

January 24, 2008

Hi Everyone,

Let's all take a deep breath. Joel, I was thrilled to learn about all of the hard work you and Jerry are doing since joining the Town Council. You've done quite a bit in a very short period of time – thanks so much for sharing. I think that it would only be fair, however, to recognize the importance of having people out there who will ask the tough questions as Arthur has done (true, perhaps he could have asked in a slightly less confrontational way, but it is clear to me that his intention was good). Asking those questions is what stimulates the healthy dialog that is needed to air the issues and progress toward open government. I hope you both can appreciate the importance of having such discussions so that the views of the people of Germantown can be heard in many different forums.

I, for one, appreciate the point that Arthur raised, even if he didn't raise it in the most sensitive of ways. I was frankly a bit embarrassed to hear about our Town Council passing such a resolution (condemning the Governor's plan to provide driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants) without hearing from the people of Germantown. I'm guessing that many people in Germantown would, in fact, support that resolution for many reasons. I am not afraid to say that to me, the negative reaction of many in this State, including our Town Council, smacked of xenophobia. It just seemed to me to be an extension of the intolerance that many in this town have for "outsiders," something that many of us experience on a regular basis. Others may have supported the Governor's plan for very different reasons such as the idea that it would help us to track people and know who the undocumented immigrants are among us, helping make it a safer society. Yet others may have supported the plan because they recognize the fact that our economy depends so heavily on immigrants who are willing to work very hard at low wages to do the jobs that we can't get others to do. I recall recently speaking with a local fruit farmer who said she would have had more, but she just couldn't get enough pickers so some of the fruit was going wasted.

People who are desperately poor will travel far and accept these jobs at great risk to their own safety – they are not bad people. They just need to get around. I'm not sure I've adequately represented the various points of view, but you get the idea. The point is that it would be nice to be heard, whatever our views are, even if the length of speech has to be limited for practical reasons.

Joel and Jerry, I really hope that you can, over time, continue to work with the Town Council to help shift toward greater openness. We know you can't take on everything at once, but we're glad you're listening and getting off to a great start.

Julie Stone