

Gary Wayne Walker: Fresno's Carolyn Hogg brings people together

By Gary Wayne Walker

E Pluribus Unum.

My next door neighbor, Carolyn Hogg, brings to mind that Latin phrase. She is the city of Fresno's Chief Information Officer, and top digital expert.

E Pluribus Unum is translated, "Out of many, one," or sometimes, "One from many."

The traditional meaning, which is on the seal of the United States, was, out of many states or colonies, emerged a single nation. Later, it was applied to exceptional Americans like Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Edison.

Today, these words increasingly apply to Americans who are neither historical nor famous, but who have arisen from the herd to accomplish momentous deeds.

Carolyn Hogg meets this criteria as much as anyone I know.

Born and raised in Fresno, Carolyn enrolled at Fresno State after graduating from Fresno High in 1980. She majored in German, including German culture, Spanish and business, taking 18 units per semester while working part-time.

Her mother is a German immigrant who, after surviving the horror of the Third Reich during wartime, emigrated to the US in the 1950s. Because of her upbringing, Carolyn has always been interested in other cultures.

After graduating from Fresno State in 1985 and rejecting an offer to translate smuggled documents out of East Germany, Carolyn became a loan specialist at Guarantee Savings. She then moved on to Fresno County, where she became a systems analyst. Later, she served for 10 years as the chief information officer/director of Madera Community Hospital.

In July, 2007, Carolyn arrived at City Hall and became Fresno's chief information officer, with responsibility for supporting the technology needs of 19 departments in California's fifth largest city.

Her technology department, typically housed in basements, consisted of 80 people. It turned out her timing couldn't have been worse, for the Great Recession started a little more than a year after her arrival, resulting in the loss of half her staff.

Carolyn explains that, at the beginning, there was little interaction between her department and the offices they were there to serve.

"We were never invited to the table," she says. "Every department hugged their computers, but through patience, perseverance and great support from the mayor's office, we were able to build a bridge of cooperation that has made a real difference."

With the gradual upturn in the economy, Carolyn has been able to hire 10 new employees, resulting in a department of 50 people. Today's technology demands have moved her department from a basement mentality to broader surroundings.

"We've gone from the outhouse to the penthouse," she says with a big smile. She has also built bridges to local

“anchor institutions,” including Fresno State, and a downtown partnership with Fresno Unified School District.

Perhaps her most significant achievement has been her department’s liaison with the Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C., through the Strong Cities/Strong Communities Federal Partnership Program.

When Carolyn learned that the USDA wanted to expand broadband to rural communities, she saw an opportunity to build a bridge across the cultural divide between urban and rural communities in the Valley.

Fresno is the only city west of the Mississippi to be selected for this program.

She believes that the result has been a strengthening, not only of our city, but our region, through digital awareness and decreasing the digital divide. She believes her knowledge and appreciation of other traditions and beliefs has been crucial to her success in bringing people of diverse backgrounds together to bring about this success.

Because Carolyn broke traditional models of technology in local government, she was recognized by President Obama in the White House as a Champion of Change in 2012.

She also received the Honor Award for Excellence from the US Department of Agriculture in 2013.

More recently, she has been named one of Government Technology magazine’s Top 25 Doers, Dreamers and Drivers for 2015.

Carolyn Hogg is a free spirit who, among other activities, likes to ride motorcycles. Happily married to her husband, Steve, for more than 30 years, the Hoggs have two grown daughters.

Carolyn Hogg, *E Pluribus Unum?* Indeed!

Gary Wayne Walker is a resident of Fresno. His novel, “Vengeance is Mine,” is now available at the Clovis Book Barn as well as Amazon.com. Gary can be reached at wwalker61@comcast.net.