

Colleagues pay tribute to retiring City Council member Yogash Kumar

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
Friday, 01 April 2022 04:53



One thing was clear by the end of the March 22 City Council meeting: retiring council member Yogash Kumar will be sorely missed.

“You’ve been my boss, you’ve been my inspiration and you’ve been my friend. You can’t be replaced. Your unique perspective has been so helpful to us and for the staff,” City Manager Maryann Ustick said. “I also want to thank you for your support of the community, in so many ways that go unknown to the community. Come by often and give me advice.”

She was among several colleagues who sometimes tearfully heaped praise and commendations on Kumar at the last meeting of his second term. Some, like Mayor Louie Bonaguidi, had funny stories to share. He told about their first meeting:

“Twenty years ago we were putting up Ceremonial banners. I’m driving by his motel and I see a bucket truck out in front. I pull in and ask, ‘Who owns that bucket truck?’ and it was Yogash. I called Yogash and asked, ‘Can we borrow your bucket truck so we can put up banners? And he refused.

“A day later he calls me back and says ‘I’ve decided I’ll lend it to you.’ He lent me that truck and we used it for the next 12 years. The truck broke down and he had a Skytrak [industrial lift], so he handed me the keys and said. ‘Take this.’ I’m looking at it saying, ‘What the hell do I do with this machine? I can’t drive this.’ So he drove it. For the next five years, when we did it, he got up at 5 a.m. to use his Skytrak to put up those banners.”

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Greater Gallup Economic Development Corporation Executive Director Patricia Lundstrom credited Kumar with getting that organization off the ground in 2012.

“We had no office, no equipment, no supplies. It was Councilor Kumar, then a regular citizen businessman, who bought all of our computers, all of our supplies and got us ready to do economic development,” she said. “His value to the organization has been second to none, with key business insights and working knowledge of the community. You have to have both when it comes to economic development. It’s my hope that he stays with us and certainly qualifies to sit on our board.” [Kumar and Bonaguidi are ex-officio members.]

Lundstrom also noted that Kumar has donated his council salary to community nonprofits, including GGEDC, over the years. Another beneficiary has been the Gallup Fire Department.

Before presenting Kumar with a metal flag from the department, Fire Chief Jesus “Chuy” Morales thanked Kumar for his support and donations that help pay for smoke detectors for the community. “Those are items that help minimize the risk and will continue to keep people safe at night for the next 10 years,” he said, quipping, “They have 10-year batteries in them.”

Councilor Linda Garcia had to choke back tears. “He’s special to me because we started out from day one nine years ago. We walked the streets together. Arts Crawl, meeting the people, meeting at his home...It’s bittersweet because I’m going to miss you,” she said. “Time marches on and we’ve got to let you go, but you will always be in my prayers. You did a great job. He’s a good, humble intelligent man and he’s stood that way the whole nine years.”

Councilor Fran Palochak praised Kumar’s broad business expertise and willingness to help others. “You’ve sparked that light within me to learn more about economic development. I want to know the ins and outs so I can do what I can as a councilor to help them. We want to bring more businesses to Gallup and we want to be business-friendly and you’ve shown us how to do that,” she said. “I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for being a mentor to me.”

Councilor Michael Schaaf said, “It’s been a pleasure and honor to serve with you. You bring a lot to the city of Gallup and I appreciate it and the citizens of Gallup appreciate it. Thank you.”

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Kumar thanked his colleagues and the community as he recalled his council experience.

“When you first start out it is a difficult position. Everything you want to do is shot down, or you can’t do this, can’t do that. You have to work your way up, like most things. You have to prove yourself and have an understanding of things. I’ve been blessed because I’ve been in the business side of things,” he said.

“We can’t always agree on everything, and that’s OK to disagree. We leave that behind. That was one item on an agenda and we move on because we respect each other. That’s what it takes. To live in a community you have to respect everybody for what they do.”

And with that, Kumar made his final motion to adjourn.

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