Holdrege Grad Earns Top Award at FFA Convention

The future of ag looks promising in Phelps County as a Holdrege High School graduate was selected as this year's American Star Farmer at the National FFA Convention in Indianapolis.

Grady Johnson was selected as the 2021 Star Farmer 30



Grady Johnson

years after his father, Blake, won the award. The American Star Farmer is awarded to the FFA member who demonstrates the top production

agriculture SAE (Supervised Agricultural Experience) in the nation.

Johnson had been involved in the Holdrege High School FFA program since his freshman year and won the Nebraska Star Farmer award in 2018. Each state is allowed one candidate for the American Star Farmer award each year. Johnson and his records were competing against the best of the best from each state.

He is currently a senior studying agriculture economics at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He plans to graduate in May and return to Phelps County to farm.





An 8,000-head cattle expansion at Phelps County Feeders will bring 10 new jobs to Phelps County in 2022. (Courtesy)

County's Cattle Population Grows With Phelps Co. Feeders Expansion

Phelps County Feeders recently began an expansion project that will add 8,000 cattle and will bring 10 new employees to the county.

After the 2021 harvest, Phelps County Feeders began moving dirt for the project, which includes adding 40-50 pens of cattle on about 65 acres. It will increase its cattle on feed from 42,000 to 50,000. A new loading dock and processing dock will also be built at the business's main feedlot at 73938 J Road. It also has a "west" feed yard north of Bertrand.

This is good news for area farmers as the feedlot will need more crops to feed the variety of cattle raised at the business.

Phelps County Feeders raises its own cattle and also feeds cattle

for clients across the United States and Canada. The feed yard is often at maximum capacity with its clients and needs more space.

Phelps County Feeders co-owner Dale Klute said he believes the decrease in family-owned farms and ranches has created a need for expanded pen space in commercial yards. Also, the demand for beef has increased nationwide. According to AgWeb, consumer and wholesale beef demand have hit a 30-year high despite record beef prices.

Nebraska Star Beef

The feedlot is owned by the Dale and Shawna Klute family and the Tony Mayes family. They also operate Nebraska Star Beef, a direct-to-consumer beef products business that has also grown in the

past several years. Phelps County Feeders raises and supplies the all-natural and conventional beef for Nebraska Star Beef.

Kayla Pfister, a partner in Nebraska Star Beef, said that only a small percentage of cattle go to Nebraska Star Beef. The rest of Phelps County Feeders cattle are sold to various packing facilities around the Midwest, depending on the end-use. The business raises a variety of cattle including conventional cattle, Piedmontese, Wagyu and many others. Each breed is on a different feeding program and is shipped to a different end-user.

Pfister said the 2020 pandemic shutdown created a unique

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PCDC inducted two businesses and an individual into its Business Hall of Fame at its annual banquet in late October. Roger Allmand (right), BD (top left) and Glion Electric Scooters/Robert McCormick and partners (bottom left).

Harrel Chosen as PCDC President's Priceless Pick

Mark Harrel has been selected as the Phelps County Development Corporation's 2020 President's Priceless Pick.



Mark Harrel

The award is given annually to someone who has gone above and beyond the call of duty in economic development.

PCDC President
Phil Hinrichs selected
Harrel for his leadership
and vision in economic
development work the
past year.

"He has been a good

advocate for us," Hinrichs said. "And his involvement has been critical to some of the projects PCDC has been working on."

Harrel has served as the CEO of Phelps Memorial Health Center since 2007. He's led several hospital expansion projects, and PMHC has been recognized as a top critical-access hospital by The Chartis Center for Rural Health for five years in a row.

The hospital provides hundreds of well-paying jobs. Gallup named PMHC an Exceptional Workplace for the second consecutive year in 2021.

Under Harrel's leadership, the hospital

expanded its capacity to serve the area by bringing in new doctors, services and visiting specialists thus improving the quality of life for the region's residents. He and his leadership team, including Loren Shroder, CFO, were instrumental in creating RuralMED, a diversified provider of home health and medical management services.

"Having a great hospital in a community is a key to its success and growth," Hinrichs said. "Mark's leadership has made our community a better and safer place to live and has improved our efforts to attract and retain businesses."

PMHC also received the Huron Excellence in Healthcare Award in 2021, and Harrel was named the 2017 CEO of the Year & Best Overall Performance for Critical Access Hospitals by Quorum Health Resources.

Harrel's leadership has also guided the creation of Adjacent Properties LLC, which is investing in community improvement projects, such as residential property and the renovation of the Sun Theater, with more projects in the planning stages.

"Mark has been a quiet community leader on many important economic development projects," Hinrichs said. "We appreciate his guidance and his passion for community betterment in Phelps County. His contributions are indeed, priceless."

PCDC Celebrates \$1 Million Campaign

Investors have pledged more than \$1 million to help GROW 37 by supporting the work of the Phelps County Development Corporation over the next five years.

More than 100 investors pledged to support PCDC's work from 2022 to 2026 as part of the GROW37 Partnership Campaign.

"We are grateful to all of our investors for their confidence in PCDC and their generous financial support to help create a vibrant local economy," PCDC Executive Director Ron Tillery said.

The campaign, which started in early 2021 and wrapped up at the end of the year, is part of the funding mechanism for an aggressive five-year strategic plan that focuses on four key areas:

Recruit Targeted Industries: Make Iron Horse Business & Industry Park shovel ready, attract new businesses and manufacturers, provide grants for new franchises, continue a retail recruitment partnership.

Support Current Businesses: Assist in workforce recruitment and training, continue

high-demand jobs scholarships, support DREAM grants.

Improve the Quality of Life: Complete the new CREW subdivision, create more workforce housing, build an attractive events center, recruit restaurants and retailers, create thriving downtowns.

Create a Strong Brand: Expand PCDC communication lists, be a leader in economic development circles.

While LB840 sales tax funds support PCDC's projects, the investor funds pay for administrative expenses so that sales tax funds can be funneled directly to programs for local economic development.

Before launching the campaign, PCDC conducted a feasibility study to gauge investor confidence in the organization. Of the 30 investors interviewed, 99 percent rated PCDC's image as good or very good, and 100 percent rated the local economy as good or very good.

Investors said that "PCDC is supportive and

drives innovation in the community" and "adds energy to the community."

When potential investors were asked about their dreams for the community, answers included more restaurants and clothing stores, added manufacturing, a more visually vibrant community, a vibrant downtown with more retail, added retail in general, quality affordable housing, an event center, an expanded CCC campus, completed baseball complex, and a hike/bike trail.

Interviewees were also asked to share major issues facing Phelps County. Challenges listed included workforce recruitment, lack of affordable housing, increasing construction costs, vacant downtown buildings, and lack of IT services as remote working grows in popularity.

PCDC conducted similar campaigns in 2011 and 2016, which both resulted in approximately \$1 million in investor funds as well. However, PCDC drove down 2021 campaign expenses to less than a third of the previous campaigns by using local resources.

Phelps County Feeders Expansion

continued from page 1

opportunity for Nebraska Star Beef, and the company reached the \$3 million sales mark for the first time that year. Its most popular products are ribeye steaks and ground beef. And, Californians, are feasting on Phelps County-raised beef as it was the most popular shipping destination for Nebraska Star Beef products in 2020.

"With the pandemic, we were able to supply a lot of ground beef," Pfister said. "We got some good reviews and positive feedback. They were able to try our product, and demand continues to grow through word of mouth."

Nebraska Star Beef is also eyeing an expansion in the coming year as it needs more freezer space.

In addition to all-natural beef products, Nebraska Star Beef also produces Lucky Brand beef jerky and seasonings that are also shipped to consumers across the United States.

The family also owns Angus Burgers & Shakes in Kearney and Gretna and Joy's Table in Kearney and provides all of the beef and steak for all three restaurants.

Pfister said Nebraska Star Beef and Phelps County Feeders employ 50 people

between the two companies.

"We are pretty thankful for the crew we have," she said. "Several have been with us for a long time."

With the expansion, they will need to hire 10 more employees, including pen riders, feed-truck drivers and processing workers.

Weather permitting, they are hoping the project will be complete by late spring or early summer of 2022.

Pfister said a few of the reasons Nebraska Star Beef and Phelps County Feeders have been successful are due to their great customer service and their family-centered operations.

"We care about the service we provide, and we try to make sure we provide good customer service to our clients. We care about what we do. The family aspect of it helps, too."

In addition to Pfister and her parents (Dale and Shawna), other family members in the business include Kayla's four brothers (Joe, Derek, Chandler, Todd), a sister (Kelsey), two sisters-in-law (Becky and Katie), a cousin (Steve) and an uncle (Dan).

To learn more, visit the website at www. nebraskastarbeef.com.





Phelps County Feeders supplies beef for Nebraska Star Beef, a direct-to-consumer beef products business. Its Lucky Brand beef jerky and ribeye steaks and ground beef have been growing in popularity around the U.S.

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RECRUITING QUALITY TALENT

Applications Due Feb. 15 for HD Jobs Scholarships

Applications are due Feb. 15 for Phelps County high-demand jobs scholarships.

The High-Demand Jobs Scholarships are part of PCDC's efforts to create a quality local workforce.

Scholarship winners must sign a contract stating their intention to return to Phelps County and work for a certain amount of time after their higher education. The scholarships are funded through LB840 sales tax funds, private donors and matching funds from the Phelps County Community Foundation.

The scholarships are intended to encourage graduating seniors and non-traditional students to pursue work in local high-demand jobs: nursing, agri-business and technology positions, auto and diesel mechanics, engineer technologists, mechatronics engineers, injection mold technicians, electro-mechanical technologists, machinists, tool and die makers, construction trades, welders and commercial truck drivers.

In the eight years the scholarships have been offered, \$200,500 has been awarded to more than 77 students.

Applications are available at www. phelpsfoundation.org.



Creative Solutions

Thirteen students participated in the first semester of a dual-credit automotive tech class offered at Janssen Auto. Four other students are registered for the second year of the program, which is designed to encourage local students to consider careers in automotive technology. The class is a partnership between Janssen Auto, CCC, HPS and PCDC. PCDC is paying the tuition.



Scholarship Recipent Opens Automotive Shop



Colter Edgren opened Edgren Automotive at 1119 4th Ave. in Holdrege. He is pictured here with his wife, Stephanie.

A former PCDC high-demand jobs scholarship recipient has opened an automotive repair business in Holdrege.

Colter Edgren was among the second group of students to receive the scholarships in 2015. Now, at age 25, he has opened Edgren Automotive at 1119 Fourth Ave. in a building he is leasing from CHS.

He performs all major automotive repairs, including brakes, transmissions, engines and air-conditioners in addition to doing suspension work, oil changes and checking engine lights. He works on cars, SUVs, pickup trucks and vans.

"It's different every day," Colter said. "I just like fixing things. I always have. It just makes me feel good when I get something fixed. I

like knowing how things work."

After graduating from Holdrege High School, Colter earned a degree in general automotive at Southeast Community College in Milford. He then worked at a local automotive business for five years before launching his business on Nov. 17, 2021.

PCDC assisted Edgren to start the business by granting him a GO! DREAM signage grant and a GO! BUSINESS facility build-out grant.

Edgren Automotive is open from 8 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and can be reached at (308) 248-0101 or edgrenautomotive@gmail.com.

For more information on PCDC business grants, visit www.phelpscountyne.com.

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If You Can Work From Anywhere, Live Here

Typically, families move to a new town because of a job opportunity. But, recently several families chose to live in Phelps County and brought their jobs with them or are creating opportunities here. They are enjoying the advantages of living in a small town, which include a healthy work-life balance and a sense of community. A small portion of their stories are included here. To read their entire stories, please visit phelpscountyne. com/inthenews.

Jason & Michelle Mcnierney

Michelle Mel Mcnierney and her husband, Jason, stumbled upon Bertand when they took an RV trip to escape the COVID restrictions in Denver. They loved the community so much that they bought a house there and moved their family.

"The people in Bertrand are super nice and helpful," Mcnierney said. "They want to do things together like play bingo together and play golf together. It just has that sense of community."

Michelle, who is a certified yoga teacher and life coach, started teaching yoga at the Don Sjogren Community YMCA in Holdrege and is renovating a building in downtown Bertrand where she will open a yoga studio with the help of PCDC grants.

PCDC has awarded \$22,000 in GO! DREAM and other grants to help fund a new roof, purchase a new sign and replace gutters and windows on the 100-plus-year-old building. Jason Mcnierney with AP Roofing will do the work on the project.

"We just figured we needed to do something to support the community and be in the community, too," she said. "My youngest is almost two so we are going to be here a while."

Jack and Amanda Krause

Amanda Krause is a Phelps County native, but it was her husband, Jack, who most wanted to settle down in Holdrege.

"Every time I came to visit to see where my wife grew up, I kind of fell in love with the place," Jack said. "This place is almost like a time capsule. It keeps traditional family values. Everyone is friendly and kind."

As a child, Jack lived in about every state. Jack and Amanda both served in the military, so the moving continued throughout their early years of marriage. They most recently lived in Las Vegas.

Jack is now medically retired from the military (Army Rangers), while Amanda recently finished her service with the Air Force. While they could have lived anywhere, they chose Holdrege. They purchased their first house this fall just a







Above left: Jack and Amanda Krause. Above right: Jason, Aspen, Autumn and River Mcnierney. Bottom left: Shane, Jennifer and Brecklynn Warren. Bottom right: Nathan and Kelli Bentley and their boys from left Camden, Jax and Preston. (Courtesy photos)

few blocks from the high school where Amanda graduated in 2007.

While some may say there's not much to do in a small town, the man who just moved from Las Vegas would disagree.

"I have my home. I have my family. I have plenty to do," Jack said. "I just recently joined the running club at Lost Way Brewery. I just love the sense of community here."

Nathan & Kelli Bentley

Kelli & Nathan Bentley were high school sweethearts from S-E-M and Amherst who married and started a family. They moved their family, which now includes three young boys, to Holdrege in August 2020 after experiencing big city life in New York City and Omaha.

Nathan and his friend Chris Hays started the law firm Bentley Hays LLP. Their firm advises clients in transactions and disputes with large institutions.

"I help people deal with the federal and state government, banks, insurance companies, and

the large companies I represented in my past life," Nathan said. "I enjoy when opposing counsel underestimates our capabilities since our law firm is in rural Nebraska"

Shane & Jennifer Warren

The pandemic created a unique opportunity for Shane and Jennifer Warren to continue their current employment and move to a smaller town.

The Warrens had been living in Lincoln where Jennifer worked as the administrative billing specialist for KVC Behavioral Healthcare. Shane is a sales support engineer for Electronic Contracting Company. They moved to Holdrege with their daughter, Brecklynn, in the summer of 2021.

"Throughout the pandemic, our companies realized that employment doesn't have to mean being in the office Monday – Friday 8:00 to 5:00 and that there is technology out there to make working from home a possibility for their employees," Shane said. "It's been great living here, and we enjoy getting back to a smaller community."

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Sidel Returns to Holdrege to Serve as BD Plant Manager

Jason Sidel has been hired as the Plant Manager for BD-Holdrege, Medication Delivery Solutions. He started the position in October.

Sidel hails from St. Paul, Neb., and has a bachelor's degree in individual psychology from



University in St. Charles, Mo. He has been with BD since 2003, including time at Holdrege (2003-2010), Sandy, UT (2010-2019) and Broken Bow (2019-2021).

the U.S. Military Academy

at West Point, NY, and an

MBA from Lindenwood

Jason Sidel

"This was a great opportunity to continue

growing my career with BD while staying in Nebraska," Sidel said. "It also helped knowing that this facility has a solid base of people who will support BD, the community, and me."

Sidel said he is looking forward to growing the Medication Delivery Solutions Business while working with the Holdrege people again. Previous Plant Manager Stuart Rogers will stay in Holdrege to lead embecta, BD's new Diabetes Care.

Sidel's community involvements include serving on the American Legion State of Nebraska Athletic Committee and the board of directors for the Nebraska One Box Pheasant Hunt, His hobbies include golfing, hunting, fishing, outdoor activities and concerts.

He is married to Kelli, a Wilcox native, and they have two children, Emma, who is a senior at UNL studying Forensic Science (Biology); and Dane, who is a sophomore at Broken Bow High School.

Bebensee Begins Role as YMCA Executive Director

Holdrege resident Brett Bebensee has been selected as the new Executive Branch Director

of the Don Sjogren Community YMCA.

Bebensee is a



Brett Bebensee

management experience in retail, most recently as the store manager at Marshall's in Kearney. He began his new position at the YMCA in Holdrege on

"I wanted to work at the

Y because I love how community involvement is

a huge part of the YMCA's foundation," Bebensee said. "I want to help continue and possibly bring new additions to further support the communities the Y serves."

Bebensee graduated from Wilcox-Hildreth High School and earned a bachelor's degree in English with a minor in popular culture and an emphasis in writing at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. He is currently working toward a master's degree in English with an emphasis in writing.

Bebensee and his wife, Ashley, have been married for nine years and are parents to two young boys, Oliver, 5; and Samuel, 2.

Outside of work, Bebensee enjoys spending time with his family and movie date nights with his wife.

PMHC Hires Hruska as **Director of Specialty Clinics**

Phelps Memorial Health Center has hired Eric Hruska, RN, BSN, as the Director of Specialty Clinics.



Eric Hruska

Hruska oversees the daily operations of all specialty clinics in both the Phelps Medical Plaza and the hospital including ortho/spine, oncology/ infusion, pulmonary, cardiology, ENT, urology, podiatry, wound, and psychiatric. He will collaborate with patients, visitors, and healthcare

professionals and will also be responsible for budget, growth, and job performance for these areas.

Before returning to Nebraska to be closer to family, Hruska worked at the University of Kansas Health Systems in the Blood, Marrow, and Cellular Therapeutics Outpatient Transplant Center both as a treatment RN and Post-Transplant Coordinator, which he served as for the past 8

"I look forward to working with our team to deliver outstanding patient care and service that Phelps Memorial's patients have come to rely on," he said. "I am extremely excited to dive into this role and be a part of this incredible and rapidly growing facility and work with such amazing and caring professionals," he said.

More than 30 specialists visit PMHC to see patients through the two specialty clinics.

Hruska and his wife, Jamie, live in Axtell and have two children Emma, 7; and Mason, 4.

CHS Selects Ord Native As New General Manager

John Ptacnik began his new position as General Manager of CHS in mid-November.

He came to Holdrege from Yuma, Colo., where he has worked for the past 15 years as a grain merchandiser, grain department manager and then

general manager.

Ptacnik is originally from Ord and earned a bachelor's degree in Ag Business from UNK.

> "This new position gives me an opportunity to manage a larger company Ptacnik said. "I look

and get back to Nebraska," forward to working with the CHS employees and patrons and being involved in and

getting to know the local communities in the area."

When Ptacnik is not working, he enjoys working around the house, golfing with his family and exercising. He has been involved in coaching youth sports and was on the planning committee for the Heat in the Street basketball tournament.

He and his wife, Anne, are parents to three children: Amelia, 14; Zach, 13; and Josie, 11.

New Extension Educator Focuses on Youth Development

Molly Brant began work in November as the new local 4-H Youth Development Extension Educator. Brandt is originally from Platte County



John Ptacnik

Molly Brandt

and earned a bachelor's degree in agricultural education and a master's degree in applied science from UNL. She previously worked as an academic advisor for the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources at UNL.

In her new role. Brandt will work in youth development programming

related to leadership, entrepreneurship and STEM.

"I'm excited to work with youth and help them to develop their full potential," Brandt said. "4-H provided me with a lot of great opportunities and experiences, and I am excited to connect youth with similar opportunities."

When she's not working, Brandt enjoys running, gardening, and traveling.

GUNEWS



Bruning Bank Begins Expansion

After 11 years of business in Holdrege, Bruning Bank is expanding.

Kyle Anderson, Sr. Executive Commercial Lender at Bruning, said the 1,700-square-foot expansion on the west side of the building will create five new offices as the local bank adds new services and employees.

"We've been blessed with continued growth of the bank," Anderson said. "It wouldn't be possible without the great support of our customers and the community. We very much appreciate the clientele and the community and appreciate their patience while we update the facility."

The addition will allow some services already offered through Bruning Bank statewide to be offered at the Holdrege location.

Holdrege native Lane Schulz recently joined

the Bruning team as an LPL Financial Planner through Bruning Wealth Management. Holdrege native Alissa Waller-Swanson will share time between the Holdrege and Kearney branches as part of Bruning Insurance Agency.

The wealth management, insurance and home mortgage departments will all work in the new addition once it's complete.

The bank at 1215 Burlington in Holdrege will remain open with little disruption planned to the business during construction, which is expected to be complete in June. However, customers must enter from Hill Street instead of Burlington to access the drive-thru. The expansion project will also include a few updates to the original portion of the building, such as new carpet in the main lobby and new flooring in the bathrooms and kitchen area.

K & D Motor & Electric Acquires Minden Location

K & D Motor and Electric of Holdrege has now expanded to Minden.

Owner Brad Ludeke said Gary Braun contacted him about purchasing his Minden electrical business because he planned to retire.

"It just made sense for us because the town was in high need of an electrician due to retirements," Ludeke said.

The sale was finalized in July, and opening doors in Minden has created new opportunities for the longtime Phelps County business to serve even more Kearney County customers.

Coby Bryant, who has worked for K & D for more than 20 years, is managing the Minden location. In addition to Ludeke and his wife, Tracie, K & D has six other full-time employees.

Ludeke said that due to the high volume of business lately, he would hire up to three

additional electricians if he found the right people.

K & D has helped area farmers and businesses with farm, commercial and industrial electrical solutions for more than 40 years. Ludeke, who has been a part of K & D for 31 years, purchased the business from Duane Long a decade ago.

K & D employee Evan Dow was among the first group of Phelps County students to earn a PCDC high-demand jobs scholarship in 2014. Evan started working at K & D in high school, continued working there throughout college when he could, and started work full-time at K & D after earning his associate's degree at Central Community College in Hastings.

K & D is located at 418 Brown in Holdrege and can be reached at (308) 995-6063. The Minden location is at 614 S. Minden Ave. and can be reached by calling (308) 830-1146.

Rudy's Tires Opens Holdrege Location

Terry Rutenbeck opened Rudy's Tires in the former CHS hardware store and service station at 1016 4th Ave. in Holdrege on Dec. 1. Terry has worked in the tire business since graduating from high school in Wayne, Neb.

He and his wife, Angela, own and manage nine tire stores, including the newest locations in Holdrege and Alma. They lease both locations from CHS. The business is headquartered in Wiggins, Colo.

"Why wouldn't someone want to expand in Holdrege?" Terry said. "It's a beautiful area, big in agriculture and support industries, and the people have been absolutely awesome."

Rudy's Tires repairs and sells tires for ATVs, cars, SUVs, pickup trucks, semis as well as construction tires and all types of ag tires. The business does changeovers on ag equipment, such as changing sprayer tires from narrower tires to wide tires. It carries Bio Ballast, a non-corrosive liquid tire ballast.

The business also performs oil changes, brake work, alignments and changes batteries. By spring, Terry hopes to add air-conditioning work and offer on-farm tire service.

Rudy's Tires currently employs two tire techs, one alignment/service tech and an office manager. At least one more tire tech is needed.

The business is open 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Friday and will be open until noon on Saturdays in the spring. For more information, call (308) 995-8686 or visit www.rudystires.com.

BD Announces Name of New Spinoff Company

BD announced in early December that "embecta" [pronounced em-BECK-tah] will be the name of the independent, publicly-traded company that will

hold BD's Diabetes Care business upon the completion of the previously announced



spinoff, which is expected to close in the second quarter of calendar year 2022.

The name "embecta" represents the future company's commitment to people living with diabetes and its corporate heritage.

Both BD and the new embecta company will have locations in Holdrege.



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PHELPS COUNTY BUSINESS JOURNAL



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3 FAVORITE THINGS

At the PCDC Hall of Fame banquet and at a recent Rotary meeting, we asked residents to list their 3 Favorite Things about Phelps County. We will be sharing some of those Favorite Things throughout the year in the 2022 Phelps County Business Journals.

- Friendliness of the people
- The Tassel
- Phelps Memorial Health Center
- Nebraska Prairie Museum
- Love our parks!
- Opportunities to be involved in organizations and as elected officials
- Quiet and clean streets
- Generosity and support when others are in need
- Diversity of types of businesses & employment
- Great place to raise kids

- I can get to wherever I want in town in less than 5 minutes
- Don Sjogren Community YMCA
- Safety for all, anytime of day
- Opportunities for financial success
- Confident citizens who know they can compete with anyone anywhere
- A warm welcome
- Four distinct seasons to enjoy
- Our optimism
- Great neighbors
- Close to hunting and fishing