

State of the Town Address (Feb. 7, 2017)

I started thinking back in early November about what I wanted to say in my State of the Town Address this year. It seems so long ago now.

I typically highlight some of the goals reached, projects completed, events enjoyed and share a tone or vision I feel represents where we've been and where we're headed entering the new year.

Listing the goals, projects and events is pretty straightforward. Determining where we are as a community exiting 2016 and where we're headed in 2017 is not so clear. Not so typical.

In 2016, many challenges and opportunities presented themselves that impacted Yountville.

Early in 2016, the sale became official of Vintage Estate, which consists of Villagio, Vintage Inn and V Marketplace. A significant percentage of our retail businesses, office space and hotel rooms changed hands. The challenge was not knowing how the transition would impact our small town. Brookfield Hotel Properties took the opportunity to invest significantly in upgrades and to respect the role it assumed taking over for decades of local family ownership.

In local business news, Yountville welcomed Jean-Charles Boisset and his wine and culinary team to town with the JCB Tasting Salon and Atelier.

Chef Anita Cartegena opened Protea, fulfilling a dream of owning her own restaurant and serving food inspired by her native Puerto Rico.

Stewart Cellars opened a wine tasting room, café and bookstore, adding another gathering place for locals and visitors in the north part of town.

Across the street from Stewart, progress continues to be made on the construction of RH Yountville, which will offer a unique culinary, wine and lifestyle retail experience.

We also said goodbye to Ed and Kris Barker, owners of Yat-Ta-Hey and Artistry in Gold, when they closed the doors to one of the oldest small businesses in Yountville.

Midyear, Whitney Diver McEvoy took over as president and CEO of the Yountville Chamber of Commerce and launched a new effort to support our business community following the retirement of Cindy Saucerman from that post.

A decade-old conversation to beautify the Highway 29 underpass became a reality when the Town, its Arts Commission and private donors raised funds and the community helped hire two Sacramento-based artists to paint a mural, "The Memory of a Tree", which is scheduled to be installed this spring.

The Yountville community again had to respond to the possibility of our elementary school being closed or consolidated with another campus. Pleas to the school district Board of Trustees resulted in changes to merger plans and a renewed commitment to work with the parents and community members in support of a long-term, viable Yountville Elementary School. Efforts to boost enrollment and maximize the potential of the campus are ongoing and headed in a positive direction.

The makeup of the Council changed last year, even though our local municipal election was cancelled. Incumbents Jeff Durham and Margie Mohler were unopposed to retain their seats. Kerri Dorman joined the Council to complete the two years left on the term of Vice Mayor Richard Hall following his resignation due to moving out of town.

Feel-good stories from 2016 include continued fiscal health, the meteoric rise in popularity of Pickleball and a rockin' second annual Residents Bash. The Town delivered on several notable public works opportunities with major park renovations and infrastructure improvements last year that have continued into 2017, including the successful operation of flood control measures along Hopper Creek that helped control the major storm season we've experienced. Also noteworthy is the water line replacement and street resurfacing of Yountville Crossroad.

A highlight will be the soon-to-be-completed renovation of Veterans Memorial Park, adding recognition of the military branches and service of our veterans, new leisure and entertainment spaces and improved public access to the park. We are emphasizing the strong bond shared between the Town of Yountville and the California Veterans Home.

One of the first special events scheduled in the park will be in March when the Town hosts "The Wall That Heals", a traveling replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall.

I continue to work closely with our State Department of Veterans Affairs leadership, as well as our Yountville Veterans Home administration, to direct CalVet's plans to update and upgrade veteran services and support. That includes looking at ways to modify and renovate Home facilities, to generate workforce housing and to engage public private partnerships to better serve our veterans, their families and those who care for our warriors.

Opportunities stem from the visit late last year by U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert McDonald and Governor Jerry Brown's Little Hoover Commission as they research how to partner with local administrators to improve the quality of life for our veterans.

Two statewide initiatives played a significant role in our community last year. Following the election, we became challenged with finding a balance between the use of recreational marijuana and crafting local ordinances that fairly and appropriately control the impacts to our residents.

The same is true about the growing existence of short term rentals and second home ownership. Our challenge is to protect the integrity of our neighborhoods while supporting affordable housing opportunities for all income levels.

The Town also embarked on "Envision Yountville," a General Plan update that will involve community member engagement to help the Town Council and staff map out the future of our town.

Here's where my address becomes less typical.

This country, our State and even our community is divided over how we should move forward as a nation. Whether the topic is gun violence, tensions between law enforcement and citizens, immigration, economic policy or social priorities, we are at a crossroads.

At all levels of government, those of us fortunate enough to be trusted to represent our communities must do so with the best interest of the public first and foremost. At the same time, we need to act and make decisions based on our individual core values.

It's pretty simple to get behind policies that are meant to generate jobs, protect the citizens of our nation, and generally support the success of our country.

The struggle comes when the means to achieving those goals appear to discriminate against people based on religion, ethnicity, or economic status.

In response, people have been inspired to make their feelings known in ways they have not done before. I see that as democracy in action.

We can disagree about the best way to create jobs, protect the environment, keep our citizens safe or provide government services, but we must do so with honesty, integrity and respect. The vitriol we have witnessed these last many months diminishes us and divides us.

We public officials took an oath to serve and protect the people of our community. When we see less than that happening, we need to come together in voice and purpose to ensure elected leaders at all levels live up to that standard.

Over the last three months, I have met with our local, state and federal legislators to evaluate the rapidly-changing political landscape and to discuss how best to proceed - preferably with a unified message. That effort is ongoing with statements and actions expected in the coming weeks.

Paraphrasing the Equal Rights Resolution that I authored and the Town Council adopted in April 2009, Yountville does not support discrimination of any kind. We support equal rights and protection for all citizens. We embrace the diversity of our residents, visitors and local workforce. We recognize the value of cultural and social diversity in our community. We strive to be a safe, vibrant and tolerant place for all residents and their families, free from hate and other forms of discrimination.

I, and I believe all of us, remain committed to this mission.

When we see a threat to members of our community who have immigrated from Mexico and other countries, it is our responsibility to support their human rights.

Importantly, we can do that while also focusing on our nation's security and economic welfare. These are not mutually exclusive efforts.

We should speak out to protect the rights of all men and women, even those who share different religious, social or economic perspectives. However, we must do so with respect, honesty and integrity – even when it's difficult.

Fundamental to our democracy is the ability to speak out, to disagree, to debate policy and to elect people we believe will best represent our values and our interests.

To achieve and maintain this reality, we must dedicate ourselves to making our community safe, prosperous, healthy, welcoming and vibrant. We should not wait for others to do it for us.

Community service can take many forms, including volunteering, supporting non-profit organizations or joining a Town board or commission. Seek out what work for you, but I encourage you to participate.

The more we are involved, the better we can affect outcomes and to make a positive impact.

After all, new challenges and new opportunities are upon us.

Thank you.