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The kids really are alright

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November has been a terrible, terrible month for southeastern Wisconsin's economy. In case you haven't been keeping track, here's a sampling of the local carnage that has happened so far this month:

By [Steve Jagler](#)

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Milwaukee-based Brady Corp. will eliminate 10 percent of its workforce, or 800 jobs.

St. Louis, Mo.-based Viasystems Group Inc. announced plans to close its Oak Creek plant, eliminating 238 jobs.

Kohler Co. has eliminated more than 200 jobs.

Mequon-based Charter Manufacturing Corp. will eliminate 155 jobs and close its processing plants in Fond du Lac and in Detroit, Mich.

ACCO Brands Corp. will close its Pleasant Prairie plant, eliminating 150 jobs.

CNH Capital in Racine recently eliminated 115 jobs.

Columbia St. Mary's Inc. has eliminated 74 jobs.

Rexnord Industries LLC, the Milwaukee-based parent corporation of Falk Corp., eliminated 60 jobs.

Port Washington-based Allen-Edmonds Shoe Corp. eliminated 40 jobs.

Meanwhile, employees at Linens 'n Things, Circuit City and Steve & Barry's stores in the area have lost their jobs as the retailers have closed their stores because consumer demand has slowed to a trickle.

And if you really want to verify the pain, pay a visit to a local car dealership and look into the eyes of one of the few remaining salespeople on the lot.

It isn't just that the media is saying the sky is falling. For many companies and key industries the sky really is falling.

Nationally, filings for unemployment benefits shot up to their highest level since July 1992 last week, rising 27,000 to a seasonally adjusted 542,000, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. Meanwhile, the number of people receiving unemployment benefits rose to 4.01 million in the week ending Nov. 8, the highest level in 26 years.

In times like this, we must look for hope and good news wherever we can find it. I was blessed to find some of that good stuff last week.

I was among 23 "community leaders" asked to attend the Pebbles for Peace/House of Peace Youth Forum at Cardinal Stritch University. The conference is presented annually by the House of Peace, a Capuchin Ministry, in partnership with Cardinal Stritch and the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

I was seated at a table and had lunch with seven high school students. I think the idea was for me to pass along some of my wisdom to them and inspire them. In fact, the process worked mostly in reverse. Our conversation solidified my belief that the kids are alright. In fact, I'm convinced that the next generation is going to be smarter than my generation. The young people of color at our table were undaunted by the headlines of the day or the challenges that await them.

Just ask them. Their conversation inevitably turned to the election of Barack Obama. Now, please understand, I am well aware that most of the regular readers of BizTimes Milwaukee probably did not vote for Obama.

And like everyone else, I have absolutely no idea what the future has in store for America or what kind of president Obama will be.

That being said, his election was what the young people at our table wanted to talk about and the impact of this historical moment on their outlook is palpable. For them, this election transcended party politics. So, I asked them to write down their thoughts about what the election meant to them. Here are their responses:

"It means so much to me because he (Obama) has made history as the first Black president, and this lets me know that I can be whatever I want to be, as long as I set my mind to it," said Samira K., a sophomore at Divine Savior Holy Angels High School in Milwaukee who plans to pursue a career in the medical field.

"It's important because it's determining our future, and our future looks brighter," said Mauricio C., a sophomore at Veritas High School in Milwaukee who plans to make a living doing "something with cars."

"It's a big change and so different than the other years, because this new president will try to help a lot of people," said Maria D., a senior at Greenfield High School who hopes to own a restaurant someday.

"This was very important to me because this election was history, and I was part of it," said Maria H., a freshman at Tenor High School in Milwaukee who plans to have a career in law.

"It means that there is change, not only in the community, but in the world, starting with the United States," said Dauson W., a freshman at Marquette University High School who plans to "study hard and not let anything get in my way or get me sidetracked." (Dauson's goal is to attend Yale University.)

"It means a lot for me, because there will be a lot of changes for Mexicans and others and we will have a better life," said Brenda M., a freshman at Carmen High School in Milwaukee who hopes to be "someone who could be able to work out bad problems or a doctor."

"With all presidential elections, there comes change. Barack Obama is faced with a hard responsibility, being president. It's exciting to see a minority president, rather than the norm," said Max X., a sophomore at Community High School in Milwaukee who plans to go to college, but has not decided on a career path.

The next time the headlines of the day get you down, do yourself a favor. Immerse yourself in a local charity (find one of your choice in the BizTimes Nonprofit Directory at www.biztimes.com/nonprofit) for an afternoon. You'll feel better about yourself. You'll also feel better about the future of this country.

And we all can use some of that these days. Hope you have a happy Thanksgiving.

Steve Jagler is executive editor of BizTimes Milwaukee.

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