



## THANK-YOU NOTES REVEAL COMMUNITY

BY DANNY HEITMAN, *FORUM* EDITOR



Last year, as Thanksgiving approached, my office printed holiday cards and asked staffers to sign and mail them to people who had helped each of us in recent months with our work.

I cheerfully embraced the assignment, not expecting it to take very long. As a magazine editor, I spend many hours alone at a keyboard, which carries an occupational hazard. Over time, such solitude can condition you to assume that your work, whatever its merits or flaws, is largely a solo effort.

Writing those thank-you notes last year quickly corrected that conceit. A task I'd expected to take an hour soon consumed much of a day. As I thought more deeply about the many people who help make *Forum* possible, the list of those to whom I'm indebted grew and grew.

That list includes the magazine's battalion of contributing writers, along with colleagues who help brainstorm ideas and proof the copy. Others maintain the

*In the exercise of gratitude, I was reminded of the many connections that sustain my life and work.*

mailing list and post online content, advancing engagement on numerous social media platforms. We'd also be lost without the talented professionals who design and print the magazine. The most important players who sustain *Forum* — too many to receive an individually written thank-you — are the readers.

The day last year that I devoted to gratitude was truly humbling. It reminded me that I'm part of a real community — a network of stakeholders who are supporting one another in a common enterprise.

It also brought to mind *The Upswing*, a book by public policy researchers Robert D. Putnam and Shaylyn Romney Garrett published last year. The authors detail how a sense of American community has been lost and how it might be regained. They mention, among other intriguing facts, that the use of the pronoun "I" has soared in recent decades, which might be a rough index of the self-absorption eating away at the ideals of community.

No one could have known that *The Upswing* would appear amidst a pandemic that registered its own implications for community. Lockdowns brought isolation, but they also underscored our mutual dependence on often overlooked bulwarks of community — those who deliver our mail, grow and distribute our food, and care for the sick.

That's raised a lot of useful questions about the true dimensions of community. Though the scale of our connectedness can be hard to fathom, here's a suggestion:

Write a few thank-you notes to those who have helped you this year. You might be surprised, as I was, by how broad and deep your community is.

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