Officials from Park City are looking to Moab as an example of how to successfully promote diversity and inclusion.

While Park City may well be considered an older sibling to Moab in terms of their tourism-centered livelihoods, it was the elder that took advice from the younger last week on, as Park City officials put it, “social equity.”

“Moab is great for that,” said Jed Briggs, Park City’s budget manager, during a roundtable discussion on Friday, Feb. 9 among officials, community leaders and diversity advocates from both cities. The discussion followed a tour taken by Park City’s entourage to the Moab Valley Multicultural Center.

Partly as a response to growing fear and uncertainty in Park City’s Latino community — after a year of rough national discourse related to issues important to Latinos — Briggs said the Park City Council, “elevated social equity as a top priority a couple months ago.”

That priority focuses on not just Latinos, but also several populations that Park City leaders have recognized as underprivileged: the elderly, LGBTQ and the economically disadvantaged, to name a few.

“We have a large gap. We have an underserved community,” Park City Mayor Andy Beerman said at the outset of the roundtable.

Beerman, an Ohio native who moved to Utah many years ago, owns a second home in Moab (“Moab is where I fell in love with Utah,” he says). As a Park City Council member prior to becoming mayor in January, Beerman was in Moab several months ago and took note of MVMC. He felt his own city might learn something from it.

Beerman and the Park City entourage of about 15 people said it was their goal to “steal” ideas that have made Moab stand out in Utah — especially given its small size — as inclusionary and embracing of diversity.

“We’ve found it’s much easier than starting from scratch,” Beerman said.

“If you’re going to steal something, the efforts of [MVMC] are a great resource,” Moab Mayor Emily Niehaus said.

The visitors from Park City praised MVMC after they had seen its mission in action, and they appeared eager to implement something similar in their own city.

“It’s super helpful to actually see your model here,” Park City Manager Diana Foster said.
Katie Wright, executive director of the Park City Community Foundation, said, “I just love the concept of a place where anyone and everyone can walk in and say, ‘Hey, I need help.’”

But they seemed equally impressed by how MVMC does what it does, with compassion, said Rhiana Medina, the center's executive director. Or in other words, “taking the role of advocate seriously.”

Compassion plays such an essential role at the center that even when encountering people who oppose something the center does, “We’re compassionate with them just as we are with the people we’re trying to help,” Medina said, almost as though compassion was an end in itself, as important as the assistance the center provides.

It was something that Park City Council Member Tim Henney observed, and it affected him, he said.

Henney gave a heartfelt and inspiring speech about the need to disrupt the societal relationship between the “privileged” and the “marginalized.” But he also acknowledged his own position of privilege, which gave rise to certain judgment, he admitted. Seeing the [MVMC] team in action, he said, “was a good lesson for me: Have compassion; listen; understand.”

Medina emphasized the “team” aspect. “I hope you noticed the teamwork that exists at the Multicultural Center,” she said, citing it as, “the strength” of the center’s efforts.

Beerman noted that another strength, as he saw it, was that the multicultural effort in Moab wasn't government-driven. The “good thing they've got going down here,” he said, was good precisely because it came up from the community. “It feels very authentic and very welcoming for that reason.”

Niehaus said Moab could learn something in return. “We need to be as loud as our visitors in our praise of the center,” she said.

ByBy John Hales

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