

THE POORE PAGE

August 2011

I still remember my first trip to Bentonville. It was December and I remember driving up Interstate 540. I remember passing the Promenade Mall, seeing the Embassy Suites facility, and finally making the turn to Bentonville. One of the first things I remember about my turn on to Walton Boulevard was seeing the city limit sign with the city population listed. I kept wondering how a city of just over 30,000 has a high school of 3,500 students. That visit began my entry into a world of daily surprises that continues to this day. As I prepared to write my column for this month, it became clear I needed to share one of the most significant surprises and offer a word of caution on how to keep this wonderful surprise a daily occurrence in Bentonville.

What is this wonderful surprise? Bentonville is a big community that feels very small. Have you ever thought about this? We are blessed with every amenity, restaurant, and kind of entertainment known to mankind. We have wonderful sports opportunities from a great professional baseball team to the wide array of sport options at the University of Arkansas and the success of our own high school sports teams. Yet, we are also blessed with a small town feel. I see this "small town feel" play out in numerous ways. For example, I have never seen more courteous drivers in one community. People actually let you pull out on Walton Boulevard - even in high traffic times. We have a town square. Now that is definitely small town. But, we also had Sponge Bob and Dora interacting with our kids at the last First Friday in our town square. Let me give you two more really good examples of our small town feel. Our mayor was recently out directing traffic and manning a crosswalk at one of our schools during our first week of school. How cool is that. To top it off, Mayor McCaslin did multiple interviews that week with *USA Today* and *Southern Living* about life in Bentonville. Are we small or big? One last great example, the Waltons have each reached out to me since my arrival. Jim, Lynn, Alice and Tom Walton have all been so genuine in sharing their concern for our schools and reaching out to help. For people like that to take time, offer support and really care about our kids sure feels like a tight-small community.

So, what is the issue? Well, we are quickly becoming a very different community. We have and will continue to grow. It is hard to imagine the impact Crystal Bridges will have on our community. Hundreds of thousands will visit our community, and we will have numerous new businesses and families move in to support these visitors. Growth can change a community and it can change people. It is easier to move just a little quicker, talk a little less with each other, and become a little more agitated as we deal with change.

What should we do to combat this and how can we keep our small town feel? It really is about each person making a commitment to holding on to our small town values. What does that look like? It means we continue to pick up trash no matter where we see it. It means we say hi to folks and be courteous in our actions and our words. It means we continue to strive to do something nice to someone or for someone each day. It means we still allow cars to merge in even when we are hurrying to get to our own destination. Finally, as your Superintendent, I hope that we always find ways to support kids. Volunteer at a church, our library or our schools and find time to work with our kids. My goal is to incorporate our district into the community by sharing a vision with the city leaders, partnering with the parks department and local businesses, and becoming acquainted with every neighborhood. Nothing can unite a community more than to hold the schools up and make them our treasure. Together Bentonville will not only retain its small town feel but it will be the town everyone in the nation will want to emulate.