

A young man and woman are sitting on the back of a moving truck, smiling at the camera. They are surrounded by cardboard boxes. The woman is wearing a light green shirt and blue jeans, and the man is wearing a white shirt and blue jeans. The truck has a red sign that says "Dakota Bound!" on its side.

PLAN YOUR DAKOTA HOMECOMING!

*You **CAN** Go Home Again. Really.
Three Key Steps To Planning Your Return*

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PLAN YOUR DAKOTA HOMECOMING

A practical guide to making a successful return to your Dakota hometown.
Written by Dakotafire staff.

Do you have family members who would like to move home but who don't know where to start to make that happen? Send them this guide!

You CAN Go Home Again. Really.

If you'd like to make your way back to the place where you grew up, you are not alone. While it doesn't make up for the numbers of people leaving rural areas, some people are going back to the places where they grew up.

According to a survey of participants in Dakota Roots, a program that helps people find work in South Dakota, three main reasons are bringing them here: They want to be closer to family and friends; they appreciate the beauty of the state; and

they want a slower, more authentic way of life. Brian Hoey, an associate professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Marshall University in West Virginia, has called some of those making the transition from urban to rural places "lifestyle migrants" because they are using "relocation as a way of redefining their relationships to work and family through changes in lifestyle, the patterns of everyday life."

If you are one of those who wants to make the return journey, where do you begin? How will you make a living? Where will you live? Will you find a way to belong in the community again?

All of these questions can be answered. Get ready: It's time to make a plan.

1 Find A Way To Make A Living.

When a team of researchers from the University of Montana asked more than 300 people who had grown up in rural places in the United States what would keep them from moving home, "There wouldn't be a job" was the most common answer. But they also found that many of the people who wanted to move back to rural places for non-work-related reasons were able to find work when they made the effort. In fact, in his State of the State address, Gov. Dennis Daugaard said South Dakota has shortages in fields such as engineering, information technology and health care. The oil boom in western North Dakota has created a labor shortage throughout the state in many fields.

Consider these strategies for getting your career going in your hometown:

Bring your job with you. This option has several advantages: You would be able to continue working in your chosen field (assuming that's where you're working now); your salary would likely stay the same; and it would keep one part of your life fairly consistent, which may be

appreciated when so much else is changing with your move. It also has the effect of creating a job in your hometown, which will be appreciated by the economic development folks there.

If you own your own business, you could relocate the whole business when you move, or if you work for an employer that offers flexible working arrangements, you can telecommute.

The number of workers who telecommute is steadily increasing. Employers are recognizing that it can save money and increase employee satisfaction. Telecommuting has clear appeal for workers in the Dakotas, who can skip a long commute, avoid winter driving and save on increasingly expensive gas.

Become a freelancer. Companies are increasingly outsourcing some of their labor, which means that there is an opening for people with certain skills to pick up this contract work. Online sites such as Elance and Guru have made it much easier for companies and workers to find one another. Elance announced in early March that \$500 million in work has been done on its site since it started in 1999.



ABOUT DAKOTAFIRE

Dakotafire Media is a company created by Heidi Marttila-Losure and Troy McQuillen, who both returned to South Dakota after years away. Heidi returned to her homeplace in rural Frederick, Troy to his hometown of Aberdeen. Their new journalism project, called Dakotafire, pools the resources of community newspapers and rural experts to report on issues of importance to rural communities in the James River watershed area of North and South Dakota. News is distributed via Dakotafire.net, the participating newspapers, and a quarterly magazine. As part of the Knight Community Information Challenge, the three-year project has received support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and the South Dakota Community Foundation, with additional support coming from Dacotah Bank, other foundations, and corporate and individual sponsors.



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Start a business. While it can be risky to move based on a business you have yet to start, careful planning can make the business more likely to succeed.

First, talk to the folks in your hometown. Is there a niche you can fill? If a much-loved restaurant closed because of a retirement, you could step in to serve the restaurant's regular customers. Also consider businesses that can support an industry that is already established—hunting and guiding, for example, or machinery repair to support the ag industry.

Whatever you choose, make it something you get excited about, according to Andrew LaPointe, author of *Small Town Dream: The Guide for Moving to Small Town America*. "It may be cliché, but it's true: Do what you love and success will follow," he writes.

Find a job in your hometown. If you start your job search in the most obvious place to start looking in cities, you will likely be discouraged—Monster.com is probably not the place to find work in the rural Dakotas. That doesn't mean there aren't any jobs, however. You'll just have to use other means to find them.

If you have family or friends still in the area, ask them about possible jobs, and ask them to make some inquiries for you.

The departments of labor in both North and South Dakota have programs to connect job seekers and

employers. They may not have as many connections in very rural areas as they do in bigger towns, but they will do whatever they can for you. Check their online job searches first (<http://dlr.sd.gov/> and <http://jobsnd.com/>), then make an appointment to talk to someone.

If you know of a business where you'd like to work, contact them directly. While they may not have something for you immediately, they may contact you a few months down the road.

Consider commuting to a bigger town. This provides the advantage of potentially finding work that in your chosen field. The disadvantages are that you will spend a significant part of your time on the road (Tip: Find some good audio books or learn-a-language CDs), gas isn't cheap, and winter driving in the Dakotas is regularly unpleasant.

② Find a place to live.

Making sure there is adequate housing is one of the biggest challenges in building up in our communities. Most will tell you there is not enough affordable housing in the region. You may need to get creative.

Find a house for sale. Check the listings online or contact real estate agents in your community. Houses in small towns in the Dakotas are very reasonably priced (if you are from a high-housing-cost region such as California, you may think



Tips for a Smoother Return

Build a financial cushion before you move. While it's true that the cost of living in rural areas is typically lower than in urban areas, wages also tend to be lower. Moreover, you may find yourself spending money on things you didn't expect—a four-wheel-drive vehicle, for example. Three strategies to make financial life less stressful:

- Reduce debt—especially your credit card debt.
- Set aside six months' worth of income for emergencies. (Depending on what you have set up when you move, more might be better.)
- Do the cash flow numbers. Pencil out how your income and expenses may or will change with the move and adjust as needed to make it balance.

Find a mentor. Many business people in your hometown are very eager to talk to people interested in moving back. Find an established business person and ask if they will help you with the transition. Remember, you probably left as a kid, yet you're returning as a business person or a professional.

If you are starting a business, one good place to start is SCORE, a nonprofit organization "dedicated to helping small businesses get off the ground, grow and achieve their goals through education and mentorship." Since the help is provided by volunteers (experienced business people who want to help people just starting out), advice is provided for free or at low cost. For more information, go to www.score.org.

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someone forgot a zero on the price), but be alert for older houses that may require more maintenance.

Find a place to rent. People still use newspapers for advertising available rentals in the Dakotas, but the use of Craigslist is growing. If you don't find the perfect place listed for rent in your hometown, ask your family or friends there to ask around, or make some inquiries yourself—it's likely that some vacant places are not listed. A lot of business is simply handled by word-of-mouth in small towns. You may be surprised what is available if you let it be known that you're looking.

Build a house. This is not a fast solution to a housing need, but it may fit what you're looking for as a "lifestyle migrant." Construction companies are quite busy in northeast South Dakota (Aberdeen is booming), but you'll likely be able to find someone who is able to build your dream house for far less than you'd be able to build in more urban areas of the country. If you aren't in a hurry and have some aptitude for the work, you could also do at least some of the construction yourself.

If you are moving close to where your parents live, there is one more option:

Move in with your parents. During the recent recession, this was not at all uncommon, and it still may be the most practical solution for you—and perhaps also for your parents, if they are of the age where they may need some help. It can at the very least serve as a temporary solution as you search for work, other housing, or both.

If you decide to live with your parents for an extended length of time, it may be good to set some ground rules:

- *Decide who will pay for what while you stay there.*
- *Discuss how many meals you will eat together.*
- *Discuss how to divide chores such as dishes and cleaning.*

③ Have a life.

If you've been away for some time, be prepared for a readjustment period. In Thomas Wolfe's novel *You Can't Go Home Again*, the main character finds that while he has changed after going to the city, his hometown has stayed the same. In real life both you and the community are likely to be different than they were when you left. Here are things to keep in mind as you find your social and cultural bearings:

The friends you knew when you lived here before may not be the people you will be friends with now. First, those old friends may have moved away. Second, if you last lived in a small town in high school, you will now be free of the constraints that high school puts on your social circle—you will be freer to be friends with people who are not your age, for example.

You may make friends who are far different from you. A recent study by a Wellesley College professor found that people in small towns tend to have much more diversity in their friendships than people in more urban areas. It's counterintuitive, but the more choice you have, the more likely you are to be friends with people who are like yourself.

Neighborliness trumps political affiliation. People in small towns tend to be a little wary about talking politics—not because they don't have opinions, but because people are connected in ways that are more important: The ardent Democrat and the feisty Republican may serve on the church council together, for example. And if you drive into the ditch, your political adversary might be the one to drive by in a pickup. It may be wise to keep your opinions under your hat.

Culture is not missing, but you may need to work harder to find it. While you may be able to find good music every night of the week in the city, for example, in rural areas it may be only once a month, and you may have to drive some distance to see it. But there are great cultural events—film festivals, plays, concerts, conventions, lectures, and more. And if there is some aspect of culture that you miss dearly, bring it with you. People will likely appreciate your contribution.

The same goes for restaurants—good food beyond the typical fast food chains can be found here, but you may not always know where to look. Ask a local for advice. Yelp.com is also becoming a popular resource for finding whatever type of business you're looking for, including restaurants.

High school sports are for everyone. If you want to see where everyone is on a Friday night, go to the football field or the gymnasium. Even if it's not really your thing, this is where you'll make social connections. You'll probably find yourself getting into the game, too.



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What You Will Find Here (That You May Not Expect):

- **High-speed internet.** Even most very rural areas are now served by speedy internet (though you should check with local internet providers about a specific area).
- **Cell phone service.** Though there are still areas where service is spotty, this has improved markedly in recent years.
- **Parcel delivery.** The major carriers will find you even here.
- **Good healthcare within driving distance.** Just like anywhere, you'll need to do your own homework in finding healthcare providers that work for you, but you'll find nearly any specialty you need within fairly reasonable driving distance. It's not perfect in rural areas, especially in emergencies, but you'll probably find it's better than the national discussions about rural healthcare make it out to be.



What You May Not Find Here:

- **TV stations (without a device or cable, that is).** Analog stations reached farther out into the country than digital stations do. If you want more than public television, you may need to get satellite TV.
- **A cleared road after a storm, or good roads in the spring.** Budget cuts and several snowy/wet seasons have led to reduced services in many rural areas. There is some optimism that the recent mild, winter may offer some relief.
- **Pizza delivery.** Most places have a mileage limit, and many rural areas lie beyond it.
- **Garbage and/or recycling service.** You may need to haul these items yourself.
- **Specialty shopping options.** You can find many things in regional shopping centers, but you may find that something you'd like to purchase is missing. You can of course shop online (remember that the parcel delivery people are fine with country deliveries), or you can also shop consignment stores—there are a surprising number of them in the region, and they have an impressive variety of items.

Still have questions? Want to connect with others who have either made the move back home or are thinking about it? Visit the Dakotafire Homecoming Forum at Dakotafire.net/homecoming. Find links to more resources there as well.

Some Final Suggestions for Finding Happiness in the Rural Dakotas:

Do something that gets you outside. Hunting is one way; even just dog-walking will work. You won't see the Dakotas' beauty if you're parked in front of the television, and you won't be able to talk about the weather as effectively either. (Weather makes up a significant part of Dakota conversations.)

Plant a garden. Not only will this get you outside, it will connect you to the reason people moved to the Dakotas in the first place—good farmland. There are people in cities who would be very envious of the amount of land we have here. We might as well appreciate it.

Learn the history of the area, if you don't know it already. The story of the Dakotas is an interesting one, and knowing it may help you feel more ready to write your own story here.

Find a way to make a difference. There are many ways to contribute in rural areas, and there's not a lot of bureaucracy to wade through—it is easy to see the results of your efforts. School boards, city and county commissions always need new ideas, especially from young, optimistic newcomers. Run for an elected office; it's a great way to acclimate yourself to the pulse of your community. Take action, and make your move back to your hometown a meaningful one. ✨



**SPECIAL SECTION
CONTRIBUTED
BY JULIE M. JOHNSON**
*EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
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JOBS! YES! JOBS! Aberdeen and several places in North East South Dakota have jobs. Our area is growing. At times like this, "There's No Place Like Home" takes on additional meaning!

The business climate of our area is also unparalleled, which is a great excuse to remind folks of the relative ease of doing business out here, and the opportunity for business growth. Invite folks to bring their businesses back to us, in addition to spreading the word of our jobs growth.

The other "plus" of returning to our roots is the great family support system that so many of us get when bringing our families back home to extended families. It is so much more comforting to know that we can be so much closer to family members who may have medical needs or may be aging. We have good health care and child care infrastructure in our growing region.

So, what do we do with that information? Here are a few ideas for summer and fall as we all interact with friends and families at this amazing time in our growth history:

JOBS: THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME!

SUMMER VACATIONS

What another great reason to spread the word of our growth opportunities! So many folks return to our beautiful lakes and outdoors for their summer vacations. And we can certainly share relocation information with you to take with you as you trek across America or beyond for your summer vacations. We can even send a relocation packet, or a few quick materials, with you on your trips. The Aberdeen Area Chamber has the relocation packets, and they are full of great resources about our growing area. Or refer folks to our great web tools, which are improving every day, www.aberdeensd.com, which has links to growth opportunities around our area, as well as Aberdeen.

SUMMER CELEBRATIONS, REUNIONS AND CENTENNIALS

School reunions and community centennials are perfect for sharing the great joy of all of the opportunities all around us. If you are hosting one, let us know, and we'll be happy to do some cross-marketing with you, and keep on spreading the word. So many of us are using Facebook, or other social media, in lieu of mailings to recruit folks to come to such events. We can share great resources through our Facebook tools, including Absolutely!Aberdeen, as well as "Aberdeen Area Jobs" on Facebook.

AT THE FISHING HOLE

Sitting in your favorite fishing boat, or in your favorite fishing spot, is a great time and place to share the great news. Moms and Dads, Grandmas

and Grandpas, Aunts and Uncles are often the best at sharing these great tidbits. Our region is also unequaled in how accessible our great outdoor opportunities are to us, within minutes in most cases.

PHEASANT SEASON

It is not too soon to spread the word to our annual pheasant guests, as they make their plans to join us for the abundant Pheasant Season we enjoy in NE SD. Of course, we all know that Pheasant Season is like a family holiday for many of us, with multiple generations returning to the home place, sharing the joy of the outdoors or just the family dinner tables. And remind them of our good air service, as well. They will be here before we know it!

HOMECOMING

High School and College Homecoming events are another great excuse to share the news! Those events have a way of "gifts that keep on giving", in terms of sharing great information.

BE WELCOMING!

Just as all who have come before us in our area have done, let's extend a welcoming hand to those who are joining us in our growing area. A great time to let our welcoming ways shine!

There's no place like home!

Check out www.aberdeensd.com,
contact us at Absolutely!Aberdeen, 725-5070,
or juliem.johnson@absolutelyabernodeen.com.

WORKING ON WORKFORCE



Above: Absolutely!Aberdeen is a growth initiative whose mantra is "Accelerating the Growth of Aberdeen and the Region!" Over the last 10 years, Absolutely!Aberdeen, and its regional development arm, Prairie Vision, have worked strategically to do what is necessary to grow the area. Absolutely!Aberdeen does business uniquely in a collaborative business model across the region.

Aberdeen has been in the "workforce recruitment" business for most of the last 5 years now, and has learned much about what seems to work and what doesn't seem to work. And most recently, many of the areas in our labor shed and the James River Valley are also in this "business". Here's a thumbnail sketch of what we think we know, after doing a deep dive into the research, as well as going to the "school of hard knocks" the last few years to ramp up our population, and that of our region:

① Folks that know our area have the greatest likelihood of joining us for these opportunities throughout our region, than do folks who don't know us. For example, southern climates may not work. But those who may have come here in the summer to stay with Grandma and Grandpa on their farm, or come back for the annual Pheasant Hunt, which is like a holiday here, long for those connections again.

② Alumni of all kinds have greater potential for our growth future. We are so fortunate to have worked with alumni groups throughout the region to spread the word of opportunities here. The connectivity in alumni is a powerful tool to use at times like this.

③ Grandmas and Grandpas, Aunts and Uncles, Moms and Dads have a great voice in persuading their friends and families to look at sharing these great opportunities, whether it is to return for a new job, relocate a business, telecommute from here, return for the family support system, or

retire back home. Their ability to tell our growth stories should not be underestimated.

④ Folks joining us here love the outdoors and all of those rich experiences, about which we are all spoiled here. We get questions about all kinds of outdoor venues, such as walking and biking trails, ease of access to fishing, ease of access to camping, snowmobiling, extreme sports, public access hunting, birding, and, of course, pheasant hunting. At very few areas in the country, can a person duck hunt in the morning, go to work, go pheasant hunting after work, and probably squeeze in a quick stint in a deer blind, all in one day!

⑤ The power of the story! One family who returns and their story, begets another family who returns and their story, and so it replicates itself every day in our growing region. And social media works!

⑥ The value of the support system! How quickly we are reminded about how important it is to be much closer to aging parents or those family members with health concerns with our great health care resources right around us. And the value of the child care services our region offers is immeasurable... way beyond the accessibility in larger metro areas. All of these supports can make the ease of life and work and family so much easier in our slice of Rural America!

⑦ The education system has high value at times like this. Access to a high quality K-12 system, public and private, as well as all of the post-secondary education afforded by Northern State University, Presentation College, and NEW Tec (in collaboration with Lake Area and Mitchell Technical Institutes). Huge value!

⑧ Growing the region is almost a higher priority than growing just this place!

⑨ Each one of us is an ambassador for our area every day!

Let's all keep on spreading the news!

**THERE'S
NO PLACE LIKE
HOME!**

Our area is growing with hundreds of new career opportunities in renewable energy, value-added agriculture, manufacturing, construction, financial services, healthcare, retail and more! Facebook your family and friends, share with them how your hometown is still growing! Your courage, heart and brains can take you a long way, but there's no place like home!



FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT ABERDEENS.D.COM OR CALL 800-874-9038.

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