

Mayor Dennis Donohue
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I am an “accidental Mayor”. I often tell people there are three stories about how I became the Mayor of Salinas and one of them is actually true.

The most true is that I “cut my political teeth” on local tax measures in the City of Salinas, in various roles as part of my service on the Salinas Chamber of Commerce Executive Board and ultimately as Chair.

In 2004, the city failed in its efforts to pass two critical tax measures that left the Council with no choice but to shut down virtually all city services with the exception of police and fire.

The home of John Steinbeck, one of North America’s six Nobel Laureates, was literally on the verge of closing its libraries. And then Salinas in epic fashion responded with a tale that even Steinbeck might have relished telling.

Those who loved libraries came together in an unprecedented fashion and organized what became known as Measure V. The effort received international attention, Hollywood stars came and gave to Salinas...Bill Murray donated his AT&T Pro-Am winnings to the libraries, Hector Elizondo was great in *Pretty Woman* helping Julia Roberts, he was even better on the steps of the Caesar Chavez library, and even the *Hollywood Librarian* film came to town.

And I was honored to receive this organization’s *President’s Award* for my role in Measure V. And like all of those who receive awards such as that I most certainly accepted it on behalf of thousands of people all ages

and backgrounds that helped saved the libraries...that day....for a decade. And like many great literary works there are still stories to be told about our libraries because a decade in literary and real time goes fast!

This weekend we are on the eve of an Election Day that will see if Measure E will make Measure V permanent. The lessons of working with so many people in the community “marked” me politically and personally.

I have been given the honor and opportunity today to bookend my time as Mayor with a chance to share some of my experiences, a Mayoral point of view (thank you for that....nobody asks anymore now that I am a lame duck!) and my vision for the future of libraries.

I know first-hand just how vulnerable libraries can be in the current fiscal era we live....particularly in California. All too often the most vulnerable service these days is the public library. Ironically, library patrons most likely represent the most potent community force when they are mobilized.

One of my favorite books is *How the Irish Saved Civilization*....and, not for the obvious reasons. But think about what the monks did in the middle ages...they looked ahead...and realized they had to save civilization and copy ancient manuscripts.

So too this generation must look ahead and figure out how to save the libraries for future generations. In my view, nobody should be under any illusions about the financial state of affairs of far too many cities in California.

To be sure there are real financial challenges, but this is not the talk where I bemoan the loss of Redevelopment Funds yet again, the looming possibility of claw-backs to cities, the fact we may only be a third of the way through our foreclosure problem. This is not that talk...but if

Measure V is not made permanent or extended within a few years
Gollum will be holding the ring not Frodo in Salinas.

One of the things I appreciate about our librarian Elizabeth Martinez is she and I have shared an “inevitable destiny”. It is a concept based on a mystical New Mexico journey. It is one of those few times when dreams become real.

During my journey as Mayor with Elizabeth, I truly came to appreciate the absolute need to stress to Salineans all basic city services have value. In our city it has become imperative that we break the gridlock of public safety choices versus parks and libraries.

The budget choice is all too real....it will get worse for at least the next decade....unless all of us began to tell a better story. In theory we ought to be pretty good at telling stories in Steinbeck Country. But you know...the book is on my nightstand....I intend to read it....but it's late....I am tired...and tomorrow looks brighter.

We are at the same crossroads as the monks in Ireland. Library advocates need to tell their story city by city, and ensure the future of the institution.

I take a back seat to nobody in a pro-business orientation, and a belief in the necessity of a strong police department. And I want to be very clear that by robust I mean a police department that is guided by neighborhood policing philosophies and strategies that move beyond community policing.

But I would tell you as a Mayor of a City that has had a significant youth violence challenge that while I need an excellent police force, I cannot envision a fundamentally peaceful city that does not have a vibrant library system.

In fact I would argue that libraries are the strategic city service that can and should bring the community together everyday around our common challenges and dreams...be they economic, public safety, or re-inventing government.

Let me speak to those elements as a Mayor but pause first to note that ultimately at the heart of all of this is what libraries are all about. I am the Mayor of a City with high unemployment, where people work hard in the fields for their children to have a better future. In short those fields grow dreams besides lettuce, broccoli, and, of course, not nearly enough radicchio.

At the heart of all of this is the fact libraries are a place where everybody can go and does go, to touch something bigger than themselves. At libraries, they discover a strength and potential within.

Do you remember the first time a book grabbed you?...really grabbed you and you fought to sleep, didn't want to go to dinner, everything was inconvenient but that book. That feeling is what brought Hector Elizondo to Salinas.

I would submit only libraries can arouse that type of passion and really unite a community. People ask me what I intend to do after I leave office. I tell them my focus will be the arts, culture, history because I have seen what they mean to a community, and libraries house and tell that shared story.

Now I am not naïve about budget realities and the challenges libraries face....so let's get down to business for a minute. The public sector now seemingly lives in a permanent financially crisis driven environment.

Salinas has suffered from structural deficits for over three decades, wrestles daily with a significant youth violence issue, and is currently working through the loss of some 850 jobs due to a re-organization following the acquisition of our largest non-Ag employer by *Capital One*.

I need libraries open 7 days a week so families can gather to learn to read, spend time together, students can do their homework. I want to see our libraries go on offense, and do as Salinas is doing - create the first Digital Arts lab in a California public library, partner to introduce a Coder Dojo coding club to help develop young programmers who we hope will be the future entrepreneurs of the Salinas Valley....which for all intents and purposes is the fresh southern flank of the Silicon Valley.

Every K-12 student in Salinas has a library card, 86% percent of residents have library cards, 1800-2000 patrons visit our three libraries daily, young poets hold slams on Friday nights, 750 programs are provided a year in the libraries, *Snappy the Tortoise* was second only to Paul the Octopus that famed soccer prognosticator in web hits, and the list goes on, ...including the newly renovated and expanded Caesar Chavez Library which will be dedicated on December 2nd.

I would further tell you that as a Mayor I know cities don't take days off....but our City Hall is only open 4 days a week. I can't help but wonder why I can't develop government self-service kiosks for the residents to get dog licenses, pay fines, get basic permits. If grocery stores can have automatic tellers why can't libraries help with automatic government?

Frankly no other public institution has more potential to help communities solve problems, get ready for the future, promote the common good, and cultivate individual aspiration and dreams, and, ... oh yes....provide a good book....whatever form that takes!

My personal vision is that Salinas has the vision and the will to imagine a Great City, a Great City that is anchored by a great iconic library ...like Alexandra's library in Egypt.

Some Mayors dream of Downtown Ballparks. I spoke of a dream of an Iconic Library a few years ago at San Jose State University to revitalize Salinas's fortunes. Can anybody here really doubt that, if we built such an institution, people would come?

I truly believe that at a seminal moment in time when all things around the written word are changing, that libraries everywhere should be leading that conversation and saving civilization. All visions have their time,now is the time for libraries to take the lead, to pivot towards the future, and embrace their rightful position at the center of our cities.