

Commentary



•Letters...page 7

•Columnists...page 68

Our Views



MIKE CHAIKEN, editions editor
Established December 9, 2004

Published weekly by The Step Saver, Inc.
213 Spring St., Southington, CT 06489
editorial: 860-621-6751
advertising: 860-628-9645
circulation: 860-628-9438
fax 860-621-1841

e-mail mchaiken@BristolObserver.com

All editorials are intended to reflect the position of the publisher and not that of any individual editorial writer. Signed columns, on the other hand, reflect the position of the author and not necessarily those of the publisher.

www.BristolObserver.com
www.StepSaver.com

Some in city need to take a compliment

We've all probably met that man or woman. They are handsome, gorgeous, smart, funny, etc. But they don't believe it.

You tell them they are handsome, gorgeous, smart, funny, etc.

And they say they are ugly, dowdy, dumb, stupid, etc. Even further, they suspect your motives for saying otherwise.

You figure, okay, you're a friend so they need a third party—a stranger who has never met them—to confirm to this man or woman they are, indeed, handsome, gorgeous, smart, funny, etc. And the third party confirms this is so.

But they tell this third party, they are wrong. They are ugly, dowdy, dumb, stupid, etc. And this third party has to be pretty stupid to think otherwise.

Right now, the citizenry of Bristol, well some of them, are acting out this scenario.

CNN/Money magazine recently released a list of the 100 best places to live in cities Bristol's size. And Bristol made the list.

This should be a point of pride for the city. A national media organization offered praise for the city where we live.

But rather than pride, some of our residents have shouted wherever they could, "Horse hockey! Bristol stinks. And we're not going to listen to anyone who admires us."

Unfortunately, this is so typically Bristol. While other cities have an oversized opinion of their self-worth, and take pride in what they have to offer, Bristol, as a collective, always finds a way to denigrate itself and focus on the negatives.

When someone tells us we're handsome, gorgeous, smart, and funny, etc. we adamantly argue that, no we're not. We're ugly, dowdy, dumb, stupid, etc.

We should be feeling good about ourselves that Bristol was so highly ranked in the survey. After all, CNN/Money didn't have anything to gain to tell Bristol it's doing a good job. It's a national news organization. The survey isn't likely to gain the magazine or news network more circulation or eyeballs by blowing smoke up our butt. They truly are a disinterested party saying, "Hey, you know you're a pretty good looking city. Good job."

If the people who feel it necessary to scoff at the city did a little thinking, they might give their views a second thought.

After all, the citizens of Bristol are the city of Bristol. So if the city stinks, we all stink—that includes the naysayers.

Is that how you see yourself? Are you comfortable telling everyone that you stink because you live in Bristol? We'd like to think you'd be a bit insulted and might even want to defend your honor.

So, let's close our mouths and stifle the insults. Let's bask in the warm glow of a compliment for a change.

After all if someone else thinks we're pretty great, we really should think the same.

Outsiders sometimes see better than insiders

When I pulled into the parking lot, I realized that I had just a few bucks on me.

Until I checked, I did not know that I had only two.

I reasoned, however, that it was better to make it to the Farmer's Market on Wednesday than not to.

I am a creature of habit.

Once I get into a routine, I follow it.

I knew that getting to the Farmer's Market was step one.

So, I took my money and bought two cucumbers from Green Acres Farm for \$1. I bought two zucchinis from Tonn's for another \$1.

My money was depleted, but I had some cukes and zucchini and I got to sample some pickled cucumbers and cheddar cheese from Twin Pines Farm, and I picked up a business card from Blue Moon Farm, which raises its own beef, pork and poultry.

I would say that was a successful trip.

Now all I have to do is get back there and remember my money.

I have been meaning to make trips to the Farmers Market more regularly.

I know, people ask, what's the big deal?

This is it for me, at least, and it all comes down to making the most of what we have, including our locally grown food sources.

This idea came home to me on that school trip to Italy late in June.

(I promise, no more Italy for a while after this column.)

Driving through the countryside from Venice to Florence and again from Florence to Cinque Terre and Lake Como, I was amazed how the Italians used every conceivable bit of land.

In backyards, families grow corn and wheat.

On hillsides, on terraces carved into steep inclines, olive trees and



David Fortier Around the House

grapevines grew.

Everywhere something was growing.

This cultivation of space was as much a part of the culture as the architecture, music, sculpture and painting, and food. All of it is tied together.

How cool, I thought, it would be for a bunch of our families here to replicate this family farming idea and created a co-op that together produced enough corn or wheat to sell and help pay the bills, but also to inculcate in our culture some of the values associated with working the land.

No doubt, it is difficult work.

No doubt, the demands are taxing.

I thinking about some of the work that goes on around here.

Take the hanging flowers on our porches.

This summer I have to water them.

Every day, I take out my little watering can and go to work.

Fifteen minutes later, I've finished.

If I miss a day, the plants wilt.

Miss a couple of days, they are gone.

Multiply this effort and the commitment times 200 and maybe I start to understand what it means to work on a farm day after day.

Of course, we all do not have to

own and run farms to learn these values, but we have to support our farms so they can remind of some basic principles to live by.

Of course, a lot of us get it.

On a walk around the block just last week, I stopped to admire flowers in a neighbor's front yard and I saw that in the arrangement a couple of summer squash plants were growing.

Clever.

And cool.

I took another walk last week, on the recommendation of Uncle Hal.

Check out Rockwell Park, he told me.

So I did.

I saw that the skateboard park was being used, that the basketball court had been moved (Tells you how long it's been!), the playground with water park is done, the pool has been expanded, over by the lagoon a new amphitheater is almost complete, and the lagoon itself is undergoing a total renovation.

Without checking with anyone, I guess that the new boardwalk over the lagoon and the lagoon itself will be completed by the fall.

Using our open spaces wisely is important.

No one has to go to Italy to figure this out, but we need to be reminded of this.

Looks like Parks and Rec Department understands this.

Maybe, our parks were one of the things that the Money Magazine people considered when they included Bristol in their top 100 small cities list.

Sometimes people outside get a better picture of what we have around here than the people who have been living here.

Maybe that is why a trip to Italy helped open my eyes to the good things we have around here.

David Fortier, a Bristol resident, is a freelance writer.

City's ranking opens door to intriguing questions



Elio Gugliotti

If you haven't heard by now, Bristol was named one of the top 100 small cities in America by Money Magazine.

Money Magazine narrowed down cities with a population between 50,000 and 300,000 using criteria such as crime rate, housing affordability, the quality of the school system, job growth, and quality of life.

When they were all said

and done, the editors of Money Magazine ranked the Mum City as the 84th best small city in the country.

While the editors of Money Magazine have reached their verdict on the city's standing, in the local court of public opinion the jury is still out.

There are those people who feel the ranking is a complete joke, and that Bristol is closer to the worst small city than the best.

Than there are those people who feel the ranking is well-deserved, and Bristol is a great place to live that should actually be ranked higher.

Which begs the question: Is Bristol worthy of being ranked amongst the best small cities in America?

It's an intriguing question.

Does Bristol have its problems? Without a doubt the city has its problems.

Downtown is virtually non-existent, and although the Depot Square project is finally on its way, success is far from guaranteed.

Can the city offer its residents the luxuries of a Greenwich or even a West Hartford? No.

With any ranking you must consider the source. In Money Magazine's ranking economic factors carried the most weight.

Although, Bristol can't offer what a Greenwich or a West Hartford can, the Mum City can offer a great life for anybody, from any social class.

Whether you live in Section 8 housing or in a sprawling home on Chippens Hill, the opportu-

nity for a great life and a better life for your children lie within your reach here in Bristol.

The American Dream is alive and well in Bristol.

So, is Bristol worthy of its ranking as the 84th best small city in America?

The truth is I don't know, and nobody else does either. We can sit here all day and futilely argue over rankings.

Take the ranking for what it is, a nice compliment from a stranger. For in the end, you're never as good as they say you are, and you're never as bad as they say you are.

Elio Gugliotti is a staff writer with the Bristol Observer. He can be reached at egugliotti@BristolObserver.com