

Freedom-Zine America

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MEET: Richard V. Campagna The “Existential Optimist” and 2004 Vice Presidential Candidate

Richard is an international business lawyer, college law and philosophy professor, writer and editor.

Guest of Honor at The Cepia Club’s dinner on Fri., **September 26, 2008, at the Clubhouse at 411 Main/Fourth St., Centuria, WI. Open to public. Reception begins at 6:00 PM.** \$10 donation for informal, friendly dinner talk and free exchange of views about “living liberty.” Richard will be happy to sign his books, which will be available that evening. **His new book is appearing this Fall.**

Richard will also speak Sat., September 27th, at 2 PM at the St. Croix Falls, WI Autumn Fest. Converse with him at the Club booth at the Fest from 9 AM to 5 PM.

Regenerating Community

In August, The Cepia Club owner & manager attended the Centuria village board meeting. Having operated in the community since December of last year, the Club spoke on its own behalf about a problem faced by all the business owners located in the downtown business district. Contrary to wide belief, WI St. Hwy 35 IS NOT the main street of the community. Therefore stood the problem: Few people inside Polk County, and perhaps fewer travelers of Hwy 35 north from US Hwy 8 (five miles east of the Minnesota border), would ever realize that the left hand turn onto Fourth Street from Hwy 35 town is actually the village of Centuria’s “main street.”

While the business district is three blocks from the main north-south Hwy 35 avenue for weekend cabin owners, snowmobilers, and other vacationers on their to northern Wisconsin, the business district—the life blood-pumping heart of any rural community— gets passed by

drivers out of ignorance.

As reported by the Club manager to the village board, even the Club’s members, participants and friends were shocked the last nine months upon their first visit to the Clubhouse and Cepia Bazaar store, located at 411 Fourth Street, four blocks from the highway. “I’ve lived in Polk County for years, travel the highway once a week, and I never knew Centuria had a ‘main’ street,” is an often heard comment from the Club’s own people. “I thought main street WAS the highway.”

Centuria got just bulldozed by “globalization” when the chain markets set up shop south of here along US Hwy 8. Many people in the village or former residents have talked about the “old days” when Centuria had a thriving town based on a railroad. People mention all the businesses that USED to be in the downtown—grocery store, hardware store, restaurants, etc. Well, those days passed and the “wave” of

modernization that helped such places like Osceola and St. Croix Falls in Polk County blinked when they drove past Centuria.

Centuria, as stated by the Club manager, is in an accelerated cycle of decay. Some store fronts are empty of stores; buildings are scarred, worn, or dis-repaired. Of a little over 20 store fronts, almost half were converted to apartments or remain the dread term in an economic depression—“VACANT.” As part of this catastrophic decay of Centuria’s downtown, the village has to face other serious problems. On the top end of a world-wide economic crisis and financially uncertain national (and state) economy, there will be less government transfers of monetary assistance to all local communities; and this will impact Centuria if a sounder economic base is not grown. The entire community still needs basic services like water, sewer, etc., but village revenues from property rates will most likely

decline. This could inevitably happen due to the market value affected by the sub-prime credit crisis and due to property that cannot be adequately maintained or improved. Unfortunately, the village of Centuria will need to recapitalize (rebuild) all of its infrastructure at some point, sooner rather than later. So, the storm brews.

Employment in the overall national and state economy is driving headlong below full employment. And already, Centuria's employment statistics have the air of "depressive economics." That is a fancy phrase for unemployment or non-productive jobless. Regardless of how or why, Centuria's future cannot be solved by Federal taxpayer subsidies, more public assistance for the un-working, or via higher taxes on the property owners (resident owners or absentee landlords).

Taken as a whole, a business district in itself without a lot of business, and a structural problem in the local societal-economics, we have a combined problem in Centuria: The village is hurting and heading toward a bad future. Let the people be aware.

In The Cepia Club's "community ending public ignorance and apathy," offers some simple ideas for positive action to make things better. We won't expand on those here, but we would like to point out certain conditions BEFORE action takes place. This might be a practical guide for all struggling communities, if they wish to regenerate.

First, the business community must recognize that a low visibility of main street is their problem, first

and foremost. It is not a burden that we should place on the taxpayers. We might require assistance from them as represented by the village board, but as, as the Club says, the free market of commerce and ideas must solve the problem of regenerating "main street."

Second, the government in the village has to recognize that whatever they can do to assist at no great cost to their "owners," i.e. the owners of property who pay the taxes, should be measured against the long-term interest of the community. The community of Centuria is far larger than in geography and concept than an incorporate village's boundaries. Restoring the community must happen with the village government's honest consent in principle that they can and must be part of the solution to help the business owners create more prosperity. After all, without a sound economy in the village or around it, the village pocket book suffers in many ways. Unless the village government becomes an active partner in renewal with the business owners, Centuria will disintegrate like an Old West ghost town. Centuria already resembles similar budding ghost towns across the Midwest affected by globalization. How long before it reaches the tipping point here?

Third, the citizens of Centuria, the average person neither business owners nor employed by the government or elected to it, have the most to lose from a lost sense of community. They also have the most to gain. Therefore, whether just a sense of pride in place, or to live in a nice, fulfilling and safe community, the citizens can play an active in their own interests.

Fourth, it is not right that we look to outsiders to decide our answers. Outside people cost money. Outside advice is not very rooted in the place concerned. A consultant from the Twin Cities or Eau Claire charges a lot with the primary aim to make money for themselves. As implied here, if the business owners, government public servants and village employees, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, those who just live here want a community to be a "better place" to live, then we must do it for ourselves. No one else really cares. That should be a positive idea for cooperation, constructive dialog, and positive action by everyone. Since no one has a monopoly on good ideas, the process can be and should be open to everyone with some stake here.

The initiative undertaken for better advertising a downtown business district forms the first step in building some trust and understanding among the three major players—business, government and people. Other things can and must follow. But essential to all of this, we must have a commitment of respect to WORK the solution, not fight and re-fight the problem.

The Cepia Club does suggests something beyond a better, more functional and effective sign for the on the highway for the downtown. We believe Centuria must formulate a long-term idea of what Centuria had in the past, has at present, and what we would like it to be in the future. The village needs to pick a theme around which a larger promotion and development of the village can focus. But again, choosing something as important requires everyone to participate—"e pluribus unum"—from many people, one united. Talk about it and let's get together. The future is arrived.

