

Enrichment is Good for Our Community

One of the many things highlighted by the pandemic is that our ability to enrich our lives is very important to us. The restrictions and modifications we have experienced this year have severely limited our avenues for entertainment, socialization, and civic engagement. We have been unable to completely experience our parks, pools, movie theaters, shopping establishments, restaurants, school activities, community arts, church functions, and so much more.

This brings forth the fact that we want to live in an enriching community. What do we do for fun, entertainment, recreation, socialization, or play?

Parks, pools, hunting, fishing, and recreation centers are so important for our play and our physical activity. Easy access to them can have a profound impact on our health. Physical activity and the ability to be outside in nature are also correlated with contentment and creativity.

Local shopping, theaters, farmers' markets, and other similar activities not only drive our local economy but can also act as entertainment. They offer a change in routine that brings variety to our day-to-day lives.

The arts, including museums, libraries, music, community theater, and even the band at the local bar, stir our emotions and inspire us to look beyond our basic perceptions. From local galleries to life-size wall murals, a community full of art is a community full of culture. Research has even shown that cities that emphasize art have a more civic and social engagement, better child welfare, and even lower poverty rates.

Church and civic organizations do a tremendous amount of good for communities. They also allow us to gather for common beliefs and to work toward common goals. Humans are social beings and we are healthier emotionally, spiritually, and physically when we can get together.

Let us not forget about our schools. Our youth get to explore wonder and awe and get exposure to many of the things I have already mentioned. For adults, I cannot even describe the enjoyment I have received from going to school concerts, plays, and sporting events.

Many of these enrichment activities point to the social aspects of human existence that can have a huge impact on our lives. Social connections promote a sense of safety, belonging, and security. This allows us to confide in others and lets them confide in us.

Dozens of studies have shown that people who have social support from family, friends, and their community are happier, have fewer health problems, and live longer. Conversely, a relative lack of social ties is associated with depression and later-life cognitive decline, as well as with increased mortality.

Socializing and working together have a huge impact on our well-being but are also of major importance to our community at large. Our interactions build a network of relationships and shared experiences that make a community close. The shared values and trust that make social exchange possible is social capital. Our society, economy, institutions, and political system are very inefficient without it.

Hopefully, the pandemic will fade over the next year. As it does and it becomes safer to be out, I suggest that we remember what we missed last year. We need to be supporting the local institutions that enrich our lives. Go out and find entertainment, recreation, and play!