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**“A Friendly Greeting”**  
**by**  
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The Villages is touted as *“America’s Friendliest Hometown”* and for good reason. As a native West Virginian I feel right at home here because of the overt friendliness of fellow residents of this fantastic community. I was born in a small town in WV and it was not uncommon to speak to everyone you met anywhere in the town because pretty much everyone knew everyone else, but after college I moved to a large metro area in Virginia and friendliness was not the order of the day. It seems the goal of most people in a large metropolitan area is to blend in with the scenery so you won’t be noticed. I don’t know if it was fear or just trying to be invisible because they were somewhere they shouldn’t have been and didn’t want to have witnesses to the fact, but very few people would even wave to you as we passed much less speak out loud.

Of course, it seems to get worse the further north you go because I was warned prior to my first trip to New York City... *“Be sure you don’t make eye contact with anyone on the street... they’ll think you’re after something.”* I was transferred to Brooklyn, NY to work in a finance office and boy did this poor Southern boy have a difficult time. The ladies in the office were nice enough but everytime I would answer, *“Yes ma’am, or No ma’am,”* I would get cussed out because they said I was insinuating they were old by using the term *“ma’am.”* I tried to explain that I had always been taught to call ladies *“ma’am”* and men *“sir”* and I didn’t know how to do differently. When going out for lunch I learned another important lesson... never open the door for a female person because you really trigger alarms in their heads that you’re some predator setting them up for the kill. My kindly manners drew nothing but dirty looks and grimaces and never a smile or thank you.

Meanwhile, back to metropolitan Virginia...drugs and crime were beginning to raise their ugly heads in our neighborhood so I felt it would be best to move my family back to the family friendly environs of West Virginia, but this time to the rural area of Greenbrier County where I was born. This was truly a country atmosphere with only 35,000 people in the entire county and 2,500 in the little community in which we lived.

It was our first time ever living in *“the country”* as everyone called it and we were transported back 30 years to my growing up in a town where everyone knows everyone and speaking to your neighbors was not an option... it was expected. As you walked down the road, worked in your yard, or be caught standing in the road jawing with your neighbor, a wave from a truck or car driving by demanded a response. Even though you would probably never see some of them on a one on one basis it was still important to reply to their outreach in some way.

This is the important part that you should remember and possibly put into action wherever you live... how you respond, or how you initiate the greeting is critical and says a great deal about your potential future relationship. I'm sure everyone has heard the word "**Howdy**." Mr. Webster says it is a "*term to express greeting,*" but let me tell you... in a community such as Lewisburg, WV it means so much more. As a new neighbor you might say "**Howdy**" in a soft, uncertain voice and it can mean "*Hello. I'm new to the area and I'm a little shy so I don't really know what to say to you, so please accept me as a friend and hopefully we can become best friends.*"

If you've lived in town a little longer and you say "**Howdy**," this time just a little bolder, you could be saying, "*Hey, how ya' doing? How's the wife and kids. It's been real nice seeing you and hopefully I can stop to talk a little longer next time.*" Of course, after you've established yourself in the community and you pretty much know the life story of everyone you can say "**Howdy**" in a really robust voice and this time it might mean, "*Hey there... Golly it's sure nice to see you. I heard you were down in the back and couldn't get around much. Glad to see you're out and about. How's the wife's cold... you know it's that time of year again and it'll be gone in no time at all. Be sure and tell your kids to stop by this Halloween we've got some great treats to hand out and don't want them to miss out on them. Well, take care and ya'll stop by sometime.*" I sense doubt in some readers' minds out there but trust me on this.

Needless to say... the above greeting of "**Howdy**" is not a property of small country communities like Lewisburg, WV. You'll be pleased to know it's on the official list of approved greetings and salutations while walking in your neighborhood here in The Villages, and now that you know its true meaning(s) I hope you will be inclined to use it. Next week I'll give some insight on proper waving techniques to use as you drive down the street so be sure to check in.

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