

THE VARIETIES OF CIVIC INVOLVEMENT: EMERGING SAGE LEADERS

I'll take on the world to help someone else. That is part of who I am, and this keeps my life in perspective. Emerging Sage Leader

Themes

Since virtually all emerging sage leaders are paid employees (with the exception of a sole homemaker), it is not surprising that their most favored civic involvements are in the workplace.

The leading favored civic agencies are nonprofit organizations, where 28 emerging sages hold the positions of board president, board secretary, executive director, manager, coordinator, chief educator, or volunteer. Those holding paid positions give from 150 to 300 hours of service a month, while unpaid volunteer positions contribute 18 to 60 hours. The favored organizations of these emerging sages include Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Campus Life, Center for the Arts, Center for Nonprofit Leadership, the Exchange, First 5 of Nevada County, FREED, The Friendship Club, Nevada County Arts, Live Healthy Nevada County, The Milk and Honey Café, North Tahoe Business Association, the Script Program, Sierra Commons, Sierra Nevada Mentoring Partnership, Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital Foundation, Project Simplify, South Yuba River Citizen's League, the United Way, and the Yuba Watershed Institute.

The second most favored civic organizations are Nevada County, Nevada City, and Grass Valley government, where 14 emerging sage leaders hold such positions as chief executive officer, mayor, city manager, city council member, chief financial officer, treasurer-tax collector, department head, program supervisor, program director, and probation officer. The hours given to the positions of mayor and city council member average 50 a month, while the hours worked per month in the other governmental posts average 200.

The third most favored civic organizations are in education and include five emerging sage leaders in the paid offices of Lyman Gilmore Middle School (Principal), Nevada County School Superintendent's Office (Superintendent), Nevada Joint Union High School District (Assistant Superintendent), North Columbia School House (Director), Yuba River Charter School (Director/Principal), and the unpaid post of Board President of the Nevada County Association of California School Administrators. The five paid emerging sage leaders contribute between 160 to 240 hours of civic service a month, and the unpaid sage leaders average five hours.

And there are three emerging sage leaders who are active in fraternal/service clubs, including Rotary (board president, project coordinator) and the Nevada City Chamber of Commerce (chair, marketing committee). These unpaid leaders contribute an average of seven hours of service each month.

Reflections

Unlike the senior sage leaders, most of the emerging sages are still working full-time and have major family responsibilities. Their civic engagement takes place, at least in part, through their formal job in government or in nonprofit human service agencies. There is much more to the story, however, when it comes to the involvements of these emerging leaders in Grass Valley and Nevada City. They often are engaged in volunteer activities above and beyond their job—ranging from equine rescue to Rotary to Nevada County Arts. In most cases, the emerging leaders are involved in at least three different community-based organizations—and only one of these is a formal paid position. What these relatively young men and women have in common is their exceptional level of energy and their sustained commitment to all of the civic activities in which they are engaged.

Passion and Commitment

So what drives these very busy men and women to do all of this community service work? One great passion shared by many of the emerging sages is the natural environment. Even more than senior sage leaders, the emerging sages believe that preservation and restoration of the physical environment is critical to community life. They also consistently exhibit a passion for formal civic leadership; they have run for public office and serve on community boards, and they

express interest in the outcomes of government and also its structures and operations. Unlike many of the senior sage leaders, these young men and women believe that something of value can be achieved through public office and effective public policy. They devote themselves not just to nonprofit initiatives but also to public ventures.

A Supportive Environment

In most cases, the emerging sage leader has a supportive spouse who fully appreciates the community work the leader is doing—and might even be involved in comparable civic activities themselves. For many of the emerging female sages, there is a “significant other” in their lives who at least some of the time is the primary family caregiver. Children are additional sources of support and encouragement, especially when they enter adolescence.

Support also comes from outside the immediate family. As one of the emerging leaders notes, those with whom one works on civic projects also become a primary social network. And members of their families often join the emerging sages and become part of this expanded social system. Much like the barn-raising of a previous era, contemporary community services become occasions for family-based friendships and celebrations. Emerging leaders have many balls in the air, but they are joined by other jugglers and soon find that this becomes a splendid inter-family affair.

Sacrifice and Legacy

There is, of course, the other side of the story. It’s not all fun-and-games for many of the emerging leaders. They talk about missing out on important family events because of their civic activities and obligations elsewhere. They come home exhausted from a full day of service to their community and find little time and energy left for those about whom they most care – their spouse and children; one emerging leader talks about falling asleep on the coach rather than playing basketball with his daughter. Yet, the commitment to outside service is compelling to these emerging sages even when they have children living at home. They believe that a strong community makes for strong children. From their perspective, it truly does take a village to raise a child, and a community that energetically works to counter decline will be better suited to raise healthy and caring children.

Even when sacrifices are being made by emerging sages, there are benefits for the entire family. One emerging sage shares the experience of taking his daughter with him when meeting with a young man for whom he is a “big brother.” Later the daughter says, “Daddy, we have to help him.” What a remarkable life lesson. Is there a better way in which to learn about giving back than by observing ones parent in action? As many of the emerging sage leaders observe, these powerful examples of human service tend to linger in the minds and hearts of children. Perhaps this daughter will herself become actively involved in community service and will one day become an emerging and then a senior sage leader. What a powerful legacy this would be!