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On The Grow

Group Explores Economic Opportunities For Gayville, Volin

BY LORETTA SORENSEN
P&D Correspondent

Is there economic potential in Gayville and Volin?

That's a question local group is working to answer.

Volin community resident Chuck Fleming, a liaison between the exploratory group and a Gayville-Volin steering committee, said the group's efforts have already uncovered some interesting facts about both rural communities.

"This group grew out of the Horizons project that's involved both Gayville and Volin for several months," Fleming said. "One of the first goals that came out of the Horizons activities was developing a list of businesses in the two communities. It was surprising to most of us to learn that there are about 85 businesses between the two towns. Many of those are home-based, but they're legitimate businesses that many residents of the communities weren't aware existed."

Development of the business directory is underway and that committee is exploring the options for producing either an online or hard copy business directory that will help local residents and surrounding communities identify services they need. The steering committee Fleming works with is also considering how to bring people from surrounding communities as well as tourists to the area.

"We've been in contact with some other rural South Dakota communities who went through a process similar to what we're doing," Fleming said. "Gregory, Kimball and Montrose have all implemented this type of investigative effort and found that it resulted in a lot more business activity in the community. Montrose residents said the entire Horizons project did wonders for their town."

As part of their effort to attract new business to the Gayville and Volin area, the steering committee has organized a business course presented by South Dakota State University Business Management Extension Specialist Dr. Larry Swain that will begin in April. The course is a six-week session and participants meet one time per week throughout the six week period.

"Dr. Swain has developed 16 of his own businesses," Fleming said. "He's helped more than a thousand small businesses in the United States and on several Native American reservations. His business plans have been used in 26 different countries around the world."

The goal of the business course is to provide direction for existing businesses that are interested in expanding what they're doing. It's also intended to assist community residents who have an idea for a new business.

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"The course will give existing businesses ideas about how they can grow what they're doing," Fleming said. "Those with ideas about new business will learn how to develop a successful business plan. The course is just finishing in Gregory and it'll be offered in Kimball before it starts here."

Fleming notes that the foundation the Horizons Project established by gathering

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CHUCK FLEMING

information about Gayville and Volin has been the first step in building ongoing support for exploring community resources and encouraging business development.

"One of our goals is to determine if there's an ongoing need for the support and services you'd find in a Chamber of Commerce," Fleming said. "What we're doing may just be a one-time deal, but if we see enough need for supporting our businesses we'll explore how we can continue to do that."

Fleming, whose family is new to the Volin community, said he didn't bring a lot of experience to the steering committee he's working with. He feels his greatest contribution has been time and energy.

"I've never done anything like this before," he said. "When we first heard about the Horizons Project, my wife and I thought it would be a good way to get to know people in the community. I grew up in a small town, so I have an interest in seeing communities like Volin and Gayville survive and grow. I know that takes effort and only happens when the community sets specific goals they can work toward."

In his own hometown, Fleming saw significant growth begin with the addition of five new homes, which

represented a 10 percent residential growth.

"That didn't seem like much at first, but it wasn't too many years before 25 more new homes were built in the community," he said. "That led to the construction of a new school, which fueled more growth. People began to look at that town and say there must be something valuable in that community if the residents want a new school."

As with many small communities, Fleming said Gayville and Volin struggle to find enough people who are willing to serve as leaders in community development. One bonus for the small towns is that the majority of residents see the value of having both communities work together.

"We share a school, so we really need to work together to see our towns grow and develop," Fleming said. "We're working to find people who are willing to take on a leadership role for three years, training someone to take their place while they serve in that role. We have a lot of people who want to help, but some are hesitant to step out as leaders. We're hoping more people recognize the need for their service."

Fleming added that exploring the need for expanding existing business and implementing new businesses is just one facet of the activities that have grown out of the efforts Gayville and Volin residents are undertaking.

"The goal of the Horizons Project is to reduce poverty in a community," Fleming said. "Poverty doesn't just involve money, it's also found in lack of resources and communication and many other things. Looking at the economics of a community is important, but there are many other things that make a community valuable. We're searching to find those things in our communities."

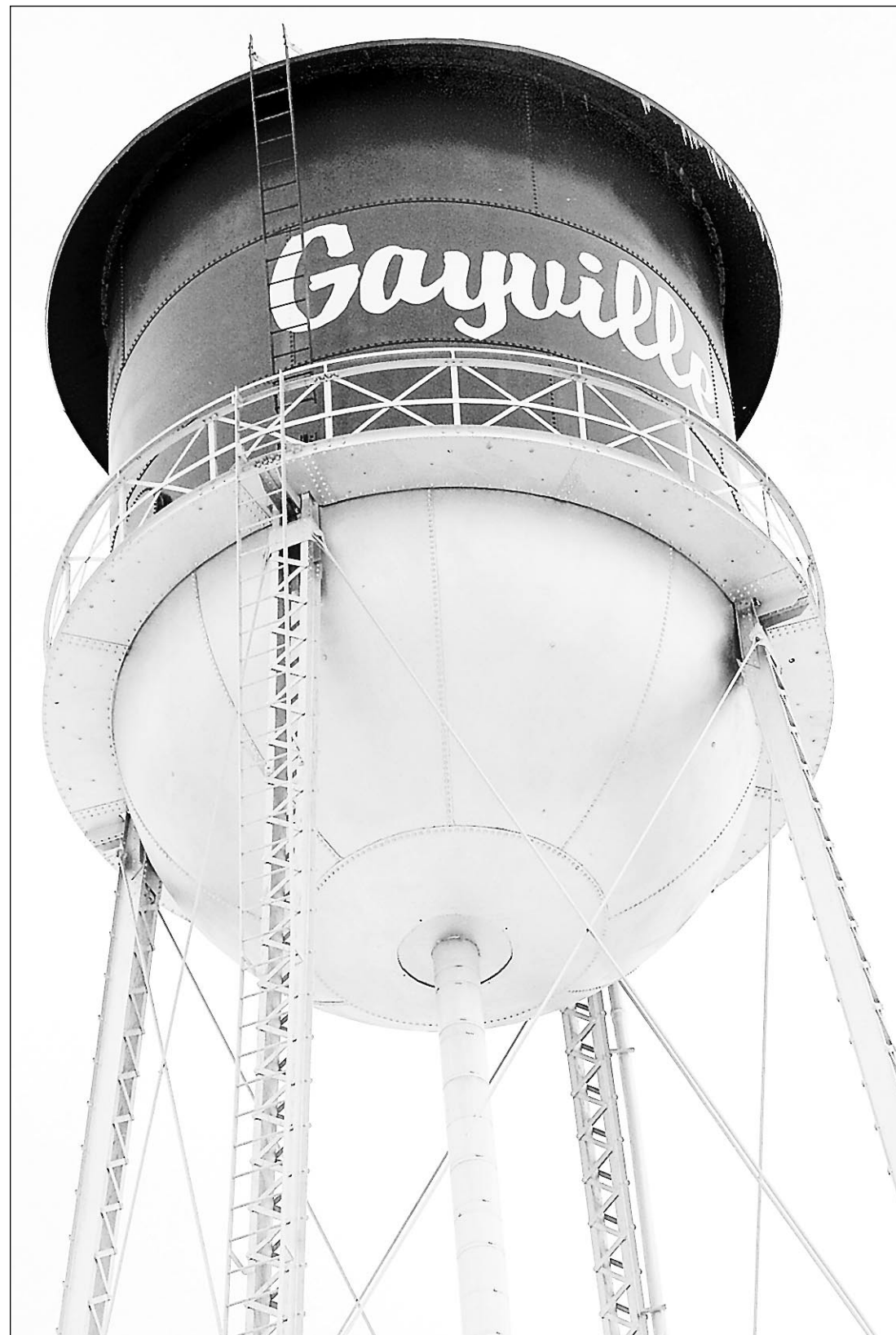


PHOTO: LORETTA SORENSEN

Gayville and Volin residents are exploring the possibilities for business development in their communities. Their activities originated in the Horizons Project that they undertook in 2009 to make overall improvements to both rural communities.



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