

Firestone mayor draws on diverse life experience to govern

By Jen Reeder
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FIRESTONE – On April 1, 2008, Zachary Auer did a happy dance in his front yard. It wasn't some sort of practical joke for April Fools' Day – his father, Chad Auer, had just been elected mayor of Firestone.

"That was a fun night for the family," the mayor said. "They definitely helped me out through the campaign."

Life after the election didn't change much for Zachary – his father still hasn't lifted the ban on fireworks, as he'd like, and his friends don't know that his dad is a public figure.

"Kids don't believe me that he's mayor," Zachary said. "They think I'm lying."

Whether they believe him or not, it's a fact, though the family wants to be as normal as possible. Auer's wife Megan is a nurse in Longmont, and their three kids, Zachary, 10, Sophie, 8, and Benjamin, 5, attend Centennial Elementary. The family goes to church at CrossPointe Community Church.

"We're just a regular family, doing our best to be good friends and good neighbors," Auer said. "But, we're also concerned with public policy. We're service-oriented folks; we like to be involved."

Megan said she had mixed feelings about her husband running for mayor because she worried about the family being in the limelight, but ultimately supported the decision.

"He loves what he does and he's happy, and that's what I want," she said.

Auer primarily ran with the goal of boosting regional collaboration by restoring Firestone's Intergovernmental Agreement with St. Vrain Valley School District and relationships with Weld County and other municipalities.

"Getting Firestone back into the greater regional community was



Photo by Jen Reeder

The Auer family gathers at their home Nov. 24. From left: Zachary, 10; Benjamin, 5; Megan Auer; Mayor Chad Auer; and Sophie, 8.

very important to me," Auer said.

He felt he could accomplish it by drawing on his diverse professional and life experience. Auer was born in Denver and adopted as an infant by Ken and Becky Auer, who raised him and his two sisters in Niwot.

"My parents are really great people," he said. "Stable, steady and wholesome."

Auer enrolled at Colorado State University, but took a year off after his freshman year to work as a cowboy on a cattle ranch in Montana.

"I don't know if it's a good trait or a bad trait, but I'm not intimidated by very much. I like to try new things. Going and cowboying in Montana seemed like a great adventure, so off I went. We were in the saddle sunup to sundown," Auer said.

Back at CSU, Auer met Megan at a Fellowship of Christian Athletes meeting (she was a swimmer and he was a track star who still holds records at Niwot High School).

They married in 1995 while they were still students and had little money. So they spent a year working on a dairy farm north of Fort Collins – while still attending classes at CSU – for a year, milking cows at 4 a.m.

"It was as good early marriage counseling as you can get," Auer said.

His experiences on the ranch and farm motivated him to focus on becoming an educator. He sings the praises of the education he had in Niwot.

"I had a great experience from the first day of kindergarten to graduation," he said.

But once he met people who hadn't had the same educational opportunities, he determined his vocation.

"I felt it was my job to make great educational experiences for other kids," Auer said.

Now Auer is a school improvement administrator for Denver Public Schools, and a former principal of Carbon Valley Academy. He's also halfway to getting his doctorate in educational leadership from the University of Northern Colorado.

"My goal is to have my doctorate before Sophie graduates from high school," he said.

Auer has been busy in the meantime with public service, which has included experience as chair of the Weld County Planning Commission, vice-chair of the Board of Adjustment for Weld County, serving on the city council of Dacono before the family moved to Firestone five years ago and member of the Chamber of Commerce. He is proud of the efficiency and camaraderie on the current board of trustees for the town of Firestone.

"We've made tremendous gains as a board," Auer said. "Diversity of opinion is respected at our meetings."

Megan said that listening to divergent opinions is one of her husband's strengths as a "value-driven person." He will even respond to hate mail.

"He's really respectful of people with different opinions," she said, adding, "He's one of the coolest people I know."

That respect has translated into a "spirit of cooperation" with the other Tri-Town mayors, Auer said. They have a long history of acquaintance – Frederick Mayor Eric Doering was a Sunday school teacher and senior faculty member at the First Christian Church in Longmont when Auer was growing up and attending with his family, and Dacono Mayor Wade Carlson was president of the St. Vrain Valley School Board when he graduated from Niwot High School.

"I'm almost certain he signed my diploma," Auer said. "They've both been very gracious to me. We don't necessarily agree on everything, but we still work together, we still laugh, we still respect each other. That's something the region can be proud of."

As for the future, Auer plans to run for re-election because he wants to lay the groundwork for his children's generation of Firestone residents with smart growth, economic development, a solid transportation system and parks and recreation programs.

"I want a Firestone that's a leader in all respects, and community is a big part of it – getting our community back into an optimistic frame of mind," Auer said. "I'm having a ball."

To contact Firestone Mayor Chad Auer, visit his website at www.chadauer.com.



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