

Thoughts on Retiring from City Council
Peter F. Orazem
December 15, 2017

My sister Helena was up from Kansas for work in Des Moines this morning when she sent me a screen shot of a Des Moines TV Station's list of things to do in Central Iowa. Number 1 was the Campbell Orazem Retirement. That just shows why we have to improve entertainment options in this town.

My sister decided to head back to Kansas rather than head up to Ames for my retirement. She said she would have come up if it was for my funeral.

When I announced I was not running for reelection, a reporter asked me why I was retiring. I told him it was on account of my drinking problem. I could not drink enough to get me to do another 4 years on City Council.

But the last 8 years have been a lot of fun and very rewarding for me. I have many people to thank for that, starting with Steve Sapp. My political career started with us fishing on Ada Hayden Lake when he asked if I had ever thought about running for City Council. I asked him if he ever thought about being a campaign manager. He set up a meeting in Pat Brown's kitchen where a group that included Dudley Luckett, Monte Parish, Gary Botine and Karen Shimp came up with a list of 16 things we thought we needed to do to get Ames moving, and after 8 years, we made progress on 15 of them.

I want to thank my fellow City Council members for helping make so many things happen over the last 8 years. We did not always agree, but the conversation was always smart. I especially want to thank the fellow members of my freshman class, Tom Wacha and Jeremy Davis. And I want to thank the late Riad Mahayni, a fellow economist, who was the first person to encourage me to consider being a City Council member.

I want to thank our very smart and very dedicated city staff who are ready to do what needs done to move this city forward. In my 8 years, we have replaced almost all the leadership in the departments, and the department heads are a credit to City Manager Steve Schainker. They are not content to sit on their laurels, but they are looking for ways to make us better. I have singled out many of them in past talks, but today I want to single out Diane Voss. She knows everything! It's stunning how much she knows. I never came up with a question that she or her staff could not answer. She made us look like we knew what we were doing. Not many cities have that level of expertise, and we are better for it.

Great cities have great infrastructure. Businesses need that infrastructure to thrive. When I was running for office, I thought that infrastructure was roads and sewers and electricity and water. Now I know the real infrastructure is the people who work for the city to make sure we have the roads and the sewers and the electricity and the water.

I want to thank my wife, Patti Cotter, and her mom June Cotter. People think better of me because I married into the Cotters. I am not sure I would have been elected without my mother-

in-law telling everyone at the senior center that they had better vote for me or she was not going to exercise with them.

I'm impressed with how many people come up to me to say they were astonished that I was married to Patti Cotter. I am never sure if they are congratulating me on my good fortune or disconcerted at her poor judgment.

My parents were both dead by the time I was elected to the Ames City Council. They would have been so proud. Ames was their first home town as a couple. Their first house was a quonset hut in Pammel Court. Ames is where I was born.

My grandfather was Mayor of delenja vas pri Ribnici, a town of maybe 30 houses in former Yugoslavia. When Roosevelt and Churchill designated Yugoslavia to fall under the Soviets at Yalta, they set in motion a series of assassinations of prominent people – politicians, priests, intellectuals, by the communists. The idea was to eliminate potential political opponents, but also to make everyone else afraid to resist. My grandfather, the mayor of a town of under 200 people, was a sufficient threat that he had to flee his country. He came to the United States, sponsored by his brother Ignace.

Ignace left Yugoslavia after World War I because he was facing persecution because of his political beliefs – he was a communist sympathizer. What makes this country so great is that it can make room for a communist refugee and then make room for his brother, a refugee from communism, and that somehow that makes sense.

My great uncle Ignace was a brick layer. He would drive me around Butte, Montana where he lived and point to all the buildings that he had worked on. He was just one man. But in his work, he was all over that town. He built that city.

After 28 years as a public servant, Mayor Campbell can drive down every street in Ames and know that she had a part in building or repairing every foot. She is all over this town. She built this city.