcry by several city council members and their constituents about a private business using the picnic tables. In my two years on the park board not one person or entity that has come before or contacted the board and asked for the ability to use the picnic tables has been denied. The board met last Tuesday the 23rd and we granted Team Tiger the use of the picnic tables, AGAIN! They were given the exact same set of guidelines for their use. Granted it's an organization not a business but I fail to see how one group using our equipment

to make money is any different from another. If you would like to use them, come before the board with your proposal and we will consider it, that's the way it used to be and from what has been discussed among the board that is the way it will continue to be. If anyone takes issue with the decisions we have made, I would be more than happy to let you take my spot on the park board and get my Tuesday nights back.

It's strange that the same day that those picnic tables got used by a private entity approximately 40 people camped out at Edgewood Park which is incredibly off limits and not one word has been said about that to anyone on the park board or even been mentioned at a council meeting. Personally I think this has a lot more to do with some sort of grudge that the 1% of the people in this town seem to have with Flat Tire Lounge. The ownership group comprised entirely of Madrid residents many of whom that have donated plenty of time, money, and work to get other things done in the community seem to be the target of a "witch hunt." I cannot for the life of me understand why it is exactly that one new business has been the topic of so much discussion. They used their own money to roll the dice and have thus far come out on top. Good for them. If they had gotten some inside info on a building up town, purchased it and the bar were there, I would probably still be writing this. How many small businesses have tried and failed in Madrid in the last 20 years, quite a few. So instead of shunning a business how about we try and support it. If I was riding my bike to the golf course in Woodward and fell and hurt myself or someone else would Woodward Golf and Country Club get its name thrown out at a council meeting? Ridiculous! If people thought this trail was going in and there wouldn't be growing pains and issues to be resolved you are incredibly naïve.

The city of Madrid has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on things like buying properties that are useless for exponentially more than they are worth and paying a morbidly obese police officer to just go away. Open your eyes people. If we didn't have to pay out all those ridiculous amounts the children of this town would be playing ball on a better field than the I-cubs, every street would have curb and gutter, the city would have better tools for taking care of parks and

public areas. Stop being someone that want Madrid to be a better place to live but don't want it to change at all. You can't have both. Stop being part of the problem and be part of the solution. Be part of a community.

Sincerely, Stephen Neff