

THANKING THOSE WHO SERVE

We live in a country that sets aside two specific occasions in November for people to be thankful. One is Veterans Day for recognizing and thanking those who have served their country. The other holiday is Thanksgiving, when family and friends gather to give thanks. At times of thankfulness and Thanksgiving, no matter the occasion or location, be sure to proclaim your appreciation. THANK YOU is a powerful expression of acknowledgement and gratitude. It's appropriate for all ages, genders, generations and cultures. It costs nothing to express gratitude but it's highly valued by those receiving it. Are any of us saying "thank you" often enough?

In government, public servants are rarely thanked by those we serve yet we are called upon to be vigilant, right the wrongs, bring about higher standards of living, provide services and opportunities for all, and act as champions of the citizenry. A mere 144 employees carry out the mission and functions of municipal government as pertaining to the needs of Oldsmar's 13,500 residents, 1,500 businesses and 45,000 workday commuters and employees. City employees are tasked to provide leadership, innovation, environmental stewardship and excellent services in partnership with the community.

Every day our nation's public servants are doing a million things taken for granted by the people they serve. They are providing public safety, education, security, disease prevention, transportation, veterans' care and much more. They have earned and deserve your thanks. Although, at the City of Oldsmar, we have internal mechanisms for recognizing the efforts of employees for going the extra mile, working efficiently and finding ways to accomplish tasks cost-effectively, it means so much more to the employee when the gratitude and praise comes from the citizens they serve. City of Oldsmar employees take pride in their work and rightfully so. They put service ahead of self. They make personal sacrifices at times and many regularly perform under extreme or adverse conditions. Would you like to be outside under the hot midday summer sun at 95 degrees and 95% humidity knee deep in malodorous muck and mire extracting snakes and debris from a storm sewer? I think you'll agree they deserve our thanks.

The characteristic mark of our city employees is dedication to public service. Compensation and benefits for Oldsmar employees meet basic standards, so you know they aren't here to get rich. Our employees are serving through good times or bad, facing daily challenges as well as the occasional grumbling, rude and inconsiderate person. We continually ask staff to perform more with less. And they willingly put service before self. Many times in Oldsmar we've rallied employees at times of storm events or hazardous conditions which required them to leave their own home and family to serve the public interest. Be mindful that such circumstances may put the employee in harms way. Additionally, the welfare of the employee's family is at risk at such times perhaps simply due to the employee's absence.

One might exclaim, "We pay taxes. Our taxes are thanks enough for the tasks performed by the city's employees." Then, why do I hear people making purchases in a store saying "thank you" to the cashier? I recall an article published in the October 2007 *Reader's Digest* that science has measured the emotional and physical benefits of expressing gratitude. Grateful people are more optimistic, joyful, compassionate, and energetic, with sharper minds.

The point of this is to bring attention to the power of THANK YOU and to encourage greater use of the expression. In Oldsmar and elsewhere, it doesn't take much time to thank a government employee by email, card, letter or phone call for a job well done. Or, if you're in close proximity to a public employee, a casual nod of approval, thumbs up, handshake or smile communicates appreciation for the work they do. Let gratitude underscore the importance of people and occasions in life and don't hesitate to express it. For those who inspired me to this writing, printed the message and read it...THANK YOU.

*Bruce T. Haddock, City Manager
City of Oldsmar, November 4, 2011*