

My Lunch with A Local Visionary

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“The vision that inspires me is the city I love full of natural beauty and a can-do spirit.” — *Sally Duffy Colman*

It's not often you get to have lunch with an inspired visionary. But that's where I found myself back in February with Sally Colman.

Sally and I met while working together as volunteers with Spokane's Sustainability Action Subcommittee, or SAS. A few months into our work I met with her to discuss joint projects in the SAS communications and climate action planning workgroups. While waiting for lunch, I asked Sally what drew her to volunteering. To my delight, she told me a story about her rich history of environmental stewardship, and I was captivated.

It wasn't her twenty years with the Sisters of the Holy Names advocating for more sustainable development practices on local and global levels

that surprised me, although it's impressive. It wasn't her attending the last two regular meetings of the Sustainable Development Commission as a consultant to the UN through UNANIMA International that I found notable, although it's extraordinary.

Instead, what I found remarkable and inspiring was Sally drawing a connection between the "can-do" spirit of our small city of Spokane and the global awareness that moved 193 nations in 2015 to agree to a set of Sustainable Development Goals. Those 193 nations didn't sign that agreement because they thought it would be easy. They signed it to move the world in a safer direction.

And similarly, Sally said, Spokane overcame all sorts of obstacles hosting the first World's Fair on environmental issues in 1974 because local leaders tapped into the same awareness. They understood that protecting our environment was the future. And they knew that the people of Spokane had what it takes to reverse environmental degradation then, as they do now.

Spokane's connection to the global community and our ability to respond to climate change is strengthened through this type of visionary leadership. And the incredible work Sally and others did at the UN has had a positive, local impact. The SAS is now incorporating some of these Sustainable Development Goals into its recommendations to the Spokane City Council.

When I spoke with Sally more recently, she emphasized that the historically unprecedented wildfires happening now in California,

Oregon and our state are just one of the many indicators that we can no longer proceed with a “business as usual” approach. If we’re to ward off unimaginable disasters and save our city for future generations we must consider the environment in all our decisions and make some drastic changes very quickly, she told me.

Through her research and advocacy, Sally has become acutely aware of the urgent need for everyone to realize that current levels of consumption and production, especially of products requiring the use of fossil fuels, are disrupting planetary systems. These disruptions cause increasing catastrophes, extinction of species, and dangerous depletion of natural resources.

But always the visionary, she ended our conversation on this hopeful note:

*But the good news is that the work will make us stronger and more prosperous. As with COVID-19, we need to clearly understand that building a cohesive, compassionate, and resilient community will allow us to work together to overcome **whatever** disasters come our way, leaving no one behind. Spokane will thrive in that kind of unity, as we have done so many times in the past. That is the vision that inspires me.*

Together we can achieve the seemingly impossible as we did a half-century ago with Expo '74!