

by Ken Saxon

Ken Saxon's second act – following his business career – has been building a leadership network to empower, elevate, and connect Santa Barbara County's nonprofit leaders. He enjoys the opportunity to engage in civic life and leadership locally, especially through the nonprofit leadership organization he founded, Leading From Within.



Thank You for Your Service

When I committed to write a regular column for the *Montecito Journal* about our local community and the people who care for it, I could never have imagined COVID-19 and how it has overtaken our collective world. But here we are in this moment of fear and “social distancing” and the crushing of livelihoods, and it’s actually a great time to talk about the people who tend to the common good in our community as so many of us shelter in place.

Have you ever noticed that there are certain people who seem compelled to serve and to lead in their community? My second career, here in Santa Barbara, has been working with people like this – those who can’t not

and their canyon nets, and “Cash Mobs” that hit the streets to show support to our local merchants.

And now comes COVID-19. This insidious virus has turned so much more upside down this time around than our natural disasters of two years ago. It’s gone right at the social and economic beating hearts of our community, with no end in sight. And it’s global, so we can’t expect the world to come to our rescue. We will get through this pandemic crisis, but not without a lot of pain and disruption. And that pain will be spread widely and quite unevenly.

Many that launched efforts to address community needs in our natural disasters – the Foodbank,

Leading From Within would like to express our deepest gratitude to those who are on the front lines serving our community. To those providing healthcare to stocking the grocery shelves to our bus drivers and many more, we thank you!

The very least the rest of us can do is step up and do anything we can to help cushion the blow – donating, checking on neighbors, finding ways to support local businesses, volunteering as able, and certainly listening to our health professionals

step up when there is a need. Some do this from nonprofit organizations. Some work for government. Some are philanthropists. Many are everyday citizens who just get an immense amount of satisfaction by chipping in.

We saw these public servants out in force during the Thomas Fire and the January 9 debris flows that followed them. Typically, they operate behind the scenes. But those daily 4 pm press conferences made some of them household names. Remember **Cindy Ponce** of the California Highway Patrol? **Dave Zaniboni** from County Fire? And **Suzanne Grimmesey** from the County’s Department of Behavioral Wellness, helping us deal with our trauma? And for each person who popped up in our livestreams, there were thousands more working behind the scenes to help our community recover.

Philanthropic and government initiatives stepped up and made a massive contribution to recovery and renewal here after the mountain came down. But what most inspired me were the many self-organized citizen-to-citizen efforts that emerged – like the Santa Barbara Bucket Brigade, the Santa Barbara Support Network, the Project for Resilient Communities,

Bucket Brigade, the 805Undocufund, United Way, and the Santa Barbara Foundation – are stepping up again in this crisis. And schools and health centers and government are being forced to adapt all their services on the fly. While many of us have been asked to retreat to our private domains, there’s a whole universe of people stepping up to care for so many who need help right now – those losing their employment, the sick and the soon-to-be-sick, and our elderly and our children.

The very least the rest of us can do is step up and do anything we can to help cushion the blow – donating, checking on neighbors, finding ways to support local businesses, volunteering as able, and certainly listening to our health professionals. This is what community should be about – reaching beyond our private interests to invest in one another’s welfare.

In an essay last week in Politico, Villanova professor **Mark Lawrence Schrad** wrote of his hope that this pandemic crisis would ultimately lead to what he called a new kind of patriotism. He noted that we are not fighting this particular battle with soldiers. “Those on the frontlines against coronavirus... are our doctors, nurses, pharmacists, teachers, caregivers,

store clerks, utility workers, small-business owners, and employees.”

When this is all over, Schrad expressed a hope that “perhaps we will finally start to understand patriotism more as cultivating the health and life of your community... Maybe the de-militarization of American patriotism and love of community will be one of the benefits to come out of this whole awful mess.” Yes, it’s important to honor the members of our armed forces and to appreciate their service. But shouldn’t we do the same for those on the frontlines back at home?

Those cultivating the health and life of our community – teachers, nurses, caregivers, nonprofit employees, and many more – are not amply compensated in our society. And given the cost of housing locally, their life in Santa Barbara is challenging when there’s no crisis at all. That’s just a fact of life here.

As you interact with those on the frontlines of the battle to preserve and protect our community – people working at a grocery store, spending long hours in the County’s Emergency Operations Center, picking up our trash, creating online lessons for our children, or preparing food for takeout as they work to keep a local restaurant afloat – consider inquiring as to how they are holding up. And ask, “How can we help?” And before you are done, you might add, “Thank you for your service.”

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