

If I Were Mayor

by Tate Chadwick

If I were mayor, I would lead with astute thought and action. I would lead with the intent to better our future as well as our present. I would take caution with our decisions and investments. I would take care of what we need and strive to achieve what we want. I would do my best to fix our problems and prevent future ones.

One of the biggest problems facing Valdez is its lack of youth engagement. If you don't like the outdoors, then there isn't a lot to do regarding out-of-house activities. We have one recreation center, and that is the only indoor activity center. It is mostly populated by pre-teens, who are there to use the Xbox. Other than the pre-teens, the recreation center does not get many visitors. To fix this problem, the Parks and Recreation Department needs to sponsor more youth activities and provide more opportunities for teenagers to socialize. Many of the youth of Valdez are heavily involved in drugs and substance abuse, and involving them in activities designed to engage and support them could help them make good life decisions.

The town of Valdez is quite wealthy, and because of our wealth, we have a unique opportunity to provide for everything we need, and then some. The Valdez budget in this fiscal year alone is \$56,281,262. It is well within our grasp to possess fresh facilities for our townsfolk. But that is not necessarily the case. Our public restrooms remain unkept and mostly closed throughout the summer. The Parks and Recreation Department is in charge of these facilities, and the job done is less than satisfactory. We first need to know if the reason that they are not getting it done is that the department is understaffed, or if the problem is merely overlooked. Either way, there is a solution to the problem. Hire someone to clean them once a day, or remind the supposed slacker of their duties.

Our city recently invested in a 16 million dollar firehouse. This, however, is somewhat exceeding that which should be spent on a firehouse for a town this size, but we have the money and no accountability check for our spending. Meanwhile, our food bank is hardly up to code and underfunded. The Valdez Food Bank offers service to hundreds of people, but it is far too often neglected and disregarded. It is cramped and uncomfortable. Throughout the holidays, gracious volunteers are troubled with knocking elbows and stepping on toes. Most years, some volunteers are sent home because it is simply too congested for efficient work. The holidays are a busy time, and they need as many volunteers as they can get. If the town provided even a slightly larger budget to the food bank, they could expand their building and in turn, increase productivity. Our town needs to focus on what we need. We don't need a 16 million dollar firehouse; we need a functioning and efficient food bank. If a portion of the funds provided for the firehouse was provided for the food bank, they could increase the square footage of the premises.

So far I have been talking about some of the negative aspects of Valdez, and possibly giving a false depiction of what Valdez is. Valdez is an amazing town with wonderful people and an even more wonderful sense of community. We do a lot of things right here, and I don't want to demean that when talking about the town's faults. The Parks and Recreation Department does a great job, and they are always actively seeking ways to improve their parks. Yes, I do not agree with some of the decisions made, but an overwhelming majority of the time I agree with the town's leadership wholeheartedly.

In the end, our town is not perfect. Like numerous other towns, it has flaws, blemishes, and shortcomings. What the mayor does to correct these problems is what will make him/her a

good or bad model of leadership for others to follow. If I were mayor, I might make mistakes, but I would also work to increase the number of positive aspects in our community.