

Coralville Comes Into Its Own

Well, the tail seems to be wagging the dog these days. I'm referring to Coralville arguably becoming more of a force to be reckoned with than Iowa City.

Those of you who immigrated to this area in the last 20 years or so may not know what I mean. When I was a kid growing up in the late '50's and early '60's, The population of Coralville was around 2,000 and the town constituted little more than a number of gas stations, motels and restaurants along Highway 6, plus a number of rather modest houses.

Some of us snobbish kids from Iowa City perceived kids from Coralville to be (figuratively and literally) from the other side of the tracks. There was no city center, very few public buildings of note and Coralville had no real identity other than being a bedroom community feeding off Iowa City. A whole lot has changed since then.

September will mark my 20th year of writing monthly (more or less) columns for the Press-Citizen – more than 200 of them. I was flipping through some of them last week and ran across the one that was easily the most controversial.

In May of 1997, I wrote a tongue-in-cheek column about Coralville being a silly name for a city that was trying to get the world to take it seriously. I suggested that although it had a better name than some other feebly-named Iowa towns (Edna, What Cheer, Pisgah, Grundy Center), we could do better. Furthermore, for \$10,000 or so we may be able to get some other Iowa town with a more respect-engendering name (Gravity, Defiance, Thor, Soldier, Manly) to swap with us.

Even though I professed undying love for Coralville in the opening paragraph, some of the old-timers evidently were still suffering from a latent inferiority complex and a number of them failed to see the humor. Almost five years after the column was published, I ran into a small business owner in Coralville who told me, "You know, I haven't bought anything from your company since you wrote that." Talk about holding a grudge.

The response was such that I was compelled to write a follow-up column apologizing for my temporary derangement. I had seen the light, Coralville was actually a wonderful and perfectly appropriate name for a progressive city and in fact, “Iowa City” was an uninspired and somewhat redundant name that could be improved by changing it to “East Coralville.”

Fast forward to today, with Coralville celebrating its 140th year. Its population now pushing 20,000, Coralville is a happening place with enviable growth, services and community activities (if FRY fest isn’t on your calendar for August 30th, it should be).

Coralville’s city leaders have done a phenomenal job encouraging and controlling development within its borders – too good of a job according to some. I can argue either side of this issue; a certain amount of debt will always accompany rapid development, and we all have different priorities and comfort levels.

Anyway, it took a while, but the Coralvillian worm has turned. Been there, done that, got the Coralville Pride T-shirt.

These days, Coralville probably even has snobs of its own. That’s fine with me – there’s no reason we should all be confined to “East Coralville...”

Writer’s Group member Dave Parsons is a lifelong resident of Iowa City, co-owns a business on the Coralville Strip and is grateful to live and work in communities whose members can take a joke.