This week I am dedicating my column to important and concerning issues that are growing at an alarming rate across this country and have no place in our lives: intolerance, racism, intimidation, and hatred. Sadly, I see these behaviors each day in how individuals speak to one another. I see it in public, in business settings, and sports events. I see and hear it in the daily news. I see it within families. In my 42 years in public service, I have seen toxicity expressed between neighbors and also directed at public employees working in extreme conditions to keep residents safe and secure. And I see these behaviors becoming “normal.”

I wish I could say that I always listened to everything my parents said and asked me to do while growing up. Well, we all know “kids will be kids,” yet we hope what was instilled in us at an early age carries through our entire lives.

My parents regularly talked about and practiced respect. My sister and I were taught to treat others how we wanted to be treated, to be kind and generous, and to consider others’ feelings. We were taught that honesty is the cornerstone of all relationships—necessary to build mutual trust and respect. This lesson has served me well for more than 63 years.

Now, as a grandfather, I anxiously watch as our two granddaughters ready for their fourth and sixth year in school. The love they have for school and their friends, and their excitement for what lies ahead of them, is refreshing to see. Their innocence is not darkened by hatred and intolerance; it is something for all of us to reflect upon and revisit.

I will share this one example. My wife recently came across this sentiment our youngest granddaughter jotted down in her notebook while coloring, “I shall not sit and watch war happen. I shall stand for peace and make the world a better place...quote by Adyson.” This is a nine-year-old going into fourth grade who has more love, acceptance, and civility than the many people connected to hate groups in our country and world!

As a long-time Penfield resident and public servant, I know our town has a well-deserved reputation as “a great place to live and raise a family.” I am reminded why every day. For many residents it’s because of our many neighborhoods, outstanding schools, parks and trails, active sports community, vibrant performing and visual arts, active volunteers, faith community, and our connection to the greater community of Monroe County. The list can go on and on.

Penfield is also known as a “wellness community.” The quick take on that theme is making healthy choices. However, the concept of “wellness” goes far beyond what we do to keep our bodies healthy. It means we work together to build a healthy community of tolerance and respect.

As supervisor, I witness neighbors helping neighbors, civility, acceptance, and the unity they bring to our community. I regularly see that how we treat one another—what my parents taught me—builds positive relationships within our community and out in the world at large.
We have come so far, yet we have so far to go. No one person or group can correct all of the current problems we face as a nation. I will say I am cautiously optimistic that there are more Adysons in the world trying to make it a better place than there are hate groups trying to tear us apart. We must extinguish the hatred. Let’s learn from history not repeat it!

Hate in all its forms, labels, and symbols is toxic—and hate is not welcome in our community.

“Hate, it has caused a lot of problems in the world, but has not solved one yet.”

— Maya Angelou

Until next week,

Tony