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MANNERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Observations From the Mall

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Right after the Thanksgiving weekend, I began taking my turn at the Nebraska Life Magazine booth at Hilltop Mall, right inside the main entrance across from Snickerdoodles. During my shift, I'd watch individuals, couples and families walk by. In an era when we hear so many complaints from around the country and the world of how rude people can be, what struck me was how different the atmosphere was at the mall. People weren't angry or rude. They were helpful, cheerful and polite.

From my experience, this isn't just a phenomena of the Christmas season (especially since the whole joy and celebration has been muted in so many ways). As people passed my booth, they'd smile, some offered a "hi," a few even ask a hurried, "How are you?" before hurrying on their way. Greetings came from people with no time or intention of stopping to peruse or buy the products I promoted.

Since the Nebraska Life Magazine booth was near the doors, they swung open with regularity as people came and went. Without fail, I watch one person open and hold the door for someone else with a stroller, a child or an armful of bags or boxes. "Please," "Excuse me," and "Thank you," dropped naturally from lips accustomed to the use of basic manners. When one person accidentally bumped into another, he/she was quick to make amends and extend an apology.

Basic manners denote caring and concern for others. When manners and politeness disappear so does a civilized society. While many who live on either coast seem to think the mid-west is some sort no-man's land, they are wrong. Though often deemed "old fashion," manners aren't dead here in Nebraska, in Kearney. Here, we still care enough and respect one another enough, to use those simple words of "Please," "Excuse me," and "Thank you." Here we're not afraid to apologize, not afraid to hold a door, not afraid to let someone go first without thinking doing so means we're less of a person for not pushing ourselves forward.

Maybe the best thing we can do is not just to make a list of resolutions we have little intentions or commitment to keep. Maybe, instead, we can make the effort to pass on to the next generation manners along with a sense of caring, responsibility and concern. As others from around the world pass this way, maybe we'll end up exporting manners and civilization to a world at large that seems to have lost the meaning of what they mean—basic respect for our fellow human beings. And SMILE!