

Mayor takes stock of Crescent City

January 7, 2020



As the calendar turned over to a new decade, The Triplicate asked Blake Inscore, now in his fourth term as Crescent City's mayor, about the year just ended and what's next for the city in 2020.

Some of his responses were edited for brevity.

The Triplicate:

So, how was 2019?

Mayor Blake Inscore:

I think 2019 was a good year. There were a lot of things that happened. We moved to contract operations at the wastewater treatment plant. They have brought a level of expertise in what they can do, and I think we're going to see some efficiencies. It was a tough decision, obviously, because it affected employees. I think it was a good decision and it will serve us well going into the future.

We put together some master plans, such as the 10-year fire master plan. It will be a fundamental change in how we will do staffing, with the idea of generating enough revenue to be able to bring on some paid captain positions so a fire chief is not responding to every call.

Putting those things in place means we're going to have to generate revenue, be it through parcel assessment throughout the fire district or a sales tax measure in the city. If we want to provide the same level of service that people have become accustomed to, we have to realize there's a cost associated with that.

We've established a series of ad hoc committees to look at important issues. In addition to the fire district, we created committees for the pool, and developed a master plan to better serve our community efficiently and affordably; the Shoreline RV Park, to re-envision this ideally located park and make it the No. 1 destination for RVers on the north coast; the Cultural Center, asking how do we take this building built in the 1970s, which maybe has been underutilized in recent years, and bring it back to a level where it becomes a prime destination for people looking to rent space or hold events.

We also did a reorganization of city staff, including Public Works and Community Development. And we brought on a recreation director, Holly Wendt, who's been a huge boost, to plan more events such as at Beachfront Park. There's new energy for new plans, like a bike park, labyrinth - Coastal Conservancy has come forward to fully fund that.

The California Endowment provided some funding to community outreach. Prop 68 funding will provide money for parks, at \$200,000 per capita, and we'll apply for another \$8.5 million in grant money.

The Triplicate:

What is the status of our business community?

Inscore:

We have a stable business community right now. We need to continue to support small, local businesses. A revitalized downtown can do that. The Downtown Divas have done a fantastic job of refocusing our community's attention on the value of downtown.

We need to go to the next level, go beyond monthly events, that encourages shopping local. That happens with building private/public partnerships. For example, as with the help of the Downtown Divas, we're going to build a public bathroom this year.

Some issues that wouldn't normally become a top priority for the city could gain momentum if a private partnership developed where an outside entity could help bring these ideas to fruition.

The Triplicate:

How would you classify the status of the homeless situation in Crescent City?

Inscore:

The homeless question is a fair question, because we do have homeless who don't have a regular residence in our community. There was a sense that the Ninth Circuit Court ruling had put an undue burden on cities in managing (homelessness), by defining it as cruel and unusual punishment to keep someone from being able to lie, sleep or rest on public property. It was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, but they chose not to hear it. So, it stands.

The downside is, the city had signed on to be a part of an amicus brief to get it heard (by the Supreme Court), which we had to invest some money in. The flip side is, we had already established a strategy that says we are going to manage this in a way that is consistent with the law, while at the same time taking into account the importance of hygiene, safety for all of our residents, and addressing those who are creating problems and leaving those alone who are not.

Former Crescent City Police Chief Ivan Minsal, to his credit, created a very healthy relationship with the homeless population in engagement and communication, and kept it from being adversarial. Police Chief Richard Griffin has continued this relationship, which says, 'We will respect your rights to do this, but we will not allow you to infringe on other people's rights.'

I think we're doing a pretty good job. The complaint level has decreased significantly. We have done a better job communicating both sides of these rights with everyone.

The Triplicate:

The sister-city relationship blossomed in 2019. Where do you see it going from here?

Inscore:

Most everyone knows the backstory of how the relationship grew thanks to a group of high school students that found a boat from Japan. But these wonderful stories took on a whole new level when NBC Sports got involved and said, 'We're interested in making that a feature storyline for the 2020 Olympics.'

Then, all of us needed to step back and go, 'This is much bigger than just a sister city.' The sister city becomes a vehicle for accomplishing a much bigger goal of marketing tourism to the community. We have a local partnership that's pretty big. We have tribal partners that have invested money, in addition to the city, county, harbor, Fishermen's Association.

This is about, how does this create a win for us? We've hired a consultant, Rob Holmlund of Malex Consulting, who's taking the lead in providing a strategy and actionable things the community can get involved in to maximize our exposure. This includes rolling out YouTube videos about our community, a website beyond a link to the Visitor's Bureau that focuses on Crescent City.

My goal is, when "Go for the Gold" (the 2020 Olympics theme) is over, August through the next tourism year, what do we do for 2021 and 2022 to leverage everything that's done in the next 18 months? How do we invest in the future to continue to grow our community from a tourism marketing standpoint and to leverage

what will be our new standard for marketing our community to make sure this becomes a this a place where people say, 'I'm going to Crescent City'?

It's going to be a challenge. It's going to take some money. But this has to be successful, so we can build for success for the future.

The Triplicate:

What are some other goals the city is targeting?

Inscore:

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the county has been completed, which gives a 30,000-foot view on priorities. We are currently working on a city-specific CEDS. We're going to see some specific action items. I've spoken a lot on tourism marketing, but let's face it, there's not a traditional industry here. We have fishing, then the potential of hospitality. We have to maximize it, because there's not a lot of businesses looking to move their plant to Crescent City.

In 2020, the city council has authorized \$75,000 to plan a new city hall in the old Bank of America building (at 1020 3rd St.). Next is getting a designer and plans, then securing the funding to build it. Finding grant money for a municipal services building is not easy.

We're also reaching out with firms to come up with energy-efficiency plans for all of our facilities to maximize tax dollars for those improvements.

A goal of mine since I ran for office the first time is addressing Front Street. The storm drain project is the first part of plans that give us the opportunity, from G Street to B Street, of having all of Front Street dug up and correcting that portion of it. Because Front Street is (eventually) narrowed to two lanes, it also creates an opportunity to create parking along Beach Front Park at that far west end.

I think, when we look back at 2020 into 2021, we're going to say this was a really important year. Many of the things that I think will happen in 2020 and the first part of 2021 are the product of years of dreams and plans and hopes and wishes that now all of a sudden are coming together. Such as the Sunset Circle Coastal Trail, a plan I was introduced to in 2013-14, that will be completed this year, providing a connection between the bridge over Elk Creek all the way to the harbor trail.

The Triplicate:

How big was it that the Del Norte High School football team made it to the state championship and Crescent City hosted the game?

Inscore:

Having the season that the football team did is just phenomenal. It's another way of highlighting the power of community. In the same weekend as the football game was the Jaycees' eighth-grade basketball tournament, where people from all over the West Coast brought their eighth-graders here to play.

Also, the state championship was more than a football game. That was a showcase of who we really are. You've got people who came from the opposite end of our state, from a different environment that's not a small, remote rural community, who came here and saw us at our best. Not only were they a vehicle for our community, the football team did things that had never been done. I talked to people who lived here their whole life, who played football, who never got that opportunity. There's a sense of pride that goes with that.

And let's face it. It brought in people. We had thousands of people here who saw our community for the first time. It may not have been the best weather, but they saw this as a place with a beautiful coastline, giant redwoods. Economically, I've always believed if you come to our community, you're going to come back. They're going to tell somebody else about their experience. And you can't buy that kind of marketing.