

Here's what makes America great

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We've heard all about that for more than a decade, with political parties sharply divided over what constitutes greatness. Politicians will continue to grapple with that topic.

For my money, what makes America great again – while putting a shine on the Gem State that is as bright as the morning sun – are the roughly 300 people who attended the recent Idaho Nonprofit Center's annual conference. Collectively, they had compelling stories to tell, a passion for their causes and a desire to make their communities a better place.

Donna Murray-Brown, who delivered a splendid keynote address, described what she saw on the faces in the crowd.

"I saw what I see every day in this sector: extraordinary individuals who believe with every ounce of their being that they can make a difference – and, that working alongside other visionaries, they will make a difference," she said.

Murray-Brown has plenty of expertise in the field. She is principal of the Louisville-based DMB Coaching and Consulting, LLC, which helps strengthen leadership, culture and strategies for nonprofits nationally and beyond. She's a former president and CEO of the Michigan Nonprofit Association and served as vice president of strategy and development at the National Council of Nonprofits in Washington, D.C.

"Throughout my career, I've had the privilege of speaking with and learning from nonprofit leaders across the country," she said. "And no matter where I go, I see the same spirit I saw in Boise – people fueled by vision, driven by purpose and determined to serve their communities in ways that create lasting change."

Over the two-day session, I met with some of those nonprofit leaders. There's not enough space to mention them all, but the leaders I met had a clear purpose for their work and a vision for what they want to accomplish. They are dedicating their lives to solving real-life problems in their communities, and not waiting for the government to take action.

In Sandpoint, there's an organization called Panhandle Special Needs, which focuses on training adults with disabilities in independent living skills that empower them to lead more self-sufficient and fulfilling lives.

In Twin Falls, there's a place called Valley House, a shelter for the homeless. It's not a hand-out, but a hand-up for those wanting to get back on their feet. There are strict requirements for their services, along with some tough love. The winners are those who come out at the other side as productive citizens.

I visited with a representative of the Salmon-based Mahoney House, which offers support and services to survivors of domestic violence (men included) and sexual assault. And there was the Mental Health Coalition of Teton Valley, which serves a gorgeous part of the state where too many suicides occur.

My experience over those two days was educational and exhilarating. But it was a mere sample of what Murray-Brown sees in her travels.

“The energy is inspiring, even as I know many are carrying heavy burdens: growing demand for services, limited resources, staff shortages and lingering burnout from years of serving through crisis,” she said. “My keynote was meant to encourage them and to offer practical ways to keep moving forward while serving the public good day by day.”

Yes, these are the people who are making America great – again and again. Murray-Brown hits the target with her thoughts.

“As a community called America, we all benefit from nonprofits. They are catalysts for change and the source of human solutions to our toughest challenges. And there is great power when each of us contributes – whether by giving our time, our treasure, or our voice – to fuel this work. That investment makes stronger communities possible in every corner of our country.”

Murray-Brown provides leadership and inspiration where it counts.