

April 1, 2021

Hello friends and neighbors, my name is Mark Solo. You've probably seen me eating banana bread outside the Farmer's Market in the summer.

I sincerely hope you're handling the general mess that the last year has been as well as you can, and I also hope that you've noticed how far every bit of kindness and selflessness can go when things take a turn.

Those little things like the "safest" member of the household making all the grocery runs, or tipping your favorite restaurant extra because you know that being limited to carryout is straining them – those kindnesses are the heart of a good community, and it's meant a lot to me personally to see how far people in this town are willing to go for their neighbors.

I joined FGLT almost on a whim about 14 months ago. Truth be told, I seem to exist in a cycle where I reach a point of discontentment in my life, and have to find something around me to take part in to remind myself that I can be a positive force for my surroundings (I would have loved to join the Peace Corps, but alas, without a degree, I settled on the National Guard).

Last year, that cycle led me to attend a township meeting to get a better feel for what I could do in the local area, and that in turn led me to the Friends.

Since joining, I've been so grateful to see that the spirit of community involvement is very much alive and well in my hometown. The passion of people like Bobbi and Peter Harper, the generosity of neighbors like Dale Fisher and Joanne Ackerman - the sheer amounts of time and support that people like Sally and John Hoskin cheerfully pour into community projects - it's all been a tremendous comfort to me personally.

Arriving for meetings and seeing everyone who has made time and put forward money for the shared cause of enriching their community is one of the highlights of my month. Through their donations of time, money, and effort, every member contributes something to the town; and to see that continue through conditions like the present gives me hope that groups like these can grow and endure when times get hard.

It feels great to put on a Haunted Forest for Halloween and see your neighbor's kids excited to get outside and run through it.

It means a lot to watch outgoing high school students receive college scholarships that you know came from a group of people donating what they could for the benefit of others.

It's reassuring and empowering to know that when you come up with an idea to make things better, you have a group of friends and neighbors behind you who will help you make it real.

If you've ever found yourself on the receiving end of a neighbor's kindness, or even if you find yourself needing it, please consider that at this time and place, we're fortunate enough to have our own local organization dedicated to helping the community. You don't need others to do good things, but being a part of programs like the Angel Tree can change the lives of those around you, and these kinds of movements only last as long as the passion of their participants.

I sincerely hope that you'll consider joining us in working to keep Grass Lake the kind of home that it is. I can personally attest that it is incredibly rewarding to be involved in something with such visibly tangible benefits to the people and places you care about. Walking past the fruits of your labor, or seeing it on your neighbors' faces, can really remind you that you're more than one person.

Mark Solo