

9-5-14 Change is in the air

Change is part of life and we make adjustments. Well, usually we do. Sometimes change is even good for us, even those that hit us hard, for they force us to think and improvise. Sometimes they open doors we would not have pursued otherwise.

In Plympton and Halifax there's a lot going on in real estate. As elsewhere, there is a mass exodus accompanied by an influx of homebuyers. From talking to people at perc tests, it appears that many of the purchases are the result of the baby boomers downsizing and young families ready to upsize. The interest rates are good and the banks are better to work with than a few years ago. How the towns' schools and budgets will handle an increase of school children remains to be seen. The additional families will bring vitality and vibrancy, though, as only children and young parents can!

What effect will result from older people arriving and leaving, I wonder. With age comes wisdom. Some will undoubtedly benefit from the knowledge and experience of the AARP generation entering their neighborhood. We also lose that knowledge and insight and local history when people leave our towns. It makes me feel resolved to improve upon staying in touch before people are gone for good. I will have some more time for that, now that my life is not on hold while trying to sell a house. Five years is a long time to be ready for that next showing and switching out plants, decorations, pillows and bed coverings to stage the house, all in hopes of a great first impression with that potential buyer.

As it turned out, the people who bought my house didn't buy it for the plants or pillows. They bought it because it was large, with six bedrooms and four bathrooms, and had privacy. My house was purchased by someone I never met. That is the usual process; you make your bed, clean the bathrooms, vacuum, put flowers on the table and leave while your realtor shows the house. They make an offer, through the realtors and the negotiations begin, through the realtors. I was told they loved it right away and my house was just what they were looking for. It sounded like an extended family, with a grandson and grandmother and some others in between.

As it turns out, it will be an extended family, of sorts, but not the usual kind. My house was purchased to be an educational center that will become a sober house for men. They are calling it the Brook Retreat.

I know the term "halfway house" has negative connotations for some, as though it is a place to toss drunks and addicts still in the midst of actively using. There are, in fact, places to crash but a halfway house is not one of them. Sobriety is the entrance exam. I myself would not use that term, although over the years, while watching the public health crisis of opioid addiction surrounding us here in Massachusetts and, in particular, on the South Shore, I have come to think of the term in a positive light, with the meaning of working on the first six steps of Alcoholics anonymous (AA). If they can make it halfway through the twelve steps, they have accomplished so much!

The people opening the Brook Retreat tell us on the Facebook page that it is "To help men with drug and alcohol addiction recover from a hopeless life." Their website is so new, that you currently have to look at their other sober houses in order to read more about their philosophy and their rules of conduct for the residents. The one in Wenham is called Cross Keys and Number 16. The one in Wakefield is called Number 16.

The residents have to be sober to enter. They are not allowed any electronics such as cell phones or computer access. They have chores. They have meetings. They begin the work of the twelve steps. I give them so much credit for acknowledging their problem and getting help for it.

I don't blame neighbors for having concerns about this house being so close to where they live. What I find myself thinking about is that perhaps this concern is based on Plympton's recent awareness of this enterprise in their midst. The flip side of the discovery coin is what is taking place quietly all around us. If it hasn't touched you personally you might not know how pervasive the problem is. Addicts are breaking into cars and homes on a daily basis. They don't live in a sober house. The people addicted to pain pills don't necessarily act in a way that is recognized as "high", as when a drunk person cannot walk or talk straight. They work, they function, they talk and as they take more pills, the addiction takes over their lives. At that point nothing else matters more than getting more pills; not even thinking about their own children. It is, indeed, "a hopeless life", and it is killing thousands in our state every year.

I don't know how the permitting process will go for the Brook Retreat but I know the need is there for more sober houses, especially ones with success stories. I hope and pray for continued success in Plympton.

It is a change for all of us. May we all live up to the challenge.

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