

Dana Helvey article in JC PRESS:

No flag left tangled.

Dana Helvey walks the streets of Jonesborough everyday untangling the 146 American flags and waving at cars driving by. Helvey moved to Jonesborough with his family five years ago from Durango, Colorado where he resided for more than 30 years and volunteered as a firefighter. For him, moving to the town meant finding a sense of belonging.

“This place is very unique — it’s very different than most towns,” he said. “The only way it’s going to stay this way is if you get involved.”

Helvey, member of the flag committee for the Town of Jonesborough, up keeps the flags as part of an effort to keep the town inviting and picturesque.

Every day he walks down from his house with his flagpole in one hand leaving the other hand empty to wave at every passing car.

Living in Jonesborough, to him, is just another day in paradise.

Before joining the flag committee three years ago, Helvey spent his time helping a local farmer sell his products at the farmer’s market.

“Every Saturday morning, I’m down there, whether I’m tired or not ... and I sell vegetables,” he said. “It’s just nice ‘cause you see people, but you get to know people and that’s what folks have to do.”

Five years later, Helvey continues to get up, make his coffee and head down to the farmer’s market to sell vegetables for someone else.

He takes pride in being active in the community through civic services. To him, everyone must do their part within the community to keep it resilient, growing and a place to call home.

“I think the big overall view, other than the social things (and) being nice to each other, is to try to convince the people that just moved in here (that) you are part of a community, and you have to make the effort no matter how small,” Helvey said.

For Helvey, being involved in the Jonesborough community means doing as much as he can to help and that includes ensuring all the flags waving in the wind are visible and untangled.

Helvey has created a relationship with the flags, or “the ladies” as he likes to call them, treating them with care and respect. Each flag seen in the town is made in the U.S. which is something he had a hand in engineering.

He keeps a box of a dozen new flags and poles in his garage and replaces them when needed. Each one will last around a year and is then given to members of the U.S. armed forces to burn the flag as a symbol of honor.

Any money spent on the flags and flagpoles is generated from the committee through donations. A plaque is placed on each pole recognizing all the donors who have adopted a flag.

One thing the committee wanted to ensure was they weren't asking money from the town for new flags or equipment. Helvey said they even started making a small profit for the town.

He said when he first started on his flag committee journey, it was rare he would receive a wave back. After a while of waving at the same cars who never acknowledged him, they started to wave back.

"I've had people stop at least once a day, in the middle of Main Street with traffic behind them, stop, roll down their window (and) lay on the horn (and say), 'Hey flag man, appreciate what you're doing man, you make me feel good,'" he recalled.

He aims to go at different times each day hoping to meet as many people as possible. Three years later, he has become a familiar face to anyone driving or walking through Main Street.