

9/17/12

This is Jon Sapper for Community Comment.

Education is worthless!! Last week a gentleman said, "I got by just fine and I dropped out of high school. I worked for Pacific Lumber Company for 35 years and made a good living." I said, "Bill, you're 81 years old and when you went to school almost a hundred years ago, you didn't need to graduate to get a good job, raise your family, put food on the table and a roof over your head. But it's different now. Kids who drop out of school today can't get the kind of jobs you did. Those jobs are gone. And they aren't coming back. In fact, kids today who don't graduate from high school and learn some marketable skill will earn less, they will sign up for more social services and they will become involved with the criminal justice system more often."

You know, it is amazing that in just the last twenty years, the kind of work Bill was talking about went from a viable option to zero. Those good paying jobs working in the mills, the woods and fishing, for the most part are gone. As a community, we no longer have an economic safety net for young people who drop out of school. The unemployment rate for high school dropouts is twice as high as high school graduates.

About the same percentage of students drop out today as in the 50's, 60's and 70's. The only difference now is there are no jobs where they can make a living. And, for a number of reasons, I don't believe the jobs in the marijuana industry will provide stable incomes for the long term. But that's another conversation.

Education is more important today than it has ever been. Back in 1853 there were three schools in the county and the school year was 3 months long. Most of the children worked and school was not that important. It is kind of amusing, though, that in 1855, one of the major concerns was getting school reports to Sacramento on time in order to get the State to send us funds to operate the schools. Now the reports are sent in on time and the State still doesn't send the money. I guess not much has changed in 160 years in that regard.

In 1860, there were 9 districts and a total budget of \$7,000.

During the next 40 years, 90 new school districts were added. Yes, in 1901, there were 99 districts in Humboldt County. Today there are 31, one less than last year.

But the mission of education has not changed. For an individual to get a good job today, they need to graduate from high school and continue their education to develop a marketable skill. For a family to be able to put food on the table, a roof over their head and something to drive, they need good jobs which increasingly require a good education. And to build a healthy community and strong economy, we need an educated citizenry. Let's work together to make the future bright for our children and grandchildren. Get involved! The school year just started. You really can make a difference.

This has been Jon Sapper for Community Comment.

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