

My hope is that we celebrate our hometown more

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As part of our recent Christmas celebration this year my family sat down to watch “My Home Town,” the recently restored film of 1946 Camden, South Carolina.

It was truly a treat, especially to see the reaction of my 87-year old grandfather as the places and people of years past appeared on the screen. Many fond times sprang to memory, and my family became the beneficiary of some of Papa’s wonderful tales.

The Camden Horse Show, Polo, the Carolina Cup, the Camden Hunt, and the Lenten Dog Show were some of the local attractions the film highlighted. Local leaders, law enforcement, and educators and students were showcased, including my mother-in-law, the late Mary Emma Hough Funderburk, who taught at Camden High School. Businesses and churches were shown filled with customers and congregants.

As I watched the film, I thought about what was different about Camden and Kershaw County sixty years later in 2006. Most obvious were the buildings that are no longer with us, including Camden High School, the old Baptist Church building, and the Kirkwood Hotel. The polo field looked much different with its large grandstand and benches for the spectators.

Also changed were the businesses. While there are a few long-established, locally-owned businesses in town, they have dwindled over the years as national and regional corporations replace “mom and pop,” and as personal transportation by automobile has made travel to Columbia and Charlotte for shopping much easier. We also travel by Internet and make on-line purchases by credit card instead of in-store credit.

Just as we have the paper box instead of the paperboy, we don’t depend on each other nearly as much as we used to. Back in 1946 we relied on local stores to stock what we needed. Now, we know that we can hop in our car and shop in another county for what we need. So, regretfully, some of us no longer bother checking with the local store at all. Some of us no longer demand personal service, but choose quick and cheap. Content to talk to a machine instead of a person, some of us would rather check ourselves out of a store than to connect with another human being.

At one time we relied on our neighbors and friends to look out for each other and our families. Is this watchful concern by neighbors still appreciated or is it considered nosy? We have email, voice mail, and instant messaging so we don’t have to talk to anyone at all. Video games, computers, and DVD’s entertain us inside our homes. Movies now are viewed on handheld devices instead of on the big screen in a theater. These modern gadgets keep us from sharing experiences with others as an audience. We create vitality within a community by sharing – our time, talents, and resources. Sometimes we must create the opportunities for sharing. For instance, when was the last time you borrowed a cup of sugar, or anything else, from the people next door?

I wonder that as we become more and more independent, might we lose some of the special qualities that have made our community a desirable place to live? Our community traditions form our identity and bond us one to another. Our community will be strong if we continue to value the qualities and traditions that bring us together.

As we celebrate the New Year, my hope is that we celebrate our hometown more. We can do this by connecting with our neighbors more, shopping locally more, and supporting community activities more. Every now and then it might not be a bad idea to make a point of borrowing a cup a sugar from our neighbor next door.