

## *A Word from Mack*

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### We are just the same, yet so special

What a celebration! We set Municipal Auditorium on its ear Oct. 30, looking back 20 years with joy abounding and launching into a future filled with hope and promise in unlimited doses. What a night! It was 20 years in the making and three months of intensive planning by our Task Force and team, and, oh, how it all blossomed into a meaningful, fun-infused anniversary party. No expression of gratitude is adequate. So I just say to all “Thank You.”

And to everyone who was there and to those who shared through television and the internet, we must now be conscious to consider that the river which flows from that wellspring of an evening is one that truly washes through each of us in order to refresh the lives of all of us. I am seeing it daily now.

Just a week ago, I had a college professor share with me his reflections on that night together and with President Carter. “Mack, do you want to know what I found most profound in President Carter’s speech? It wasn’t when he told us that his life was changed by the afternoon tour of our neighborhoods. And it wasn’t when he challenged all of Shreveport and Bossier City to join with us to reach every single impoverished neighborhood with Friendship Houses. And in doing so make this area a light to the nation. It was when he looked out at the crowd and saw young and old and all in-between, when he saw very rich and very poor, men and women, so many ethnicities all together, and folks from all across America and those who had traveled from the African nations, educated and not, and said to us, ‘Everybody is the same.’ That got me,” he said.

Now, I must confess. Only when he reminded me of the former President’s saying that, did I remember. I remembered when reminded but I had zeroed in on his heartfelt expression of humility, when at the age of 90 years old, this former Leader of the Free World (who told his Sunday School Class when he was teaching about prayer, “If you are not a praying person going into the White House, you will be!”) this Architect of the Middle East Peace Accord between Israel and Egypt (which still holds and for which he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.) when

he said, “This day has changed my life!” That got me. But I had not remembered, “Everybody is the same,” until my friend reminded me.

To be honest, it just kind of grates against my ego. I blanch at those words. I like to think that I’m special. Not better, mind you, but special. Don’t you feel that way, too? Don’t you feel special? Don’t we all? My mind feels like a Rubik’s Cube right this minute. Are we all the same in thinking we are special? Now, I must tell you that as I reflected on this merry-go-round of two horses who look so different yet are riveted to the same calliope’s turntable, I found once again the fundamental truth of Community Renewal.

And that is simply and profoundly this: We all are just the same. And at the same time, each one of us is so special. I tell you that as we actualize this truth in our lives it can become the foundation of a new tomorrow. To peer through these two panes of these joined but seemingly conflicting realities is to peer through the window and gaze upon a new tomorrow for our children and their children.

But how we fight these two facts of life! Look at an adolescent. When our kids enter middle school they have a huge need to not stand out! They want to merge with “the crowd.” Remember? Same clothes, same hair. Yet, at the same time, a kid of that age will do anything for attention. Sheer nuttiness! No. We have to learn to balance. Too far either way and things become horrifying.

How do we celebrate “All the same and all special?” This is the Heart of Community Renewal. Seven billion people cry the same tears, laugh the same laughter, and love with the same love. But only until we can absorb the liberating truth of what St. Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria, gave to us in the Fourth Century, can we run with the two legs of “same” and “special.” To wit: “He loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love.” You are so special. Thank you for letting me be just like you.