

Making time for conversation



By Jimmy LaRoue

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One of the things I like best about the work I do is I have the perfect excuse to talk to people.

Those that know me say I don't need one, but it's nice to have it in my back pocket.

Generally, when I interview people for a story, I try — as much as possible — to buffer extra time just to have a conversation with them on anything other than what I'm writing about.

For instance, I visited Chorey Park Apartments for a story about the heat treatment for bedbugs taking place there. The reason I was there was to see what goes into the heat treatment, and to experience it.

To say it gets up to 170 degrees or more in each treated apartment is one thing. To actually feel the heat that comes from a room at 170 degrees, is another. It's something Carlton Williams experiences every time he heat-treats a room.

It's literally putting the sweat into sweat equity.

But in between taking temperature readings to ensure the apartments are being heated at a temperature to kill the bedbugs and their eggs, there's downtime for conversation, even as the two heat machines running in adjacent apartments means raising your voice just to be heard.

And there's jokes about the heat and needing a parka to take it, and how long one can stay in a room so hot.

Trust me. You don't want to be in there long. Watching Williams take his readings is almost mesmerizing in watching the numbers get higher and higher until, at long last, it stops.

Long last is about 90 seconds until retreating back to the 71-degree hallway.

In the 30 to 45 minutes before the next temperature check, Williams and I got to chat with each other, and with curious residents wanting to know what was going on.

What I enjoy even more, though, is getting some kind of sense of who someone is, and that I can't always get just through interviewing someone for a story. That comes through lingering, sharing a little about myself, and then stepping back and applying the two ears, one mouth approach. In other words, I listen.

It doesn't mean I know them as well as their family, friends or other co-workers, but it does give me a fuller picture of who they are. And it makes a long day worth it to connect with someone without it all being about the story.

In some cases, I find out something fascinating about the person. For instance, I got such a snippet that I ended up using in a story. I had interviewed Trajure Bazemore following her high school graduation

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ceremony Wednesday and spoke to her for a couple of minutes about her feelings of graduating and what her future plans were.

But as I was wrapping up my reporting of the graduation, Bazemore came back to me and shared about how, at 16 years old, she had graduated in three years instead of four by taking a pair of summer school classes.

She didn't have to run back and share that with me, but she did.

I hope whether it's a detail for a story, or just something you want to share with me, like a woman I met at Chorey Park who wanted simply to share something about someone in her family, that you'll feel comfortable enough to chat me up about it.

If I don't have the time for the conversation, I'll make the time.