



TO GRANT OR NOT TO GRANT? THAT IS THE QUESTION

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One of the most common questions that I have heard in my travels is, "Is there any grant money available?" Well, simply put, the answer is yes. However, before diving into that long and tedious process, that offers no guarantees, consider this.

I know of a community, that in 1836, joined together and built their first school at a cost of \$32,000, with a first-year student count of 140. As time went on, the needs of the community grew. A new and larger school was built to meet this need. Later, the old school became the town hall, housing the village and town clerks, a library, clothes closet and food pantry, as well as a lot of unused empty space.

After the turn of the century, discussions at the monthly board meetings included the now 164 plus year old building. What once stood as the pride of the community had now become an eye sore. The years had had its effects on the old building and what to do with it was a topic for discussion. Some thought it best to tear it down and build a new and modern town hall. Others wanted to preserve its history and rehab the old building. Either way, as with many small communities, the cost of rebuilding or rehabbing was out of reach.

Much to the community's surprise, a local wealthy family approached the town board offering to, not only pay for, but personally do the work of rehabilitating the old school house. Plans were made, and work began in the summer of 2005. Two and half years later, and well over a million dollars, the old school house again stood as the pride of the community. Now housing the Town Clerks Office, Assessors Office, Town Supervisors Office, Town Court, Sheriffs Substation Office, Food Pantry and Clothes Closet as well as a Modern Library, complete with elevator.

In honor of the new town hall, a community drive was formed to raise money to build a brick walk from the sidewalk to the entrance of the building. For a small price, a brick could be purchased in which your name would be inscribed on and the brick used to construct the walkway. Today, as you walk to the front entrance of the building, you will see many community member names inscribed into the bricks.

As I ponder the names on this walk and the sense of community pride, I can't help but wonder if its pride or shame that should be felt. After all, in 1836, it was community pride that build the school and over the next 164 plus years it was the communities lack of attention that lead to the eye sore. If it hadn't

been for the generosity of the wealthy family, who knows what would have happened.

How many of us have complained about the youth of today? How often we have remarked about how these young people expect everything to be handed to them for nothing. Well..... I wonder where they learned that from. It has been said that, "If you give a man a fish, he will eat for a day. But if you teach a man to fish, he will eat for a life time."

Don't get me wrong, I am not saying that grant money is bad. I know of a community that suffered from a natural disaster several years ago. Flood waters devastated the community, washing some of the water main right out of the ground. This is a community that needed grant money. Not the ones that have neglected their systems for decades.

Too often this grant money goes to communities that really don't need it. Being swallowed up by humanities greed rather than being wisely invested were it is truly needed. Some of that investment should be put into educating community leaders on how to properly manage their utilities so that the future generations don't have to deal with the mess that we have dealt them. As an operator for a system for nearly 20 years, I can proudly say that during my reign, I never applied for grant money. I had a small budget of only \$40,000 a year. Not much to work with. However, looking at the bigger picture, 20 years at \$40,000 a year totals to \$800,000. I ask myself, what did I do with \$800,000 of the community's money. To name a few items, we replaced the water mains on 2 streets to include valves, hydrants and curb boxes. Total cost, \$110,000. This is doing the work ourselves. Painted our 200,000-gallon steel water tank, at a cost of \$6,000. Yes, you heard me right, \$6,000. We did it ourselves. All main valves and hydrants were operational and current, a little at a time. We replaced the well pump and some control boxes at a cost of \$10,000. And replaced 245 water meters at a cost of \$36,500. Maintenance and upkeep on our buildings and grounds (yes, we did take care of our buildings and grounds). Vehicle purchases and maintenance, tools and equipment, and not to mention the endless barrage of "little things" that are always knocking at the door. Are you getting the picture? These are the attributes of community pride. When real people step up to the plate and say, "We got this!" Where is the pride in having someone else do it for you?

I don't tell you this to toot my own horn, rather to inspire you. You have the ability and resources to make a difference and don't ►►►

let anyone tell you otherwise. They say the hardest part about doing anything meaningful is getting started. Get a plan, work hard and stand tall. Don't back down for nothing. It took blood, guts and hard work to build this great nation of ours and it is going to take nothing less than the same to rebuild it. It's our turn to make a difference and I for one am not going to let my future self down, no matter what it takes. Is it going to be easy?

Heck no! But what's harder than giving up is living with the consequences of failure. To all of you who have fought the good fight and continue to do so, I say bravo. My dad was in the navy and the sailors had a saying that went like this, "We all row the same boat mate." When you get to the end of your rope, turn around and grab the hand of the next one in line and help them along. And maybe, just maybe, when you reach the end, you will be able to look back with pride and say, "We did good." 💧💧💧

