8. EIGHT CHALLENGES FOR '73

Leadership, Involvement
Of Community Essential

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There is nothing more discouraging to the conscientious citizen of a community than to hear someone say, "I don't want to get involved." The issue at hand may have to do with political change, roadways, bond issues, drainage, cultural affairs, education, religion, the courts, neighborhood improvement—the scores of activities that make a community tick. And yet, so many citizens of this community, on hearing mention of a project that needs their help, will shrug and say, "I guess it's all right, but I don't want to get involved."

It's easy for a community to sink into stagnation if enough of its citizenry adopt the same apathetic attitude. We are reminded of the businessman who, asked what he thought of apathy, answered, "Well, I'm neither for nor against it." In this day and age, it's easy enough to remain indifferent to all the vital issues that confront and often confound us. We have heard all too often the frightening reality of crowds of people looking on while a person is being mugged or murdered on the streets. They didn't want to get involved.

A community, too, can suffer irreparable damage if the people who depend upon it for a livelihood and claim it as their home stand idly by and do not spring to action when they see detrimental forces at work to undermine its political, social, and economic fabric. We are not pointing with alarm to any "clear and immediate" danger of community upheaval in any form. We do find it disturbing that not enough members of the business community, civic and fraternal clubs, religious organizations, and other average citizens do not respond quickly to community action. In any civic club or volunteer organization, there are always a select few who are called upon time and again to take over as chairmen, leaders, directors, etc., simply because not enough of their colleagues are willing to assume the burden. The same workhorses must always respond to the call, another instance of too many chiefs and not enough Indians.

During the past year the mayor has referred several times to the desirability of "community input." This is computer age jargon that translates into "Get Involved. Do your part. Become interested in what goes on in your city and give us the benefit of your thinking." Sometimes there has been response. A case in point involved the proposed solution to a major thoroughfare bottleneck. A good number became involved because they were directly affected. This often happens in cases when one's own ox is being gored. This, however, is a dangerous position, because it is clear that anything having to do with any segment of the community should command the attention of the entire community and not just the isolated few.

It goes without saying that it is not only the rank and file of the population that must be aroused to community action. There must be leaders at the fore to give counsel and direction. The key word is leadership at all layers of community life. Our political leaders must arouse confidence by their trustworthiness—and concrete results. Those charged with the education of our children and the overall upgrading of the educational system must do so with the public's educational and economic welfare in mind and not by political horse trading. Leadership is expected, too, from the clergy. Clerical voices were raised against the recent Supreme Court favorable ruling on abortion, but where is the outcry from pulpit and rostrum against obscene movies, books, magazines, and other pornographic influences in the community?

Let every citizen think twice before deciding he doesn't want to take the trouble to vote (our voting record in the recent past has been dismal), or offer his assistance for public office, or be active in his civic group, or take a vocal stand in community affairs. Let our leaders in government and non-governmental positions as well assay their efforts in molding positive public opinion and working for the communal good.

In short, let everyone become involved and grab the reins of leadership. The result will be a Lafayette city and parish we can unqualifiedly be proud of and happy to live in.