

The Quality of Life Cycle

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It's been 15 years since the Disney movie *"The Lion King"* captured the imaginations of millions of people worldwide with its timeless story that depicts the amazing circle of life. Simba's family members, those natural and extended as well as those traditional and eccentric, shaped his upbringing and eventual emergence from cub to young adult, even when he thought he had failed.

It's no different here in Salem.

The guiding hand that parents, coaches, scout leaders, Sunday school teachers and certainly those who serve in Salem's schools extend to our children on a daily basis is just as powerful as the guidance Simba received from his fictional community.

And just like in the Pride Land of the Serengeti, as it was depicted in the film, Salem is a community that values its young people.

The City Council and Administration put those values into action by providing resources necessary for quality schools, numerous parks and recreation programs and other city services such as a police department that sponsors Camp D.A.R.E. for all 6th grade students. In turn, quality schools and outstanding services attract families to Salem who desire to live in a community that values its young people.

Our community, which enjoys a vibrant and self-renewing *"Quality of Life Cycle,"* begins with our young people...Salem's children.

These days it's not uncommon for 25-to-44 year olds to come back to Salem, in fact, it is our fastest growing demographic segment (*Roanoke Times*, May 14, 2009). This is the age group that desires a quality community where they can raise their children. These individuals choose Salem, because it is a city that not only has values, but lives them.

You are welcome to test this hypothesis.

As you travel farther from here and meet more people from other places, I encourage you to examine what you have lived. I suspect that when you do, that you will marvel at what you are provided with right here in Salem. It's something that was established before your time and something that everyone should be very serious about preserving.

In his book *"Salem: A Virginia Chronicle,"* Salem's historian, Norwood Middleton describes how the "Salem First" model of governance emerged beginning in the mid-1970's and identifies the ensuing generation of leaders as the "Salem Loyalists." Middleton documents how the "Salem First" movement established Salem as a community that places great value

on its young people, specifically citing the establishment of an Independent School Division in 1983 as the epitome of Salem's "full stature" as an independent city.

Today, 35 years later, we can see what Salem's willingness to sacrifice for the sake of its children has accomplished. That sacrifice has established a "Quality of Life Cycle" for our entire city that continues to put our young people first and even safeguards our property values since the demand to reside here remains high to this day.

By placing great value on its children, our City attracts other families who share the same values and this perpetuates and even enhances our "Quality of Life" cycle. These new adults with children soon become similarly invested in Salem, and the cycle continues.

Without the commitment of these citizens – both the new ones and the established ones, and the resolve of our leaders, we would struggle to maintain our focus of keeping "Children First."

In a recent survey, the top three reasons for living in Salem were the people, the schools, and the small-town feel (*So Salem*, April 2009). All of these reasons provide evidence of Salem's unique *"Quality of Life Cycle"* – something that is remarkably rare and certainly something each generation should treasure and resolve to perpetuate for the next.