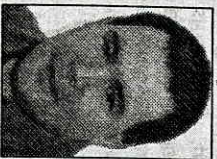


Heeding Ray's advice

Zebulon Citizen of the Year Chad Ray had a lot to say last Thursday night when he spoke to chamber members at the group's annual banquet.

He spoke about being a good businessman. He spoke about the importance of a green economy.



But I think the most important lesson he imparted had to do with giving back.

Ray has done plenty of that, supporting causes throughout the region that help schools, the local business community and a host of other institutions.

**PRODIGAL
SON**

**JOHNNY
WHITFIELD**

His example, in that regard, is one we should all follow. Giving to your community is a selfless act, one that often comes without recognition. I promise you Chad Ray hasn't done anything to help the community because he thought it would help him win the nod as Citizen of the Year.

The ways in which you can give to your community are nearly limitless. Churches are always in need of support. Their mission programs are both international and local. Many churches have food pantries that help people in our community who have bare cupboards at home.

Young people are often a favorite target of people's charity. You can support a local baseball or softball team through the parks and recreation department or you can volunteer to coach in one of those leagues.

You can work with a school principal to offer programs in the schools or tutor children who are having a hard time keeping up.

Every year at the start of the school year, the Eastern Regional Center conducts a book bag drive. You can help them.

There are a great many lesser known venues for people who need help. The mentally ill are challenged in more ways than most people know.

They can always use your support and your advocacy. Club Horizons, in Knightdale, survives largely with the support of people who give something of themselves.

Our elderly residents are also among our most vulnerable populations. You can check with the Eastern Regional Center to find volunteer opportunities that will benefit older folks. Or you can do something a little less formal, by simply keeping an eye on your older neighbors. Check on them. Make friends with them. Take a pie to their house or make them dinner from time to time.

It may sound a little naive, but simply doing the right thing by other folks is not asking too much.

In today's environment, it may seem very much like it's everyone for themselves. But it's not. And it can't be.

Most of us like to consider ourselves ready, willing and able to stand on our own two feet without the help of others. But if we think about that from a regional perspective, or even as separate communities, it's easy to understand that we all rely on others to some extent.

If we continue to depend on those resources, we might find ourselves standing in line with an empty cup.

We all have plenty of time to sit in front of the television doing virtually nothing. I would suggest — and so would Chad Ray — that we have an obligation to help better our community in some way.

It doesn't always take money out of your pocket. Sometimes you just have to give of your time and your knowledge.

Whatever it takes, I urge you to follow Ray's advice.

Find a way to help make your community a better place. It will be more rewarding to you than a pay raise.