

This time between Thanksgiving and Christmas is fascinating. Things kind of slow down for a lot of people. It's not quite the same as the French, with their month of August off each year (best time to go to Paris since all the Parisians are somewhere else), but you will often hear business people here saying "ah no point in that, you can't get anything done between Thanksgiving and Christmas!"



Actually, that's not an unreasonable theory, because with about half the population flying or driving all over the country and eating platefuls of turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce, yams, (we had hominy in honor of one of our guests) and pumpkin pie for half a day then eating the rest of the turkey for another week and having trouble getting up the stairs because of the weight gained, we almost need a month just to recover and get ready for Christmas.

Not so for the retailers among us though. For most of them, this is the make or break time of the year. They work very hard and we take them for granted because we pay them for what they sell us. We don't think a lot about how radically their world is changing.

So, here's my first thought for the season. If you live around Beaufort and Port Royal, how about a conscious decision to do at least part of your Christmas shopping right on Bay Street or Paris Avenue and the other streets that form the centers of our small towns.

Progress in our part of the world means more and more big box stores; more chain operations and the belief (sometimes correct; sometimes not) that because they're big and national, they cost less. I don't have anything against them. In fact I am pretty sure that Wal-Mart is what the Soviet Union would have become had communism worked.

I'm just one of those people who believes that the beautiful, valuable and valued aspects of the old and the historic around here are at grave risk and that we all need to find the ways of assuring that doesn't happen.

So, in this time that's quieter for most, a few more thoughts and hopes:

Wouldn't it be wonderful if any of our elected representatives, at any level, who parroted the idea of and their commitment to "smart growth" during their recent election campaigns actually would now define it and explain it and tell us exactly what it means?

The list of all the magnificent street festivals, art walks, food festivals etc., that go on around here is legend. Wouldn't it be great if all of us who attend them regularly make certain to keep doing that and then, half of you who've never tried it, make a decision to come to the Shrimp Festival or Chalk on the Walk, the Gullah Festival, Oktoberfest and any and all of the others next year. Just another way to strengthen community.

Imagine if next year, when the Community Foundation, United Way, Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, Penn Center and all the other charitable institutions that work to improve the world, ask for our donations, we make the decision to increase our gifts by 10% instead of pledging to "do the same" again.

Imagine just a little more courtesy on our ever more crowded roads and imagine that this Christmas there will not be a single kid around here without a present. The Marines are doing their Toys for Tots thing again and there is no excuse not to fill those boxes to overflowing.

This year, Thanksgiving actually made me think of the things for which I am thankful. There is love in my home and family. There are new, true friends in the place we have chosen to live. There is the success of my little business. There is this regular opportunity I get to write whatever I want and there is this one more extra bit of thanks that is made more conscious by living in Beaufort.

The Marines and Navy personnel in our midst are a huge part of the essence of our community and they are the most selfless and the most helpful among us. Let us say thank you to them every time our paths cross between now and Christmas and let us wish for them, perhaps even more than for ourselves, the blessing of peace that is part of the ultimate meaning and promise of Christmas.