

Allow Youth to Congregate and Appreciate History

By David Miller

The old Town Hall is a testament to the rich history of Bloomington. As a college graduate with a degree in history I appreciate the City of Bloomington upholding this landmark as long as it has. I believe it is important to remember the past and save as much of our heritage as possible. I also believe history is the story of progress. Preserving the status of the old Town Hall as a historically significant building and providing the youth a coffeehouse and gathering place are not after all in conflict with each other.

If one looks at the original use of the old Town Hall as stated on the City of Bloomington website, it was used as a place for the residents to come together with their neighbors. I am positive such an opportunity allowed the people of old Bloomington to get to know their neighbors and build stronger community connections. As I recall from one Letter to the Editor, at one time the old Town Hall was the center of action in the community. Well, let's get that feeling back!

Today in the hustle and bustle of modern life, many of us would claim we are more disconnected from our community than our forefathers were. The Bloomington Youth Coffeehouse Initiative (BYCI) sees the value in building stronger community connections. The more than 30 youth volunteers have worked extremely hard over the past 4 years to locate a welcoming site for a gathering place, like the old Town Hall was used for during the golden days of Bloomington.

The youth of Bloomington are seeking a safe and chemical free location to gather and socialize and keep off the streets. In daily discussion with youth, I hear how hard it is for them to go to public locations to socialize without being kicked out after a short amount of time. The fact of the matter is the youth want to feel they are apart of this community; they do not want to be shut up at home when school is out.

A youth gathering place and the old Town Hall is a perfect fit. It is a great location nearly half way between east and west Bloomington where students from Kennedy and Jefferson High Schools can come together without school rivalry. The youth already plan to name their meeting place "Central Grounds" a significant and meaningful title in the spirit of the building's original use.

If a youth coffeehouse is located at the old Town Hall, it will again be a place to meet new people creating stronger community connections. The youth will have a place to express themselves through poetry readings, art displays, and music presentations. Maybe movies will again be shown at the old Town Hall like they once were as another Letter to the Editor has mentioned. Most importantly, by allowing the old Town Hall to be used as a youth coffeehouse and gathering place, the youth of Bloomington will not only be taking part in a tradition as old as the Town Hall itself, but they will also be learning about its significance in the community. The youth have no desire to destroy the history of Bloomington, only to share in it. Historical presentations and school tours can still take

place, and the youth of Bloomington will have better access and more intention of learning about the history of which they are now apart.

Take a look at communities surrounding Bloomington. There is a youth coffeehouse initiative in Edina. Already youth coffeehouses or gathering places exist in Burnsville; and Minneapolis and other cities in the Metro as well.

In Hopkins, The Depot is a historical landmark that today also serves as a safe and drug free location for youth to gather. It brings in youth during non-school hours, but also adults during the day for coffee or lunch. If one goes to The Depot one is bombarded by the historical ambiance that the youth have committed to maintaining. The whole community has benefited from this historical building now a welcoming and safe location for youth by bringing in more people and more attention to what was once a lively turn of the century rail stop.

I urge everyone to give the youth of this community a chance to share in Bloomington's progression. Let us be a community that provides our youth with a safe location, at the same time, the opportunity to share in Bloomington's heritage and deep-rooted tradition of building a strong sense of community.

David Miller is an AmeriCorps Promise Fellow with the Bloomington United for Youth.