

Inspired to Serve

A Reflection on Civic Engagement by Samuel Moore-Sobel

“Here, sit next to me, Samuel,” Supervisor Buona said, after a few moments of introduction. The Loudoun County Board of Supervisors meeting was about to begin, causing my heart to race. Chosen to shadow my local Supervisor at the 2012 Youth in Government Day event, the moment’s significance was not lost on me. “Tell your family you will be on television,” Supervisor Buona quietly said, motioning towards the cameras as he explained that the meeting would be appearing on the local government station. Not yet a year into his term, he seemed just as excited as I was, filled with a boyhood sense of wonder at the place he found that life had led him.

Throughout the meeting, Supervisor Buona whispered explanations. For example, if a Supervisor wanted time to speak, they would turn on the red light at the top of their microphone. He was well-schooled in the parliamentary rules surrounding the proceedings, taking time to explain the nuances and giving a behind the scenes look to a high school senior who had fallen in love with the idea of public service long before.

In our conversations throughout the day, Supervisor Buona stressed the importance of community involvement, and encouraged me to pursue my own dreams of public service. Days later Supervisor Buona and I exchanged e-mails. “It was a pleasure having you at our Board meeting. You showed a keen interest in what we were doing and how the Board goes about conducting our business...” he wrote back in May of 2012. “...if I can be of any help or you just want to chat, don't hesitate to call or e-mail me,” he generously offered.

More than four years later, as a columnist with the *Blue Ridge Leader*, I had an idea for a feature story focused on the Supervisor and his work. The Youth in Government Day event had left an indelible impression, and I wanted to know more about the genuine and intelligent man I sat next to years before behind the dais.

Our meeting inspired me to ponder ways in which I too could serve. In turn, my editor at the *Blue Ridge Leader* encouraged me to apply for a position on a County board. At first, I resisted - until an at-large position for the Disability Services Board became available. Having regularly volunteered with special needs programming offered through McLean Bible Church for the last seven years and counting, this role seemed like a perfect opportunity to serve and advocate for a community that I feel so passionately about. After contacting Supervisor Buona, he readily agreed to support my nomination.

A few weeks into my term I found myself addressing the Board of Supervisors on behalf of the Disability Services Board. As I approached the podium, a wave of gratefulness washed over me. Grateful for the opportunity to serve; for, only five years before I had been sitting behind the dais, looking on and desiring to be a part of the action. Grateful for the opportunity to be advocating for a community I care deeply about; and, grateful that this time - when my parents watched me on television - it would be slightly easier for them to see my face.



Buona and Sobel at Dais, 2012