

Northwest Kansas needs more jobs

While the state centralizes offices and pulls state jobs out of rural Kansas, thousands of people are leaving for cities or other states to find jobs.

Our population decline is not the state's fault, at least not most of it.

Rural populations have been on a slide since the turn of the century. Since Cyrus McCormick invented the reaper, better equipment, seed and farming practices have boosted productivity every year.

That has meant fewer farmers and fewer farm jobs nearly every year. And while the government has spent billions to "keep farmers on the land," it's spent millions for research and land-grant universities to accelerate the trend.

If you count jobs saved or farmers kept on the land, the money has been mostly wasted. Our population continues to decline, and the government at best has bought people a few more years. You can't blame the state for that.

You can blame the state, though, for a lack of commitment to rural towns. At best the state has a split personality: taking jobs away on one hand, promising to help out of the other side of its mouth.

So just what can the state do? Sen. Stan Clark, before his death in May, was pushing to move state jobs out into rural areas.

Economic development experts keep saying that with modern communications, including the Internet, there is no reason why work has to be done in any one central location.

People work from home, in airports, on trains, wherever they can plug in their computers.

So instead of using telecommunications to centralize state work in big towns, why not farm it out to rural areas that really need the jobs?

This is no wild-eyed dream. Rural Kansas is full of old schools and other buildings that could house a state agency or two. Except for top executives, most state work could be done by "branch offices." They'd be as centralized and efficient as the agency cared to make them.

They just wouldn't be in Topeka.

Sen. Clark thought that instead of building a new state office building in Topeka, the state should spread the jobs around.

This would take some commitment from the state. For one thing, many current state workers would not want to move to rural areas. The state would have to hire many new people to fill jobs it "outsourced" to rural areas.

However, there is no need to pay Kansas City wages in northwest Kansas. People here would work for a reasonable amount.

Supervisors might have to come from Topeka at first. Someone would be willing to step up and move here for a promotion.

There isn't much that happens in a state office that couldn't be done out here. There is plenty of space. When the Herndon school is closed, for instance, the state could put an office complex there, drawing workers from surrounding towns.

The state, which always promises rural economic development, would be putting its jobs where its mouth is. It might cost a little, but it would be far better than having Medicaid calls answered in India or driver's licenses made in Washington.

And it just might start a trend that would make rural Kansas much more valuable to the state. It just might work.

— Steve Haynes

WRITE:

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We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise.

We do not publish form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

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THE NORTON TELEGRAM

ISSN 1063-701X

215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, KS 67654

Published each Wednesday and Friday by Haynes Publishing Co., 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, Kan. 67654. Periodicals mail postage paid at Norton, Kan. 67654.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Norton Telegram, Norton, Kan. 67654. Official newspaper of Norton and Norton County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, and the Nebraska Press Association.

Nor'West Newspapers

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Publishers, 1970-2002
Incorporating the Norton County Champion
Marion R. Krehbiel, editor

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Chicks and apple pies... what a week

If Chantelle is mother to these baby chicks, then I guess that makes me their great-grandmother.

We noticed cracks in the eggs last Wednesday morning. By that evening, four fuzzy little chicks were wobbling around the incubator and there were cracks in three more eggs.

That left five eggs. And, even though we gave them the same treatment as the others, nothing happened. We let them set a couple of extra days, but still nothing. But we thought seven out of a dozen isn't too bad of a return on our first attempt at hatching chicks.

It wasn't long before Chantelle had each one named. I guess the names she had assigned to the eggs didn't match the chicks after she got to "know" them. We have Scarlett and Alexis, plus others I can't recall, but Chantelle knows and can identify them on sight.

Chantelle and Angela's mom came to pick up the girls over the weekend. I think it was as hard for them to leave the chicks

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



as it was for them to leave us.

—ob—

Last Monday morning, my kitchen looked like a pie factory. I baked three apple pies so I could have three chances of a good one to enter at the Norton County Fair.

There seemed to be something wrong with each one, but I took the best of the lot and headed out.

I was stunned when I learned that entry day was the following day, so my co-workers benefited from that attempt. They voted their samples blue ribbon good.

After all, I wanted to enter a really fresh, just-out-of-the-oven pie. I resigned myself to the fact that I would have to bake again the next morning.

Problems beset me from the beginning, though. First, I overslept. There wouldn't be enough time to make more than one pie. That, in a way, was a good thing, because I discovered I had enough apples and crust for only one pie. Now, all my hopes were pinned on this particular pie.

Maybe I tried too hard, I don't know. But, truthfully, that pie did not turn out as good as the ones the day before.

The juices split the crust at the edge and bubbled over, the crust browned a little too much, and, for some reason, the filling just wasn't quite as good as the previous day. The judge gave it a red, and quite frankly, that's what it deserved. Sure, good enough for family, but it wasn't the quality product I had wanted.

But as Scarlett (O'Hara, not the aforementioned chick) would say, "Fiddle dee dee. Tomorrow is another day."

Another high school reunion visited

I had decided a couple of weeks ago I would not be writing about the Norton Community High School reunion that was held July 24 because I had previously written about reunions.

However, when I visited with so many wonderful people, it's hard not to talk about it, so just a few remarks. Three hundred people attended the Saturday banquet. Many others attended only functions that their class held on Friday and Saturday.

Several of us "crashed" the 1949 reunion hamburger feed on Friday. It was delightful. They said that 28 in the class have celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary and several more will be celebrating 50 years in the next year or so. What a record.

Phil Young, class of 1954, showed a small part of his model train collection at the public library on Friday afternoon. His class had about 70 people in town for the weekend and lots of them showed up for the demonstration.

Several of the classes met, hosted by the class of 1949, at the library on Saturday afternoon.

I was talking to Jack Whistler and his wife, Norma Jean Glenn Whistler and Jack told a story of how he and his brother Bill had wanted a dog when they were young boys.

Their mother was a patient at the tuberculosis hospital and their Dad said they could not have a dog. Jack said that someone who worked at the power plant with his Dad brought them a little Boston Terrier named "Punky".

The person who gave them the dog was my grandfather Sim Sleffel, who worked with Mr. Whistler.

Punky was my aunt's dog and in about 1942 she and her husband moved from WaKeeney to Wichita to begin to work in the Boeing Aircraft Co. and thought they could not take their dog with them.

Well, my story of Punky and her companion "Bunny" was that when my aunt lived in WaKeeney and my family would

Memories Sonya Montgomery



visit, the dogs, being terriers, were so friendly, they loved to lick your face.

My sister and I were young and only liked so much of that. When my sister and I wanted to get away from the dogs, we would stand on the floor furnace, where the dogs would not venture. They would stand and bark until Aunt Alice would come talk to them and tell them to go lay down.

My sister and I loved those little dogs and I think my aunt took Bunny, who was older, with her to Wichita.

Children need time to grieve for a lost pet

Dear Plain Sense: Our 9-year-old daughter lost her constant companion of six years, a lovable collie mix. Friends have advised us to get another dog to help her get over the loss. We don't know what to do and want to help our daughter deal with her loss.

Do not be in a hurry to replace the deceased pet with another pet. Replacing the pet too soon might result in the new animal being ignored or not taken care of properly. Allow your daughter and the rest of the family time to grieve.

Encourage your daughter to talk and cry over her loss. It's also okay for the parent to cry with the child if they feel sad. When she talks about her sorrow at her loss, listen so that healing can begin for her. Allow her to have a memorial for her pet or be involved in the burial if this is possible. These rituals allow for some healing to occur.

At 9, the irreversibility of death becomes real to children and they should be

Jack told me that Punky lived for 20 years.

Vernon Heitman from Norton told me after the banquet that all four of his children, who graduated from Norton Community High, were in attendance at the reunion, as was Betty his wife, and her sister, who married Bill Teaford, a 1951 graduate.

They had a family reunion as well as a school reunion. After children leave home, sometimes it's difficult to get them all together at the same time.

If you have not regularly attended a class or entire high school alumni get together, you are missing a wonderful opportunity.

Many schools have alumni associations and several people have volunteered (we will need more) to meet and discuss the possibility of that for Norton Community High School alumni.

High Plains Mental Health

Cora Lee Pfannenstiel, R.N.

told the truth about the death and allowed to talk about their pet. Distress over the loss of a beloved animal is normal and healthy and the child will benefit from the openness and caring of family and friends.

A person cannot run away from the pain of a close loss whether it is a person or a pet. Just because children do not react as overtly as adults, or communicate directly by words, does not mean they aren't experiencing strong reactions inside. Not infrequently, the loss of a pet is the first significant loss the child will have experienced. The effects of this loss, and how parents or other caregivers handle the loss can have a strong influence on how a child deals with losses when they are older.