

Is it football season yet? Have you ever heard a football coach talk about each player winning their battle on each play? Those are small wins, which lead to victory. If each of your offensive linemen win their battle at the line of scrimmage, that leaves room for the running back to get through. If the receivers and tight ends make their blocks further downfield, then the running back has a chance to score....every play. Each player on the team has a small part to play in the bigger picture. I remember years ago when the Nebraska Football Coaches would count and celebrate pancakes from the offensive line. A pancake was when the offensive lineman would knock down the defensive lineman they were blocking and kept them out of the play. It was a small thing, but all of those pancakes added up to National Championships time after time. Is your community celebrating pancakes?

I admit that sounds kind of weird, but is your community celebrating the little improvements that make a community great? Are you being encouraging when positive changes are made? Perhaps someone cleaned up an abandoned lot, or pulled weeds out from in front of a main street business. Do you celebrate it, or do you just say, "That should have been done a long time ago." In many of the communities that I visit, I can say that things that should have been done...are not getting done. Weeds are growing, lawns are unkept, fallen trees just lay there, and buildings are falling down. Perhaps there is no one left who cares. Perhaps the people who cared have left.

Imagine that someone in the community went and cleaned up an abandoned yard. The yard now looks amazing. No one said thanks for improving the community, no one said good job. But someone did make a snarky comment about if they did it for that one yard, maybe they should just do it for every yard. Or even the homeowner finds out about the improvement and yells at the person who did it, "No one gave you permission to be on my property! You're a trespasser. I'm calling the cops!" What do comments like that do to help motivate good works?

What would happen if we celebrated the little improvements? What if we encouraged people to pick up trash? What if we celebrated that a yard got cleaned up, a 'most improved yard' or something. Perhaps just a word of thanks to the person who did the work would go a long way. What if you got out your work gloves and went to join in the work. Many hands make light work. I know

that when I had all four kids living at home, weeding the flower beds took an hour, but it took me five hours by myself the other day.

So the next time that you see small improvements in your community. Find a way to compliment the person that made the improvements. Mention around town that you're impressed with the changes. It may be a new painted bench, a repaired window, some weeds pulled, or trash that was picked up. Be sure to notice and to encourage people to continue to make small improvements. Don't be worried about how small the improvements are, if small improvements are repeated a hundred or a thousand times, it all adds up to big change and an increased community pride.

If your community could benefit from any of the Rural Prosperity Nebraska ideas that I've discussed in this column, please reach out to me. I'd love to speak to your community about these topics. You can reach me at jason.tuller@unl.edu or at the Thayer County office at 402-768-7212.

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