

Other Voices
Vince Haughey

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Vince Haughey: Living the dream

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Thank you, South Yuba River Citizens League, for the annual Wild & Scenic Film Festival!

It was "living the dream." Not a figure of speech; truly, someone had to dream it up in the first place.

I got a world of "bad news/good news" stories, talked with activists from all over, played songs, schlepped chairs and got to be part of the team. Never even left Nevada City.

On MLK Day, the dream continued. A gospel choir rocked the house with achingly beautiful music, songs that have the power to outlive us all. Some patriotic themes, too. America and democracy need each other, now more than ever.

“I do believe what it takes to “save” a river is a constant stream of people.

Later I tuned into the regular broadcast of the Church O' Basketball. Since the game was over by halftime, I could attend more inspiring movies at the Nevada Theatre. There were flowers and flourishes for the SYRCL leaders, who should have been exhausted, but looked ready to play overtime.

Sunday night those leaders had given heartfelt thanks to the many volunteers, who ranged from the old-timers of last century to the energetic newbies. And what drew those relative newcomers to the cause in the first place?

Yes, thank you, thank you, young activists — for giving us great hope for the future. Your individual efforts should give you great personal satisfaction. But you know it goes beyond that, because the joy and energy comes from being and working with others.

In math, the sum of the total equals the sum of the parts. But that is only math. In basketball, for example on a good team the total can be much more than just the sum of the parts. Each person can make the next person better. So I trust your satisfaction includes that dimension as well.

What I would like you to know is that the well of gratitude for your efforts is probably even deeper than you realize. Just know that things you are doing now serve to back up what those other teammates accomplished long ago. Things done, like Wild and Scenic status, are less likely to be undone because SYRCL has never quit. It is clear that forces are at work that would be happy to rip up all protections.

In physics, a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. But that is only physics. In the civil rights movement, for example, the chains of oppression were replaced by chains of people linked hand to hand, heart to heart. Each added link made the whole thing longer and stronger. Might not make sense to a physicist. So, call it 'magic' then.

Some of you know me. I drove a cab about 10 years; school bus before that. Most of my working life was in the fun transportation industry of whitewater rafting. After spring melt subsided, the hydro-releases on the American could be the same each day. Shuttle, the same. Launching, landing, weather — the same. But that was only the job. The experience was of being in the midst of a constant stream of people.

I do believe what it takes to "save" a river is a constant stream of people. Or the absence of people, but that is not a choice.

River guides daily deal with the conundrum of the immovable object and the irresistible force. Being 'twixt the two gives rise to the iconic command: "(expletive deleted), HIGHSIDE!" — meaning move aggressively toward the obstacle, not away from it. Political struggle can be looked at in similar terms. From day to week to year, the rock wins.

But in the long run, there is no such thing as an immovable object.

As for SYRCL, the starting five has long since gone back to the bench, back to the locker room, out the door to other risks and rewards. Happily so, for SYRCL was in excellent hands. The whole community stood up for the river and watershed.

My family met Dr. Hicks as a healer and a boat captain. The teams he assembled took SYRCL to the next level and beyond — nonprofit status, an office in town, paid staff, an active and talented board, broad membership ... Northwest Power Company took the path of least resistance and went elsewhere.

Wild and Scenic was a statewide campaign. And then the film festival got dreamed up.

Just keep going kiddoes. The depth of my gratitude would be hard to exceed.

Vince Haughey lives in Nevada City.