

SOLAR POWER // NATIVE WIND // EMINENT DOMAIN // MILKWEED & MONARCHS // LOCAL FOOD CHALLENGE

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2015

Dakotafire

Plus:
EDUCATION,
ARTS & HISTORY
AMONG DRIVERS
FOR ELLENDALE

See page 21

SPARKING RURAL REVIVAL
ONE STORY AT A TIME.

PROMISING OUTLOOK FOR LOCAL ENERGY

**Powering up from locally owned sources
has potential to rev up rural communities.** Page 6

Dennis Williams shares the view from the top of a wind turbine tower
where he was doing maintenance. *Photo by Dennis Williams*

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Dakotafire is sparking a revival in rural communities of the Dakotas and beyond by encouraging conversations that help rural residents rethink what's happening and what's possible.

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Community & youth involvement

Correction: Congrats to the four readers who won the "spot the math error" contest in the July/August issue! OK, we didn't actually put in the error on purpose, though we wish we were that clever. In the "10 Things" article on p. 34, we used in the wrong label: One acre is 4,840 square yards, not square feet. To those who wrote in: Thanks for your close reading!



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FROM THE EDITOR



by HEIDI MARTTILA-LOSURE

Editor Heidi Marttila-Losure can be reached at heidi@dakotafire.net.

Side note: I enjoyed paging through *The Next Greatest Thing: 50 Years of Rural Electrification of America* as research for this article. I had a pleasant surprise as I reached the end of the book—someone had tucked in an article about the death

of the book's editor in 2009, and I recognized the name. Dick Pence grew up in Frederick! It truly is a small world.

The book's title, by the way, is based on a quote of a Tennessee farmer in the 1940s: "Brothers and sisters, I want to tell you this. The greatest thing on earth is to have the love of God in your heart, and the next greatest thing is to have electricity in your house."

Note to readers: Some of the stories in this issue deal with topics that may affect me personally—a transmission line is slated to go across land in which I have an ownership stake. As always, I have attempted to direct reporting so that we are looking at how these issues affect rural communities, but I wanted you to be aware of a potential conflict of interest.

People power

It's easy now—as I pause from this Saturday editorial writing to start a load of laundry, a task that would have taken my grandmother a morning at least—to think of the electrification of rural America as an inevitable step in the march of progress.

There was a time, however, when there was a stark divide: American cities and then even smaller regional hubs gained the power that lit them up at night, while small towns and farmsteads remained in the dark.

Farm families did their evening work by kerosene lamp. "If a family had so many children that they completely surrounded the one good lamp while studying, their mother could not do her sewing until they were finished. And outside the small circles of light, the rooms of a farmhouse were dark," according to *The Next Greatest Thing*, a book about the history of rural electrification.

It's even been suggested that the depopulation of rural places that gained momentum in the 1930s, spurred on by the dire economic straits of the Dust Bowl and Great Depression, was made worse by the electrification divide. The bright lights of the big city were a powerful lure for young people used to hard manual labor and bedtimes enforced by the setting sun.

If market forces had ruled the day, some rural places might still be without power. The 1935 creation of the Rural Electrification Administration, which was intended to start and supervise projects to get electricity to the more than 5 million rural homes that didn't have it, got the ball rolling. But when REA Administrator Morris Cooke asked private power companies for their plan in electrifying rural America, "Cooke was more than disappointed—he was outraged," according to the *Next Greatest* book. They would have built wires to those homes that were easy to reach and that were guaranteed to use a lot of electricity—about 247,000 of them. Millions of other farms weren't part of the plan.

Some rural folks saw what needed to be done: They'd have to take up the job of rural electrification themselves.

It was not easy work. Electricity was a new technology requiring new skills and knowledge, and getting it into rural places required

cooperation of landowners all along the route. It required a significant up-front investment of both money and labor. And many of the “powers that be” did not see the potential for success. For example, legislation to create the South Dakota Rural Electric Association failed in 1939, 1941, 1943 and 1945, finally passing in 1947.

“The idea of electrifying rural South Dakota was met with some apprehension—even hostility—not to mention a few chuckles and chortles echoing up and down the Capitol’s hallways,” according to Chuck Cecil in his book *Going the Extra Mile*. “Many legislators believed that farmers could never accomplish such a pipedream, this cockamamie idea envisioned by rural electric advocates in South Dakota. If electrifying rural South Dakota was possible and was such a good idea, they asked rhetorically, why hadn’t private power companies made it a priority?”

It might not have been a priority to the investor-owned power companies, but it was a clear priority to rural people, who came together to form cooperatives to bring electricity to their members. Farmwives were often the biggest advocates, seeing clearly how their lives would be improved by the wonders (electric irons! stoves! washing machines!) that their city sisters had had for years.

And (as I move my load of wash to the dryer, leaving it to do the work with the push of a button) we have the efforts of these cooperating,

“I was so taken with the concept of cooperation as the means by which the government and the people came together to accomplish the rural electrification ... It was so in keeping with the magnificent trait in the American character, to knit and band together in times of adversity in order to survive.

“Still, the REA people went beyond survival ... They truly brought and built something to and for themselves. ... They built these co-ops to stand as a statement of what they were capable of achieving under cooperative democratic principles.”

—Arthur Rothstein, photographer for the Office of War Information who captured the work of electric co-ops in 1942, as quoted in the book *The Next Greatest Thing*

forward-thinking citizens to thank for the relative ease of our life in the country.

Today, we face different energy challenges.

We are aware that much of our energy comes from sources that are in limited supply. And it is getting harder to deny that our use of energy from polluting sources is creating problems that our children are going to have to clean up. In some cases, the damage may be irreparable.

These are big problems. And most of the solutions that are proposed to them are similarly large. But I suggest that, like the farmers who brought electricity to the countryside, we should look to ourselves and our neighbors to find solutions that will work in our own places.

“The right local questions and answers will be the right global ones,” Wendell Berry wrote for *Atlantic* in 1991. “The Amish question ‘What will this do for our community?’ tends toward the right answer for the world.”

What kind of energy can we produce locally? Is it possible for local residents to own that energy production, so the energy is used, and any profit is made, and any costs are borne by the same people? Is it possible to do this cleanly, so we’re not making messes for someone else, somewhere else to clean up?

These are not easy questions. But I think facing them and working with our neighbors to find answers to them is the next step in the cooperative legacy of our forebears who once brought light to the countryside. *

Dakotafire coverage area and points of interest from this issue.



The 3D Lifesaver

Catching cancer at its earliest, most curable stage



Theresa Cameron, PA-C,
Family Medicine

Charlene Barrie knows her history. Her mother had breast and lung cancer before passing away in 2000, so Charlene has always made her health a top priority. Charlene typically has a mammogram each summer. But last year, it wasn't until December that she arrived at Sanford Aberdeen for a 3D mammogram.

"The 3D mammogram is so precise that it was able to pick up something a little questionable and I was called back for a diagnostic mammogram. Then I had an ultrasound and a biopsy," remembers Charlene. "And I'll never forget it. It was January 11 when I got the call I had cancer."

MAKING A PLAN

Charlene, at age 64, had a best-case scenario diagnosis. The lump was small and stage 1. She was referred to the Edith Sanford Breast Center in Sioux Falls, where she met with three breast specialists.

"When you are first told you have cancer, you get a lot of information," says Charlene. "And you think you are listening, but all you hear is 'cancer' and your brain shuts off. So when I met with the surgeons in Sioux Falls, I had a lot of questions. And they were amazing. I spent eight hours with those three and felt so much better about everything."

Charlene and her husband decided to proceed with a lumpectomy on her left breast. The surgery date was set, but as it came closer,

Charlene started having doubts. She called one of her surgeons, Jesse Dirksen, MD, and asked to have a double mastectomy instead.

"He was so supportive," says Charlene. "Dr. Dirksen and all of the other staff kept saying that this was my life, my health, my decision. They never tried to talk me into anything I didn't want to do."

SO THANKFUL

With the first surgery complete and a second happening later this summer, Charlene is feeling great. She occasionally meets with her oncologist Bongji Rudder, MD, for follow-up care in Aberdeen, and she has been incredibly happy with her decision. Now Charlene hopes her story will inspire others to regularly receive mammograms.

"If I had just waited until the next year, who knows how much the cancer would have grown?" says Charlene. "So please get your mammograms. It saved my life."

Call (605) 626-4350 to schedule
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The actual articles in the July/August 2015 issue of *Dakotafire*, minus the County Analysis centerfold, I found well-written, timely, and did a great job framing the importance and community benefits that small- to medium-locally-run-family farms bring to their communities.

I found the centerfold without a write-up confusing and irritating, because without context it's welcoming large corporate CAFO developments and supporting the larger corporate farming model that the entire magazine was critical of. Why take so much time writing community-building articles on small-to-medium farms and then put a center fold that obviously welcomes large industrial corporate ag?

There also should have been a critique on the parameters used in identifying these sites, because there are no environmental standards or socioeconomic considerations in the selection of these sites, just dollars and zoning setbacks.

—**Meghan Thoreau** (comment on *dakotafire.net*)

I've always enjoyed your magazine, but the two-page spread in the July/August issue on the County Site Analysis Program, without an article explaining it, disappointed me greatly.

One major flaw in the program is that it does not take into account neighborhoods and the potential effect on area residents. Because of the County Site Analysis Program, we have a 6,500-sow facility one-half mile from our front door. It will produce an estimated 144,000 baby pigs per year and over 1 million gallons of manure. It is not a family-owned facility; it is not purchasing its feed locally, it is not helping any local

farmers, and local contractors and materials were not used in the construction. The income from it will be going out of state, local family homes will decrease in value, and there's a threat of odor issues.

The Site Analysis program is not being used by local farmers to find sites for CAFOs; they know where they can build. It's being used by economic developers, and county and state officials to lure the "big boys" into our communities under the guise of economic development.

I feel that the County Site Analysis Program has done nothing to promote family farms or communities and would hope that a future issue covers the "other side."

—**Kathy Tyler**, *Big Stone City, S.D.*

From the editor: The main purpose of the map was to publicize (not promote) the program. If state and local governments are making a map saying "This is a good place for a CAFO," the public should know that now, and not learn it when a facility is in the works next door. Many other articles in the issue, especially the list of questions on p. 18, provided a starting point for determining whether a CAFO is good for the community. We hope those questions result in a conversation that includes accountability toward neighbors and local communities. We intend to continue to monitor the program and publicize its reports.

SEND US YOUR LETTER

Have something to add to our regional conversation? Send it to heidi@dakotafire.net, or mail to **Dakotafire Media, Letters, PO Box 603, Frederick, SD 57441**. Letters may be edited for length or clarity.





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Can we own our energy?

Experts say it's possible, and rural communities will benefit—if we can find the political will

by WENDY ROYSTON & HEIDI MARTTILA-LOSURE

When it comes to renewable energy, the Dakotas have the raw materials: A richness of sunlight falls on Dakota ground, and an abundance of wind roars across the Dakota landscape.

Lately, energy developers have started to take notice of the Dakotas' wealth. Wind development has increased significantly in the past decade in the Dakotas, pushing North Dakota up to 11th in the nation in installed wind capacity and South Dakota to 18th, according to the American Wind Energy Association.

Many of these new wind projects are big, both in size on the landscape and in the size of the deals that it took to build them. Large corporations, some of them based in other countries, pay landowners for the use of their land, pay property taxes to state coffers, and sometimes give some funding to local communities. The bulk of the profit, however, goes to wherever corporate headquarters is, and from there to wherever the shareholders are located.

But this isn't the only way to do renewable energy.

Some projects across the U.S. are being built using a different model: one in which the people with the resource are full partners in the project, the energy (or at least part of it) is used by those in the local

community, and the profit from the energy stays in the community.

Several renewable energy experts say that's the kind of project that can be a game changer for rural communities.

"I think it's very exciting times for rural America," said Dan Juhl, CEO of Juhl Energy Inc. in Woodstock, Minn. "Small communities in rural America (can) take advantage of this technology and really secure their long-term energy future instead of relying on something we know (is) bad. ... It could be a huge long-term economic value to the communities."

Changing national priorities

The release of President Obama's Clean Energy Plan in August made clear that fossil fuels are no longer considered the inevitable easy choice for the nation's energy. The plan proposes cutting carbon emissions 32 percent by 2030, compared to 2005 levels. Obama said he was motivated to act because of the potential devastating effects of climate change.

"This is one of those rare issues—because of its magnitude, because of its scope—that if we don't get it right, we might not be able to reverse, and we may not be able to adapt sufficiently. There is such a thing as being too late when it comes to climate change," he said Aug. 3, as quoted by CNBC.

Juhl said that the list of reasons for not using coal—which provides 79 percent of North Dakota's electricity, and 29 percent of South Dakota's, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration—includes more than just its carbon content.

"Obviously we needed (coal) for a time, to get through the Industrial Revolution. Hopefully, we've gotten smarter," he said. "We do know all these things are bad—it's carbon, which is climate change. Nitrogen, which is smog. It's sulfur, which is acid rain. And it's mercury, which is birth defects. And it's particulates, which causes lung cancer."

At the same time the sources for the nation's energy are being reconsidered, so is the way in which energy is distributed and owned, according to Greg Pahl, of Weybridge, Vt., author of *Power from the People: How to Organize, Finance and Launch Local Energy Projects*.

Until now, the system has been based on a centralized model—energy is transmitted from big sources of power (such as dams or coal-fired power plants) over long-distance lines to where the energy is used—"very large, capital-intensive projects," Pahl said. "That's pretty much what we have inherited. That model is beginning to change. There is a definite trend to ... distributed generation, which refers to much smaller-scale, more localized energy-generating projects."

These projects are based on a variety of energy sources, he said, including small hydroelectric projects, wind power, or—most often—solar.

And they are most often located in rural places, according to Dennis Williams, owner of Williams Power Systems in Baltic, S.D.

"Typically, we do not have the wind resource in huge, built-up, urban environments, and property is so expensive in those environments that we can't do large solar developments, so typically those kinds of projects get done more in rural areas," Williams said.

Dennis Williams captured this photo of an 80-foot blade while atop a 209-foot, 750-kilowatt wind turbine in northern Iowa. Inset: Williams Power Systems installed this 36-panel, 8.64-kilowatt solar array onto a barn. Photos courtesy Dennis Williams

Ownership could bring security

The positives for rural communities first start with eliminating the ongoing cost of inputs in traditional energy generation, Juhl said.

"If you own a renewable energy-generation facility outside of town, you can make power and deliver it to your town with no fuel, no emissions, no waste, no water, and no transmission requirements," Juhl said. "If you eliminate those things, you're going to get long-term, low-cost energy for a long, long time. That's a big value to these small communities."

Locally owned energy also means rural communities are more likely to keep the power on during weather events, according to Williams.

"Anytime there's a big storm, invariably, within the city of Sioux Falls, there are a couple thousand people who are without power" for at least a few hours, Williams said. For fully electric homes, that can mean the heat is out in the winter or the sump pump is out in a torrential rain.

In that kind of centralized system, rural areas are typically the last to get power, since electrical companies must triage their outage responses.

"They are able to get some grants and incentives based on their service factor—how many customers they have out of power and for how long," Williams said. So, in the event of an outage, "they're going to try to get a group of 100 up before they're going to get one person over here. When you're on the end of the line, you're the last one they're going to try to fix."

A local system, with less distance from the power source to the user, would be less likely to be affected by a downed line miles away. And if the system is run by the community it serves, fixing local outages won't compete for any other area for priority.

More money, more jobs

Studies have repeatedly found a greater financial benefit for local communities that own their own energy generation, compared to those whose energy resources are harvested by external companies, according to Juhl.

One of those studies was conducted by Arne

Kildegard of the University of Minnesota–Morris in 2010. The study found that community-owned wind generation had an economic impact for the state that was 3.1 to 4.5 times greater than if that wind generation was owned by a corporation from outside the community. The employment increase was 2.5 to 3.5 times greater in the community-owned model.

"All of us in rural communities spend money on power and energy," Juhl said. "And we write a check to the utility, it goes out to the mailbox, and that money's gone."

Most of it, anyway—Juhl did clarify that some employment can be local in any case.

New tech has changed the game

Many of the arguments against this kind of development are false or outdated, Juhl said.

"What do you do when the sun isn't shining and the wind's not blowing?" is a question Juhl has heard often. The answer to that is energy storage—store energy when the getting's good and use it when the source isn't available.

And that leads to another argument against a system based on renewables: Critics say adequate storage is a pipe dream. A decade ago, that was true, Juhl said. No longer.

"The technology has come leaps and bounds in the last few years," Juhl said, "and every day, it gets cheaper and more reliable."

The driving factor is demand for electric cars. Tesla, for example, is building what it's calling a "Gigafactory" aiming to produce batteries at significantly lower cost.

"You add storage to wind and solar, and you have firm power," Juhl said, meaning power that is available 24 hours per day. "That's really going to be a huge value to these small communities, because then they'll have ... long-term, cheap power that they can use to attract businesses into their town and keep those energy dollars in their community."

Projects already in place

A number of community-owned energy projects have been built in recent decades in other states.



"We've been active in Minnesota for many years," Juhl said. "We passed net metering in 1983, and built the first wind farm in the Midwest in Marshall."

The fact that Minnesota has no coal, oil or gas resources has spurred development of renewables.

Juhl's company has been building 5-megawatt projects using both solar and wind in three Minnesota towns: Audubon, Red Lake Falls and Frazee.

"We produce commercial energy that's delivered right into town, and the city actually owns the generation," Juhl said. "Whenever the thing is producing power, the city gets paid by the utility for the power it produces, and then a few nanoseconds later, (the city) buys the power back when they buy the power from the utility they just sold it to. Those energy dollars stay in the community."

Continued on page 8

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Pahl described a grass-roots effort to put together a commercial-scale project in his home region in Vermont that cost about \$600,000.

"A lot of it is borrowed money," Pahl said. "But the point is, it's possible."

The Vermont project is four years into its 10-year loans, and Pahl says the model is working—the system has produced more energy than expected most of the time.

People power is necessary, they say

Both Pahl and Juhl say that the real limiting factor to getting a community-owned project like this done is political will.

For example, utility companies typically put out bids for energy projects that are so large that no small community could gather the \$400 million needed to build one. If, instead, massive projects were divided into 5-megawatt projects, smaller communities would have a chance at them.

"It's still \$10 million for that, but that's a manageable chunk, and (there are) people out there that will fund (that size of project)," Juhl said.

There are other ways that legislators could make smaller projects more feasible, such as net metering (forcing utilities to buy energy produced on a small

scale) or tax adjustments, but "you have to have a legislator willing to stand up to the big utilities," Juhl said.

"If you have the technology and you have the commodity, you just have to have the political wherewithal to make it happen," Juhl said.

"That's what Minnesota did. It's starting to really bear its fruit now. We have a substantial amount of wind, substantial amount of solar, and we're getting more and more every day. And every time we do that, the energy dollars that we would normally spend and be gone, are staying in our communities."

Pahl suggests starting with finding grass-roots support—"a small group of local residents who support the project, who will act as the cheerleaders and the champions and will simply not give up," he said. "And when they are faced with the inevitable hurdles and problems that these projects invariably run into, they will figure out a way to get around whatever gets in their way."

"If you don't have that, you're probably wasting your time," Pahl said. "If you do, almost anything is possible." *



Program educates needed workers

"Energy scientists" is what they like to be called—these students who are attending the Lake Area Technical School's Energy Operations and Energy Technology classes. The program, which was developed at the request of the energy industry, teaches students how to monitor and control power, and how to isolate and identify problems in the energy production process.

Last year, students from the class visited the Clark Wind Farm as its 11 turbines were built.

Photo by Bill Krikac/Clark County Courier

Lakota look to energy source that honors Mother Earth

by WENDY ROYSTON

Unci Maka—or Mother Earth—is the giver of life in Lakota culture, so, naturally, protecting her is important to the Lakota people.

“If you harm the Earth, then you’re harming yourself,” said Lyle Jack, who was the development manager for the Oglala Sioux Tribe Office of Economic Development on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in western South Dakota until the department was defunded. “If the Earth is not doing well, then we cease to exist also. We’re all connected to each other. Whatever happens to Earth happens to us.”

A decade ago, the Oglala Sioux Tribe began exploring the idea of employing the sacred *tate topa*—“four winds”—to energize the Nation, both literally and figuratively.

The tribe has one energy department, the Renewable Energy Development Authority.

“It excludes any type of fossil fuels,” Jack said. “We want clean energy,” because “if you drill for oil, you cut into Mother Earth, and you harm her, and you also put out carbon, which hurts the atmosphere and the air that we breathe. It’s not meant to be used like that. Anything that harms Mother Earth is harmful to us.”

Pollution of waterways is particularly concerning to the native people, because “*mni wiconi*—water is life. Without water, nothing lives,” Jack said.

Joining forces increases momentum

For years, Lakota tribes across South Dakota worked separately to come up with a plan to harness the power of the wind to bring electricity to their people. And for years, they were met with the same roadblocks.

“Our projects were too small to attract investors,”

Jack said. “We had land, and we had plenty of wind, but we just kept running into financial problems and other obstacles.”

So they informally joined together as WETU, an acronym for Wind Energy Tribes United that also is the Lakota word for “spring.”

A few years ago, Jack met a Washington, D.C., attorney who suggested WETU combine resources and create a large, investor-attracting project. From that idea, the Oceti Sakowin Power Project was born. The project’s name means “the seven council fires of the Sioux Nation.” It’s the first of its kind, with the goal of creating a tribally owned power authority among the Crow Creek, Cheyenne River, Flandreau Santee, Oglala, Rosebud, Sisseton-Wahpeton, Standing Rock and Yankton Sioux tribes. The idea was presented at the 2013 Clinton Global Initiative.

“This is an amazing thing,” former President Bill Clinton said at that meeting, according to an article in *b*, a magazine published by the Bush Foundation. “If it works, there are a lot of other tribal lands and a lot of other tribes out there who will be able to take this and make their contribution to our country’s future.”

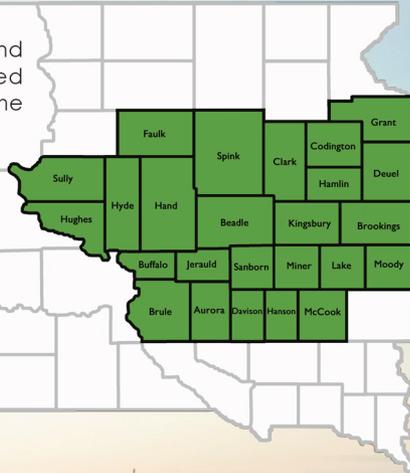


Members of the eight Lakota tribes met at the Crow Creek Indian Reservation in central South Dakota to negotiate the Oceti Sakowin Power Authority charter in November. *Courtesy photo*

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Wind is a gift found on 'the worst land'

In Lakota culture, all things are circular—everyone is connected.

“*Mitakuye oyasin*,” Jack said. “That means, ‘We are all related,’ and that means not just the humans, but all of the birds, the four-legged animals, the fish, the rocks, the trees, the plants. We’re all related, and we have to take care of each other, because we depend on one another.”

Within Lakota culture are varying levels of human relation, all circularly connected: the *tiwahe*, or immediate family; the *tiospaye*, or extended family; and the *oyate*, or all Lakota people.

“We need to take care of all of our surroundings, because what happens thousands of miles away still affects us. It’s all intertwined,” Jack said. “It’s a domino effect.”

Jack said the Lakota have found a unique opportunity.

“When they first started moving tribes to the reservations, they picked the worst land that they could find, with no resources or anything, and they pushed us there. Little did they know that these lands would be some of the windiest lands in the United States,” he said, quoting a fellow Lakota man. “It’s been a long, hard search, but I think we found” the silver lining.

Project could give new life to other endeavors

The Oceti Sakowin project aims to construct wind farms on each of the eight reservations in South Dakota, to bridle the roaring Dakota prairie winds that carry enough vigor—at least one

gigawatt worth—to energize all of the native land three times.

But Jack said the real “power” of this project does not lie within the massive amount of energy it is anticipated to produce.

“It’s to help us try to climb out of poverty and be in control of our own destiny, energy-wise,” he said.

The sale of energy from the wind farms is anticipated to create 75 permanent jobs, with an additional 500 jobs for construction of the project. Once revenues return to Oceti Sakowin and are divided among the tribes based on each one’s wind input to the project, each one will construct its own local wind farm.

“This one project isn’t going to pull us out (of poverty), but it’s going to give us the resources and the finances to create other projects and other economic opportunities,” Jack said.

To get started, the \$3 billion Oceti Sakowin Power Project needs \$15 million in seed money. Approximately \$1 million has been secured through grants from the Bush Foundation and the Northwest Area Foundation.

“Without that money, we wouldn’t have been able to get as far as we have,” Jack said, adding that the project is “getting close” to reaching its initial goal. “Once we get the \$15 million, that allows us to put our studies together, and then we can finally start issuing the municipal bonds that we need to raise” the remaining funds. *

Solarize SD aims to act, not just educate

by REBECCA FROEHLICH

South Dakota was once called “The Sunshine State.” The nickname fell out of use, but South Dakota’s sunniness has not changed.

This year, some activists are hoping to tap into the state’s clean energy potential with a grass-roots campaign called Solarize SD: Energy for a Brighter Future. The goal is not just raising awareness, but actually increasing renewable energy production by supporting projects for homeowners, renters, farmers, and ranchers throughout South Dakota.

Solar energy “is clean, efficient and sets us free from being captive consumers of nothing but fossil fuels,” said Barbara Sogn-Frank, Sioux Falls campaign leader of Solarize SD.

Information will be distributed at county fairs, farmers markets and community events, and through social media.

The campaign, which was created by members of Dakota Rural Action in partnership with GenPro, Eco Works SD, and Williams Power Systems, is issuing a call to action.

“There are a lot of people who would love to add solar energy production to their homes but who don’t know where to start, where to access it and how to afford it,” Sogn-Frank said.

Solarize SD helps people every step of the way, giving personalized guidance.

“We’ve set some concrete goals beyond the idea of getting the word out,” says Don Kelley, chairman of the board of directors for Dakota Rural Action.

Solarize SD will help South Dakotans replace at least 1,000 compact fluorescent and standard light bulbs with LED lights that use a fraction of the energy. The campaign will also help hundreds analyze their home energy use with trained “solar ambassadors.” A full consultation will include discussing the

feasibility of solar and wind technology for the individual, Kelley said.

“We also talk to folks about solar (water) heating with roof collectors and solar water pumps for farms and ranches,” he added.

The consultant examines the client’s recent utility bills to calculate the advantage of supplying some or all of their energy needs from renewable sources. Solarize SD aims to do 100 consultations, and to install partial solar energy sourcing for at least 15 individuals. Lastly, the campaign aims for eight individuals to install a full energy system in their home, farm or ranch.

Solar power doesn’t mean sacrificing comfort, homeowner says

Supplying a home’s energy solely through solar power may sound daunting and perhaps a little risky, but Don and Kim Kelley and have found it has worked well for them in their Nemo, S.D., home.

“My wife and I have lived in a totally solar-powered house for the past seven years that is off the grid. We live very comfortably and affordably,” Kelley explains. “To us, it seems that solar power energy has matured. It’s a reliable and appealing alternative.”

They were inspired to get their power from the

sun both out of principle and necessity. After living in a developing nation for several years, they came to appreciate the simpler and more environmentally friendly way of life. When they returned home and started homesteading a mile away from the nearest utility hookup, powering the house through their own solar energy made sense economically.

Solar could provide peak-hour power

Kelley sees many benefits for South Dakota communities if more homes are powered by solar energy.

“South Dakotans are increasingly aware that utilities are charging for peak rates of electricity use,” he explained. “Solar energy is most available at the same time of the day, so people with solar panels generate a lot locally, and the excess can be stored. If there were a good many solar customers in the neighborhood who had extra sun energy during peak times, it would make a cheaper source of electricity.”

Traditional utilities, in comparison, have to buy more power from the interstate grid during that peak time, or build peak plants powered by diesel generators or some other non-renewable source, either of

Continued on page 12



Don and Kim Kelley of Nemo, S.D., rely solely on solar for their home’s energy needs.
Courtesy photo



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Continued from page 11

which would increase prices.

In addition, much of the electricity used in rural communities has traveled a long distance. Many rural electric cooperatives source their energy from North Dakota. An average of 15 percent of the energy is lost in transportation across wires, Kelley said. A solar grid is also less susceptible to problems in adverse weather.

Supporters face political headwinds

Kelley acknowledges that there are obstacles to Solarize SD's vision.

"In South Dakota, it's hard to find installers of small solar panels and wind generators," Kelley said. "The ones that have come here tend to move out of state because adoption of technology is so much more rapid and popular with other states around us."

South Dakota is ranked 14th in the nation for solar power potential by Greener Energies. It ranks fourth for wind energy potential, but 18th for existing wind capacity.

In the United States, 43 out of 50 states have legislation that requires utilities to pay back the same rates to energy-producing customers, a practice known as net-metering. Three additional states have utility-based agreements in practice.

South Dakota is one of only four states that has no statewide agreement.

"South Dakota is behind the curve," Kelley said.

"We are underutilizing the resources we have here. By making it easier for people to install small-scale generating facilities, we'd benefit so much."

Dakota Rural Action has worked for three years to bring net-metering legislation to state sessions in Pierre, but it has not yet been successful.

"Legislators heard about solar energy from utility lobbyists long before us," Kelley said.

Sogn-Frank agreed that the biggest obstacles to access are political.

"Political resistance from South Dakota state legislators, the governor's office and the Public Utilities Commission stands in the way of opening up accessibility of distributed renewable energy," Sogn-Frank says. "They are heavily lobbied by fossil fuel, chemical and big agriculture corporations, and those lobbying efforts are quite successful here."

They also find that legislators think few people are in favor of small-scale renewable energy. Solarize SD aims to grow this group through the campaign.

"We want to light the fire, drum up interest, and get a few folks started with technology. We hope that word-of-mouth will help spread the advantages to others as well."

Dispelling misconceptions is also a goal.

"Quite a few folks feel it's unreliable or so expensive it's just for rich folks, but neither of these is really true," Kelley said.

People are hesitant to install a system that is unfamiliar to them, especially if it requires a large sum upfront. In other states, Kelley said, this initial cost can be mediated with payment arrangements in which solar companies act as a third party that installs the panels in a location, and then leases the equipment to the homeowner. Contracts can be structured to provide the same price for electricity for as long as 15 years. The steadiness in cost is attractive when compared to fluctuations in utility electricity prices over time.

Once installed, the system is easy to maintain, Kelley said.

"The only thing I have to do with my own is sweep snow off of it," he laughed. *

Those interested in an energy consultation through the Solarize SD campaign should email action@dakotarural.org or call 605-939-0527.

Are decades-old eminent domain laws still working?

by WENDY ROYSTON

At the heart of many disputes over new energy infrastructure projects in the Dakotas and elsewhere is the legal process of eminent domain—taking private land for the public good.

If energy created in one place is to be put to use in another, project developers have to build a connection in some way. And they often don't own the land between the two. Eminent domain is necessary to make the projects happen.

But as technologies, energy sources and ways of doing business have changed, the laws that govern eminent domain have remained basically the same.

"Some of these laws are 100 years old, when mining was a big deal in the Black Hills," and private entities could stake a claim on public grounds, said Sioux Falls attorney Mark Meierhenry, a self-proclaimed "land-owners' advocate" who served as South Dakota's attorney general in the 1970s and 1980s.

A law intended for the good of all

The concept of eminent domain has been around for centuries. It originated in feudal times, when the king or queen owned everything and granted permission to commoners to profit from the land for a pittance—or, in modern days, a tax.

The Magna Carta, signed 800 years ago, declared

that the English government could no longer take property from private citizens without payment. In the United States, that came to mean that the power of eminent domain could not be exercised without "just compensation," which Meierhenry said equates to "fair market value."

"The Revolutionary War was in part fought (because) the founders of our country believed very, very strongly in the fact that the government was there to help citizens, not to take their property," he said.

In modern America, eminent domain has been used to construct projects ranging from railways to interstate highways and electrical high-line wires to oil pipelines to water mains. In some of those cases—such as the interstate system—the projects have been government-funded and government-owned. For the most part, they were accepted, though not necessarily welcomed.

"Everybody recognized that the interstate highways are a very important part of our national infrastructure, but nobody wanted it to come through their farm," said Bill Taylor, an attorney from Sioux Falls, S.D., who has worked on both sides of eminent domain cases.

In other instances—such as electrical companies and water suppliers—the lines are privately owned, but pricing and regulation has been set by the public (through the Public Utilities Commission).

"Very few of us are going to quarrel to bring water to our neighbors," Meierhenry said, "or to get rural electric or telephone lines."

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Public projects don't always mean public use

When the people benefiting aren't neighbors—such as in the case of oil pipelines that merely run through states like South Dakota, carrying crude oil from Point A to Point B—the “public good” component is a bit foggier to some landowners.

“Generally a ‘public utility’ is open to the public,” Meierhenry said. “It’s clear that no one in South Dakota is going to use the pipeline.” But, under law, it is considered a “common carrier,” because it transports oil to a place where it can be accessed and used.

So, does a pipeline fit the definition of a “public utility” in South Dakota? Meierhenry argues that it does not, and so the right of eminent domain shouldn't apply.

“Pipelines are private, moneymaking operations,” he said. “Why should a landowner be forced to be partners with oil men or wind energy men? Shouldn't

we have free choice?”

Judges and juries have rarely seen it that way. Very few cases exist in which private landowners have successfully refuted the government's attempt at granting a project the right of eminent domain.

“As long as it's a public purpose, as defined by the (governing body), once they declare it's in the public interest to recover this property, the theory is that the ‘king,’ so to speak, still has the power to take it away,” Meierhenry said. “The citizen has no right to stop the government from doing it.”

The rules of eminent domain, he said, “favor the taker, not the landowner,” something that goes back to the original purpose of the laws.

“Historically, we were building roads and we were building public things that all of us could use,” he said. “So, the rules were set up so that the government really gets the land pretty cheap.”

But Meierhenry said there is a difference in granting use of one's land to the government for “just compensation” in order to build truly public

infrastructure, as compared to doing so for a private company to make a profit without the landowner receiving a piece of that profit.

“They underpay for the rights and they force South Dakotans to be partners in their business, but they don't get equal payment as a partner. You can't build a ... pipeline without land—yet they don't have to negotiate for (one of) the most valuable parts,” he said. “It's a three-legged stool. To build a pipeline, you need supply, you need demand, and you need a route.”

And only one of those legs has been cut short, according to Meierhenry.

“The pipeline people get market prices when it goes in, and the refiners pay market prices when it goes out, and yet we have allowed these pipeline companies to say to the landowners, ‘We're going to give you a pittance for your part of our moneymaking project,’”

he said. **“Our South Dakota legislature has stuck it to these landowners.”**

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The wrong people are getting the advantage of the power of the government."

Pipeline developers argue that, whether or not the project profits the companies, it is in the national interest to build pipelines to transport oil. Keystone XL developer TransCanada, for example, says on its website: "This pipeline is a critical infrastructure project for the energy security of the United States and for strengthening the American economy."

Without the power of eminent domain, Taylor said, "It's difficult to construct cross-country projects. One person in the middle ... can stop the whole project."

But just what makes a project "for the good of the public" and worthy of executing the power of eminent domain?

"You could look at it from the bigger picture. We need petroleum to run America. We all need it to run our cars," Meierhenry said. "Are these pipelines in

the public's best interest? As a nation, no doubt about it. As a state, I don't know."

Ongoing national debates suggest there is more doubt about whether pipelines are in the national interest than Meierhenry allows—for example, some in the Keystone XL opposition argue that it's in the long-term interest of the United States to keep that oil on the ground to prevent catastrophic climate change, or that U.S. groundwater shouldn't be risked to transport Canadian crude.

But, in the event that the national compelling interest is clear for all concerned, Taylor says the course of action is also clear.

If we are operating under the assumption that we are "one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all," the premise that national and state interests can conflict is false, according to Taylor.

"My view is that the good of the state and the nation are inseparable. ... There can never be a conflict between the best interest of the nation and the best interest of the state," he said.

"Individual interest has to give way to the greater good. Otherwise, we wouldn't have been able to build this great nation."

Still, Meierhenry said work must be done to make catering to the needs of the nation more palatable to landowners in the Dakotas.

"Am I landowners' advocate? You bet. Do I think our eminent domain laws are skewed in favor of big, out-of-state interests? Absolutely," he said. "We have very, very poor legislation controlling eminent domain. It should be revisited to protect South Dakota citizens, but right now, our legislature—urged on by lobbyists and energy interests—has permitted these private companies who are making fortunes using South Dakota landowners' property to use methods that in my mind should only be reserved for the government, where we all benefit from it." *



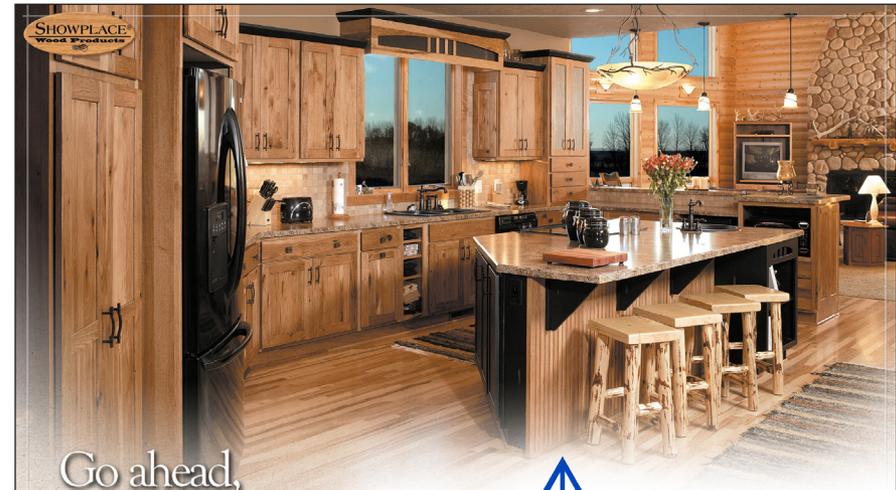
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Turbines in my neighborhood

by SARAH GACKLE

I have a picture from 2003 that I took in the middle of the day, from the side of the road about 3 miles outside Kulm, N.D. It seems to be a very mundane scene of pasture, but to me it was so breathtaking—I had to pull over. I just can't get enough of that endless horizon.

The year 2003 was a milestone in my life for a lot of reasons, one being that that summer, I made my first trip to Kulm alone. I'm originally from outside Dallas, Texas, but we have ties to Kulm. My family had visited many times, but this was a trip just for myself, to nourish something in me that only those flat, open spaces could feed. I couldn't wait to look toward the horizon without any limitation but my own sight failing, to watch a sunset that stretched miles and miles, from one edge of my peripheral vision to the other.

That summer marked the end of that landscape for Kulm. In the fall of 2003, building was complete on the first commercial wind farm in the state.

Those thin, white blades have been a strange thing to grow accustomed to. They look so fragile, like sticks a child could fasten together for a pinwheel. But the pinwheel stretches 328 feet tall at its highest reach, and, when all 41 turbines work together, they can power over 24,700 homes.

Florida Power and Light was the original owner of the farms. FPL is now a parent company of the current owner of the farm, NextEra Energy Resources. Resident Emery Lindgren remembers the community conversation when FPL visited Kulm to discuss the potential wind farm. He said generally the city was proud to host the farm and be part of this pioneering industry. Kulm was approached with the idea by Edgeley, N.D., a town about 15 miles east. They had the foresight to explore bringing a wind farm to the area, but after thorough site investigations, it was determined that the wind resource was much better to the west, in Kulm.

Some Kulm residents were leery of how the farm would affect the skyline. "There aren't many places left in the world that don't have the footprint of mankind on them," Lindgren said. But what finally hooked them was the amount of income for

landowners, a large number of initial jobs during construction, eventually becoming six to eight full time positions, and tax money for the local school and community.

The biggest community benefit has been through property tax income. Wind farms and energy plants have a reduced tax rate in order to encourage those types of businesses to locate in North Dakota. However, the amount FPL does pay still adds up to a lot for a town and a school system like Kulm's.

Last year, the Kulm School District passed a bond initiative to build a new high school. Tom Nitschke, superintendent at the time, found that approximately 15 percent of the new building would be funded by the wind tower payments—"by far, the biggest single payer," Nitschke said.

FPL also pays the communities for the part they played in bringing the farm to North Dakota. A percentage of income from the farms is sent annually to the cities of Edgeley, Kulm, and neighboring Ellendale. Some of that funding goes to economic development activities.

The final say on whether the farm was built was in the hands of the few landowners. Lowell Berntson has four towers on his land, and he said FPL was great to work with. "It all went so quickly and smoothly," said Berntson. "Construction was pretty crazy, but as

well organized as it could have been. They did a heck of a job."

The landowners signed a 25-year lease with FPL, with an option to renew. Lease payments are sent annually to individual farmers. Berntson said his one disappointment is that there hasn't been more development, especially since the company purchased many more leases when the original farm was built, with hopes of expansion.

NextEra said it would love to expand its 11 farms in North Dakota. The state has been very welcoming overall. Currently there is some concern over competition with other energy sources, but as the general trend continues to move toward cleaner energy, more wind farms are likely to follow. NextEra currently has three farms in South Dakota as well, and some legislative changes this year may enable the company to erect more farms there in the future.

Now, when I'm driving back from a long trip toward my home in Kulm, I can see for miles and miles, just the way I like it. All of a sudden, a group of skinny pinwheels comes into view, standing together like a herd of cattle, all facing into the wind.

I smile and think,
"I'm almost
home," and
head straight for
them. *

Wind turbines near Kulm, N.D., do their own kind of harvesting as a combine harvests below them. Photo by Jordan Gackle

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The milkweed puzzle

by MARY
LOSURE

Not long ago, I opened my back door in St. Paul, expecting a fine summer morning. Instead, the sky was as gray as November, the air so thick with smoke that it hurt my lungs. Toward evening, patches of blue returned to the sky and I went for a walk, but our quiet, leafy neighborhood still smelled like burning tires.

I had known there were wildfires in Saskatchewan, but that was more than 900 miles away. Now, suddenly, here was an environmental problem that wouldn't stay in the distance. Instead it came home to my neighborhood, my life.

After that, I began giving more thought to what might seem a small thing: the monarch butterfly.

Milkweed grows in ditches
in the Dakotas.

Photo by Don Lasure

As many people know, monarchs are in trouble. Milkweed is the only food monarch caterpillars can eat. But in recent years, the widespread spraying of herbicides on herbicide-resistant corn and soybeans has virtually eliminated milkweed from farm fields, one of the main places it used to grow. Monarch populations have taken an alarming dive: The monarch is now being considered for the endangered species list.

I tend to look at Facebook to avoid reading depressing environmental news, and recently I've noticed how many people in my little cyberworld are starting to raise monarchs by hand. One friend put a charming picture of soon-to-be-released butterflies on his Facebook page. Another friend who has been raising monarchs for years says it "gives her joy." For her, it's a way to try to leave the world a little more beautiful for her grandchildren.

Nobody thinks raising butterflies by hand will save the monarch, of course. But it does

show the great good will that many people, especially in urban areas, feel toward the gaudy and cheerful-looking creatures they're accustomed to seeing in their gardens. "It's gotten right down to where backyard animals are in trouble," says Deb Wallwork, an independent filmmaker working on a film about monarchs.

Wallwork was spurred to action after reading an article in *The New York Times* warning that millions of monarchs that once migrated between the Midwest and Mexico may someday be only a memory (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/24/sunday-review/the-year-the-monarch-didnt-appear.html>). Now, she's been interviewing people in rural areas about efforts to plant more milkweed and other wildflowers (monarchs also need wildflowers for nectar to feed on during their migration) on so-called "marginal" land—roadsides, hunting land, and conservation reserve programs.

An ambitious federal proposal

calls for planting milkweed in a 200-mile swath on either side of Interstate 35, along the monarch's north/south migration corridor. But to me, there's something depressing about this kind of industrial-style megaplan. I can't help imagining monarchs fluttering helplessly in the air currents from whooshing semitrucks. I picture orange-and-black wings splattered on windshields. I also suspect that huge environmental proposals like this may be easier to put on paper than to implement.

Not long ago, I was walking along a gravel road in South Dakota, admiring the patches of milkweed that grew here and there in the ditches. The plants were in full bloom, yet some of the flower heads were nodding as though they had been newly sprayed. And it occurred to me: Why not begin here? There are thousands of miles of quiet country roads in the Midwest.

Are there ways that township boards or county commissioners who oversee those roadsides could cut back on spraying or mowing? Could they manage roadsides in ways that

would encourage the growth of more milkweed and other wildflowers? (Wildflowers also benefit bees, which in their role as pollinators are critical to the farm economy.)

Could the immense good will that urban people feel toward monarchs be directed in any way toward working with farmers? You've heard of Community Supported Agriculture, or CSA, programs. What about milkweed preserves? What if a group of urban people went together to fund acres of milkweed instead of vegetables?

For several generations, hunters (many of whom live in the city) have supported organizations to preserve habitat for pheasants, ducks and other wildlife. You've heard of Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever. What about Monarchs Unlimited? Monarchs Forever?

I've recently learned that just this summer, Pheasants Forever announced a plan to give grants to Minnesota youth community organizations to plant wildflowers. "Habitat necessary for rapidly declining populations of honey

bees and monarch butterflies is also the very same diverse grassland and prairie flower habitat necessary for pheasants, quail and a host of other wildlife species," the Pheasants Forever announcement reads. "Likewise, the insects produced in this habitat are the primary food source for pheasant chicks during their first months of life."

Saving the monarch will be like putting together a large and complicated jigsaw puzzle. There is no big, easy solution, but maybe it wouldn't be hard to start putting some small pieces in place right now.

And I can't help hoping that if both urban and rural people can work together to save butterflies, there might be ways that we can work together to solve other problems as well.

Mary Losure is a former environmental reporter who now writes books for children (learn more at marylosure.com). She is also (in case you wondered) related to Heidi Marttila-Losure, who is married to Mary's son, Dave.



David LaRochelle of White Bear Lake, Minn., hatched out nine monarchs this spring in this enclosure made with netting and tinker toys. Courtesy photo

YOUR TURN What do you think about a plan to connect urban and rural folks to help the monarchs? Add your voice at forum.dakotafire.net.

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Ellendale

A small town with big-city aspirations

story and photos by WENDY ROYSTON

From art to technology to education to religion to sports, there's opportunity around every corner in Ellendale, N.D.

"Ellendale combines the best of small cities everywhere," resident Ken Schmierer said of "the gateway to North Dakota."

Despite offering the culture of communities exponentially larger, Schmierer, a Dakotafire and Dickey County Leader contributor, listed a lack of traffic jams, noise and crime among its attributes.

The town of just under 1,400, situated five miles from the South Dakota border on U.S. Highway 281, offers "life on a greater scale," he said—a claim the community feels confident enough about making that it has put it on banners on Main Street.

According to locals, the border means little in defining "community" in the Ellendale area.

"I don't think people pay a lot of attention to the state line," said Starion Financial Market President Aaron Tschosik, whose family moved to town 11 years ago. "We have a lot of customers in South Dakota, and you'll find Frederick (S.D.) and Ellendale people do a lot of things together."

Seeing beyond geographical borders is key, according to the town's leaders.

"To start a business here, you have to look beyond Ellendale," Brenda Johnston, owner of Harvest Gardens, said. "I think people get an attitude ... that 'it's just Ellendale.' It is Ellendale, but a lot of people go through Ellendale."

And the fact that Ellendale is home to a small college makes its citizenry "fluid." "They move in and they move out," Johnston said. "Ellendale is a place of opportunity."

'The Million-Dollar Miracle'

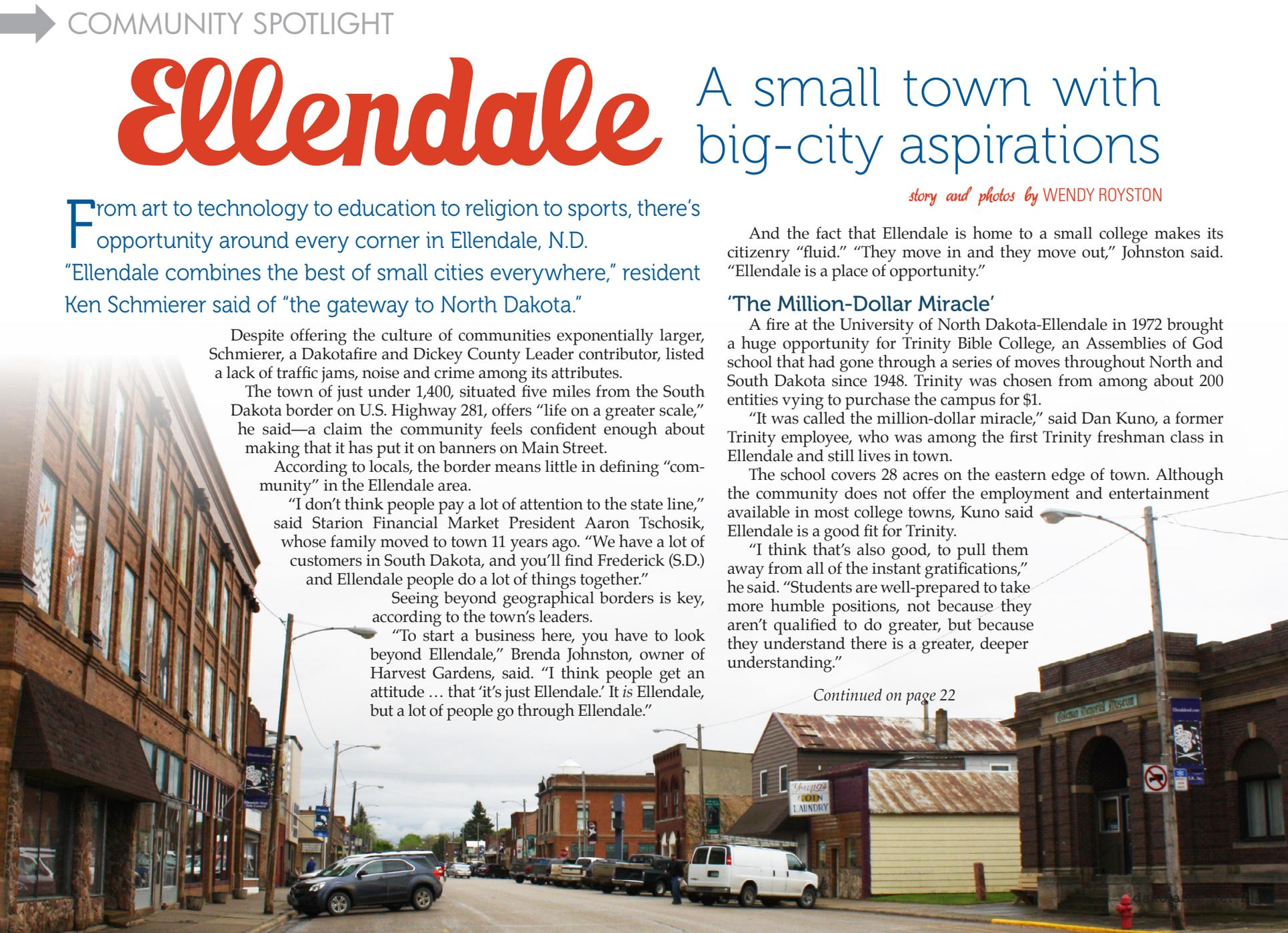
A fire at the University of North Dakota-Ellendale in 1972 brought a huge opportunity for Trinity Bible College, an Assemblies of God school that had gone through a series of moves throughout North and South Dakota since 1948. Trinity was chosen from among about 200 entities vying to purchase the campus for \$1.

"It was called the million-dollar miracle," said Dan Kuno, a former Trinity employee, who was among the first Trinity freshman class in Ellendale and still lives in town.

The school covers 28 acres on the eastern edge of town. Although the community does not offer the employment and entertainment available in most college towns, Kuno said Ellendale is a good fit for Trinity.

"I think that's also good, to pull them away from all of the instant gratifications," he said. "Students are well-prepared to take more humble positions, not because they aren't qualified to do greater, but because they understand there is a greater, deeper understanding."

Continued on page 22



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Dan Kuno (left), a former Trinity Bible College employee who also was among the school's first freshmen class on the Ellendale class in 1872, and President Paul Alexander stand in front of the new prayers chapel.



Continued from page 21

Ellendale's relative safety is a big marketing piece for Trinity, whose 225 students come from all over the nation and beyond.

"Some of these kids have never been in a safe community," Kuno said, adding that many institutions could have thrived there. "If you have the mind to adapt, you'll make it."

Ellendale has adapted to the economic opportunities Trinity brings over the years, as well.

"It's a hand-in-glove type of fit here, as we look at the college in a rural setting," with the fiscal impact on the community more obvious in a small town, according to Kuno.

Roots in Ellendale

For Jim and Brenda Johnston, roots took hold in the North Dakota soil quickly. They moved to town with a four-year plan to find their way apart from family in Wisconsin while Jim attended Trinity. Two decades after his graduation, they proudly call Ellendale home.

"It's totally outside my idea of how life was supposed to be," Brenda said.

The summer after his 1996 graduation, Jim worked as a groundskeeper for his alma mater. He and a friend planted sunflowers throughout the campus, and Brenda suggested he look into renting a local greenhouse to start a new hobby. An April blizzard in 1997 destroyed his crops, but Jim was committed to the project.

"He said we'd just replant seeds and they'd grow," Brenda said, "and sure enough, they did."

Harvest Gardens sells a variety of trees, bushes, flowers, plants and fresh produce, along with hanging baskets, gardening supplies and various gifts. Brenda credits the success of the plants to a secret passed down by another Johnston gardener.

"We plant them and water them, but God makes them grow," Brenda said. "Jim's mom was a woman of prayer, and she would always pray over the plants and for the people who would get them—that the plants would be a blessing to them."

This year, the plants weren't the only things growing at Harvest Gardens. With the help of the Ellendale Job Development Authority and other

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Brenda and Jim Johnston, owners of Harvest Gardens, said they set down roots quickly in Ellendale, N.D.

local agencies, the business opened its 18th season in a new building at the same location. And, although the original inventory has remained largely unchanged, the business has expanded its services with an ice cream shop and small eatery—a good fit, according to Brenda.

“The women come in to shop, and the guys and kids go in and have ice cream,” she said.

The Johnstons say Ellendale is a good fit for retail.

“The people from Ellendale support us, but ... we just draw people from all over the place,” Brenda said.

And their inventory isn’t the only draw.

“People who don’t even know him will come in” just to get Jim’s regional fishing report, Brenda said.

Strength in numbers

Earlier this year, the city of Ellendale, the Job Development Authority (JDA), the Chamber of Commerce and other community organizations joined together to create a strategic planning committee.

Previously, “everybody knew what

their responsibilities were, and they just kind of focused on the responsibilities at hand,” Tschosik said, rather than “looking at how we could all help each other get to the goal.”

Now, each group is represented at a quarterly meeting to discuss issues affecting the community, “to get everybody on the same page,” he said.

Such an orchestration can mean the difference in a community’s fate, according to Kuno.

“If you can keep that focus in front of you, there are no barriers. There are challenges, but there are no barriers,” he said.

The JDA “fills a gap” for financing new businesses and business expansions for the good of Ellendale. Recently, a large community day care center closed, and one of its employees opened a new in-home facility.

“Day cares are really hard to finance through a bank. They generally just don’t make a lot of money,” Tschosik said, but are vital to the success of a community, “so we’re helping get that up and running.”

Continued on page 24



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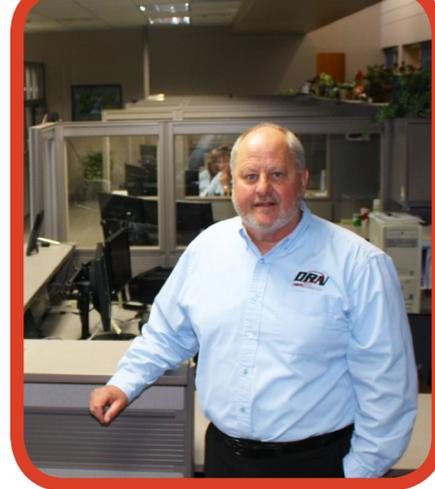
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Bob Johnson credits Dickey Rural Network with keeping Ellendale connected to the rest of the world.



But some of the recent progress in town has struck a nerve. Four old buildings, including the 1909 Nodak Hotel building at the corner of Highway 281 and Main Street, were demolished late last year.

"The one that was probably the most controversial of all of them," Tschosik said, but "it was just beyond repair, so I understand the feelings. People get emotional—but sometimes you've got to do what's necessary."

Now, the town is reimagining its possibilities.

"I think some of those bare spots maybe don't look that great, but it's kind of like having a blank canvas if you're a painter," Tschosik said.

Finding a home for growth

Recently, Ellendale has been redefined with the return of several younger-generation adults taking over family businesses and farming operations. And the real estate market is struggling to accommodate.

"Home prices are escalating so fast. Once one gets on the market, it goes," Ellendale Public School Superintendent Jeff Fastnacht said.

Recently, Fastnacht heard at the local coffee shop

that a house was coming for sale just after offering a job to a new teacher. He inquired about it, and it sold within a week.

"That middle-size family home is just gone," Fastnacht said.

"Move-in-ready homes are rare," Tschosik agreed.

Contractors have discussed building spec homes to sell, but they've said it is not profitable, and new construction is difficult for private parties, too.

"When you build a home, when that home is appraised, a lot of times it appraises for less than the price of construction, so you have to make up that equity in cash," Tschosik said.

Bob Johnson, general manager of Dickey Rural Networks, said moving to Ellendale from Fargo two years ago was "tough." He and his wife purchased a "fixer-upper" in town and do miss some of the conveniences of the city life.

"Without a doubt, there are some trade-offs," he said, "but if you live in a location for the right reasons, you can make anything work. ... People are really plugged in in town, because people know you really have to be involved to make things happen."

Building on a fiber network

DRN has helped keep the community plugged into the world, too. Three years after its completion, residents in town still are quick to point out DRN was the first telecommunications provider in North Dakota to bring fiber optic Internet, telephone and cable to all of its subscribers—a resource Johnson said keeps Ellendale competitive in the world marketplace.

"It connects rural America to the world," he said. "People with creativity can actually make some extra



Aaron Tschosik of Starion Financial said Ellendale is an easy place to start a business.

income on the farm.”

And quality telecom services are important in the heart of Ellendale, too, he said.

“It’s important that the service is there, and the speed is there, so that we don’t hold up opportunities for our Main Street businesses,” he said. “Be it hospitals, be it schools, be it Main Street businesses—all of them have the fiber and the capability to pass data back and forth.”

Conversation ongoing between school, community

Fastnacht doesn’t think his role as school superintendent requires him to stay inside school walls. Before a 2011 vote on a school building project, he spent some time at the coffee shop each morning, answering voter questions and sharing the school board’s plans. His community outreach is credited with the success of the \$5 million project, which built a new athletic facility and renovated the elementary school.

“People who would maybe be the

followers of the information” could become involved in the conversation, he said. “I do think that helped,” but he said the community itself passed the project.

“This school, this community had wanted a new athletic facility for a long time,” he said. “When you’ve got two varsity teams needing a gym, and two junior high teams needing a gym and an elementary team needing a gym at one time ... it’s busy.”

The project was an “easy sell” in the midst of holding junior high basketball practices as early as 6:30 a.m.

The plunging stock market actually helped spur the project along, according to Fastnacht.

“Once it hit the paper that you had \$5.1 million of interest-free money, that was a slam dunk,” he said, and it received the go-ahead from 80 percent of voters.

Last year, the school was faced with a unique problem that led to a different sort of expansion. Between the start of

Continued on page 26



Ellendale Public Schools Superintendent Jeff Fastnacht stands in the gym, which was constructed alongside a complete elementary school remodel in 2012. The high school was built in 1997, and a new track was built last year.



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A photograph of a family of four—a mother, a father, and two young girls—sitting on a large log in a field. They are all smiling and holding up hats. The background shows a scenic landscape with hills and a blue sky.

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Continued from page 25

the school year and Christmas break, enrollment grew by 32 students, and a vast majority were third-graders. The class started with 18 students, and ended the year with 29—an increase of 61 percent. By Christmas break, a second section of the grade was needed.

Some alternative classrooms were rearranged, and a certified teacher's aide took on her first teaching job to fill the void.

In the upper grades, the school is integrating the concept of "koinonia," by which "families" are created among peers.

"Tests aren't everything," Fastnacht said. "They should have never been everything. Building relationships with our kids—and our kids with our adults—is very important."

The "families" are composed of students in grades seven through 12, to help the younger members see the light at the end of the tunnel.

"Middle school is not fun. It's awful," he said. "There's a level of maturity seniors tend to get that year, and pass it on to these younger kids that it'll get better."

Bringing urban recreation to rural setting

Jami Eberle was raised 20 miles from Ellendale before moving to Las Vegas and Denver. She and her significant other returned to Ellendale six years ago and brought big city-style educational opportunities back with them.

Although Eberle's company, JEBERLECO, is located in a historic Main Street building, its presence is felt throughout the community, with fitness classes in the park and at the lake, and painting parties in private homes. Cooking classes, yoga classes, art exhibits,

Members of OPERA, Inc., have overseen nearly \$275,000 in renovations to the historic Opera House since 2002.

concerts and other events are held at the studio.

"It's not too often in Ellendale that you're going to get sushi, so we are bringing some outside culture into the small-town area," Eberle said. "If somebody asks for something and we think of a way to facilitate that happening there, we just kind of run with it."

Eberle said it is her hope that people in Ellendale will give some of her events a try, and that people of various interests will begin to commingle in other areas of town as well.

"People go out and support the events that are sort of within their interest group, and it's hard to break into any of the other groups and suggest" that they can enjoy each other's hobbies, she said. "Come out and try something new. Change is OK! If you don't like it, you don't have to come back. ... People seem sort of resistant to change in general."

Eberle said she is happy to be home—at least for now.

"I don't know if I will live in Ellendale for the rest of my life, but for a long time to come, given that we have just bought a house and have kids," she said. "We really enjoy it. We can still vacation to the big city."

Rebuilding a piece of history

Just off of Highway 281, community revival efforts are showcased in the historic Ellendale Opera House.

"They probably never actually had an opera," said Jeanette Robb-Ruenz, president of the Organization of People in Ellendale for the Restoration of the Arts, or OPERA, Inc. "It was more or less a community center for all different events."

The building housed its first event in 1909, and fell into disrepair sometime in the 1970s.



"There was a time that historic buildings were not 'the thing,'" Robb-Ruenz said. "I want this building restored, so it's usable to the community again—businesses on the main level, like there always were, the auditorium fully restored—usable all year round, for anything and everything. There's no end, I guess, to what things could happen in here."

An eight-member board of directors oversees projects that mostly are completed by local volunteers.

"We wanted to make this lobby, as we call it, as historic to the Opera House as we could," so hours were spent carefully removing, stripping and refinishing as much of the original wood floor as possible. Additional flooring was purchased to match as closely as possible. Since it was finished prior to the community's 125th celebration in 2007, "this room is used almost continually for something."

The roof and back wall have been upgraded, and work continues on the 1,000-seat auditorium upstairs.

"It's fun to have things upstairs when we can, so people can see what shape it's in," Robb-Ruenz said. "The acoustics in this place are phenomenal. That's what made this place so great."

So far, projects at the Opera House have totaled nearly \$275,000.

"We're continually fundraising. We have to be, in order to keep up with our projects and maintain what we've got," Robb-Ruenz said. "You've got to preserve your community's history." *

JEBERLECO sponsors a variety of arts and culture activities in and around Ellendale including yoga (left) and painting (right) classes.





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Café participants say ag education is missing

by DOUG CARD,
BRITTON JOURNAL and LANGFORD BUGLE

A group of about 25 people gathered in Langford on Aug. 3 to talk about ways to help strengthen the ties between agriculture and area communities.

The occasion was the latest Dakotafire Café, a series of events intended to spark community and regional conversations about topics covered in the bimonthly *Dakotafire*

magazine that appears in *The Britton Journal*, *Langford Bugle*, and other regional newspapers. A meal sponsored by the Langford Community Foundation and GrowSD was served by The Front Porch.

"Most of our small towns have a place where locals gather to solve the world's problems over a cup of coffee," said Heidi Marttila-Losure, publisher and editor of the magazine. "These events are intended to bring that spirit of problem-solving conversations to the issues that affect our communities. We want to get the conversation moving beyond the pages of the magazine."

The discussion during Monday's meeting centered on the question, "How can communities help to

create better agriculture, and how can agriculture help to create better communities?"

"There are two basic ideas," said Marttila-Losure. "Dakotafire communities exist because of agriculture. (And) what unites us all is that we care about rural communities and want them to survive."

District 1 State Sen. Jason Frerichs, a farmer from Wilmot, addressed the group, which was then broken into smaller groups for discussion. Frerichs noted that he sees examples of people wanting to connect with their rural roots and that rural matters are important in South Dakota. He also stressed the importance of keeping young people involved in agriculture and rural communities.

"Young people don't want things given to them, but they want a chance," said Frerichs. "We need to be sure to help them connect to that rural way of life and be proud of it."

When attendees broke up into small groups, they discussed a series of questions. They included what was important regarding agriculture and its relationship to community; what stands out about how ag and communities impact each other; what beliefs and assumptions, if challenged, could open new possibilities for both agriculture and community to make the other



better; and what people and organizations could do differently to help communities make agriculture better and agriculture to make community better.

Groups shared ideas that were discussed and opportunity, education and effective communication were hot topics.

There was consensus that opportunities are available for young people, but educational opportunities may be lacking. Currently, neither Britton-Hecla nor Langford Area schools offer agriculture classes.

It was also emphasized that one solution doesn't cover every community, but a lot of communities face the same struggles. Most agreed that agriculture and communities work pretty well together, but there is also a disconnect that could be improved by more effective education.

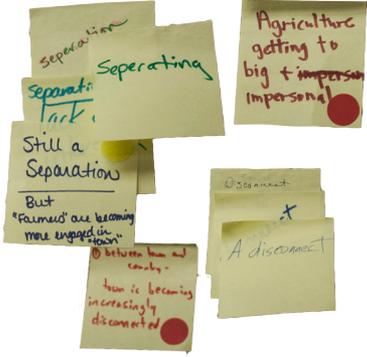
Attendees were asked to write down one action they would take as a result of the discussion to wrap up the Dakotafire Café, and Langford resident Paula Jensen of GrowSD, who assisted as a facilitator for the event, congratulated those in attendance.

"You have shown that you are a courageous leader in your community by taking part in this conversation," said Jensen.

Dakotafire Café participants gathered in the new Front Porch restaurant in Langford to discuss agriculture and community connections. Photo by Heidi Marttila-Losure



What are you noticing about the connection between ag and community where you live?



What assumptions, if challenged, could open new possibilities for both ag and communities to make the other better?



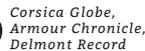
What new ways of doing things would help agriculture and communities to make each other better?



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AG & COMMUNITY COMMUNITY RESPONSE

What was in the magazine again?

- The size of farms makes a difference in rural communities.
- Fewer people are calling themselves “farmers,” perhaps because the work has changed, or perhaps because of some stigma to being “just” a farmer.
- Prairie Idea Exchange participants came up with a variety of ways in which communities and agriculture could better connect, including changing meeting times to accommodate farm schedules, requiring ag education in K-12 schools, spending locally, and encouraging value-added industries.
- Asking developers questions about how ag projects will affect communities can yield better projects in the end.
- Value-added industries can help agriculture make a positive impact on rural communities.
- Food hubs can help local food efforts get to a more efficient scale; discussions to start them are underway in the Dakotas.

Miss the issue? Want to share it?

Find all the stories at dakotafire.net.

The Prairie Idea Exchange project has four parts: 1) a gathering of economic development professionals; 2) reporting in *Dakotafire* magazine; 3) community input—online, on postcards, on our forum page (www.pie4.us), and in person at a Dakotafire Café event, 4) and with a final report in the magazine that reflects the feedback.

Here’s what we learned on the topic of agriculture and communities.

FROM WWW.PIE4.US AND THE DAKOTAFIRE CAFÉ IN LANGFORD:

What are you noticing about the connection between ag and community where you live?

“Large farms DO contribute and help small communities thrive. Large farmers and their hired help live in the small towns, shop in the small towns, partake in community celebrations, send kids to the local school, attend school events and attend local churches. The large farmer may purchase in bulk, but it is from the local co-ops in several communities. This helps keep jobs in local communities and helps the co-ops prosper and pay dividends which go back into the local communities. The large farmer delivers grain to the local elevators, ethanol plants and soybean plants, having the same results in the local communities as the purchases have.”
—*imafarmer*

I feel the biggest need for better connection between ag and communities is:

“Effective communication and research.” —*Vicki Voorhees, Lake City*

“Effective communication.” —*Roger Voorhees, Lake City*

“I feel a huge problem with communication.” —*Café participant*

I pledge to become involved or take action by:

“Try to come up with a plan for more opportunities for people to come tour.” —*Café participant*

“Keep taking steps to get ag back in the school.” —*Warren Symens, Amherst*

“Getting a group together to discuss the future of our country and community.” —*Vicki Voorhees, Lake City*

“Starting a conversation with Britton business leaders.” —*Roger Voorhees, Lake City*

“Try to be more educated.” —*Café participant*

“Support local organizations, get involved in community organizations and volunteer more.” —*D. Nelson, Langford*

“Promoting agriculture to youth.” —*Matt Nelson, Langford*

Want to add your own ideas?

The conversation continues at www.pie4.us.

See how lo(cal) you can go

It's time to check what's in your garden, and what's ready at the farmers market—and maybe even give a warm reception to that co-worker who keeps bringing in zucchini.

The Dakota Local Food Challenge starts Saturday, Sept. 12, and runs through Friday, Sept. 25.

The challenge is a way for people in the Dakotas to get better connected to the land and the people who produce their food by eating food produced locally for two weeks. Participants

will log the local food they eat during the challenge, and then mail or email that log to Dakotafire at the end of the two weeks.

The purpose of the challenge is partly educational—what food is easily available locally (zucchini comes to mind)? What is hard to locate? What might you have to go without for two weeks, if you're going hardcore?

But it's also meant to be fun. And there is a prize: All those who send in a completed log get an "I WENT LOCAL" T-shirt.

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How do you define "local"?

Determining that is perhaps the hardest part of the challenge! Some people define it as food produced within 100 miles of their home; others give the radius as 250 miles.

Is sweet corn from Minnesota local? Probably not; there's plenty of sweet corn available locally. Is

milk from Minnesota local? Maybe; it's tough to find a local source for dairy. However, there are other considerations besides just distance—the fewer changes of hands the product has between the farmer and you, the better.

Questions about how to define "local"—and anything else you want to know about the challenge—can be asked by commenting at the Dakotafire Café Conversations page, or emailing golocal@dakotafire.net.

Ready to sign up? Go to www.dakotafire.net/golocal.



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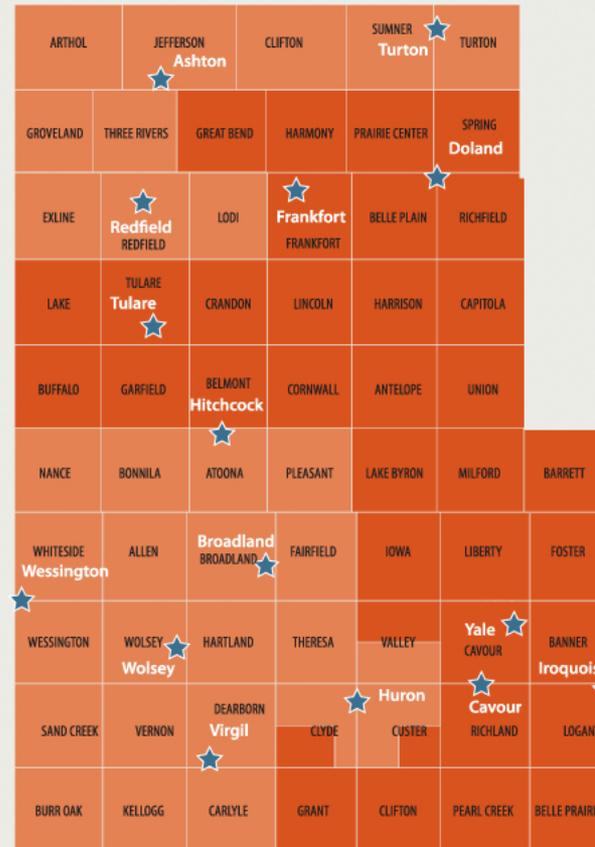


BEADLE AND SPINK ENTERPRISE COMMUNITY

Since 1995, the Beadle and Spink Enterprise Community, Inc. (BASEC) has been helping individuals and business owners open the doors to their dreams through business and home loans, as well as community development assistance.

Headquartered in Doland, SD, BASEC serves the believers of tomorrow in Beadle and Spink Counties.

Contact us if we can help you!



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→ PERSPECTIVE

"Nature and its inhabitants fuel my creative process. I attempt to weave together personal narratives with observations of my everyday world."

—Jay Hopkins

This piece, titled "Summer Colors," is currently on display at the Granary Rural Cultural Center in rural Groton. It's part of the Granary Harvest of Arts, a juried fine art show featuring artists from the Dakotas.

The closing reception for the event is Sunday, Sept. 27. The Granary is open to the public from 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday until the end of September. A Living History Festival will be held at the Granary Saturday, Sept. 12. Learn more at brown.sd.us/granary.

"Perspective" shares a unique viewpoint of life in the Dakotas through photography or art. Are you a photographer or artist who would like to submit an image for consideration? See details at dakotafire.net/perspective.



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