

It's Your Turn Now

By Maurice Carter in The Covington News – July 14, 2013

By now, you may have seen the news that I will run this fall for a seat on the Covington City Council. That means this will be my last column... for a while.

Weighing the possibility of seeking local elected office, the recognition I would have to discontinue my weekly column was one of the toughest factors to consider. Since May of last year, I've come to greatly enjoy this weekly opportunity to share with you the thoughts, ideas, and questions that occupy my mind. Those of you who've taken the time to call, write, or stop me on the street will never know how much it has meant to me. More than anything, you told me I made you think. And, that's all that I ever hoped to do.

Along the way, the responsibility to fill this space each week made me think too. We all have plenty on our minds, but narrowing it to a topic and a perspective that can be distilled in 750 words or less taught me much about the discipline of thinking clearly and communicating concisely. It's something everyone should try.

A few of you will miss my writings. Some number I'd rather not know will be glad to see me go. But the majority of you will move on and soon won't easily recall "who was that guy who used to write for the Covington News?"

I learned many years ago not to overestimate my importance. I was employed for some eight years in the Information Technology department of a major bank in downtown Atlanta. I'd done well and won a few major awards during my tenure. I'd led the adoption of some innovative technologies, and I felt they never quite appreciated my full value.

When a bank in Cleveland, Ohio sought me for my services and offered more money than I could have expected, Kim and I were bound for the frozen north. It would be just the ticket to show my former employer just how much I was really worth. When I was gone a few months, they'd realize I was the one holding it all together.

The change in latitude and the snowy winters created interesting moments that will have to wait for some future column. And, the career move worked out too. But, it didn't all play out the way I expected.

Returning to Atlanta a year later for a family visit over the holidays, I stopped by the old office to catch up with friends. Roaming the halls, I ran into a guy I'd played softball with for many years on the company team. I mentioned I was back in town for the holidays and dropping in for a visit. "Oh, you left?" he said, looking quite surprised. My bubble was burst.

So much for my indispensability. Much to my chagrin, life went on just fine without me there.

It was humbling at the time, but it's one of the better life lessons I've ever learned. That realization has helped me keep my priorities in check over the years. We're all indispensable to someone, but it's not our employers. Business is business. Do right by your business colleagues and do your fair share. But, never forget it's the friends you've made and the family you've kept who will miss you when you're gone.

No one is indispensable. But, some things are. And one of them is the community newspaper. I'm so grateful to the Covington News for giving me the chance to reach all of you each week. I believe our ability to exchange information, ideas, and viewpoints is the greatest hope we have for finding our way as a community. In a world where so much divides us, that is something that still unites us.

I never wrote to change hearts or minds; I only hoped to reveal my own in a way I wished might make you more willing to share yours – without fear, malice, or ill will against those with differing views.

They say decency, respect, and civility are in short supply in our times, but I'm just not buying it. We're better than that -- especially in a community like this, where we can still share our words and our ideas with one another.

I'm leaving an empty spot here. I hope to resume my column after November – win or lose. But, that's a long way off, and who knows. Meanwhile, it's time for someone else to step forward. Why not you?

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