

'Eye-opening' survey indicates youths want to stay

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Contrary to popular belief, high school students like their hometowns and have a preference to stay or move back after graduation from college.

At least that's what results of a new survey of seventh- to 12th-graders in communities throughout Northeast Nebraska indicates.

"You tend to hear about the problems and think all the kids want to get out. The survey

► **Check out results of the survey on page 10.**

tells us that's not really true," said Brandon Day of Norfolk.

Day and his sister, Nanette of Tilden, helped fund the survey through The Connie Fund, a foundation dedicated to funding youth projects in the area. The fund is named after their late mother, Connie Day of Norfolk.

A total of 1,833 students from 15 com-

munities in Northeast Nebraska were asked questions about their plans to attend college; how they would rate their hometown; whether they preferred to stay after graduation or return home in the future; if they had any interest in owning a business or entrepreneurial education; if they could imagine living in the Northeast Nebraska area in the future; and if any adults had asked for their input on making their community a better place to live.

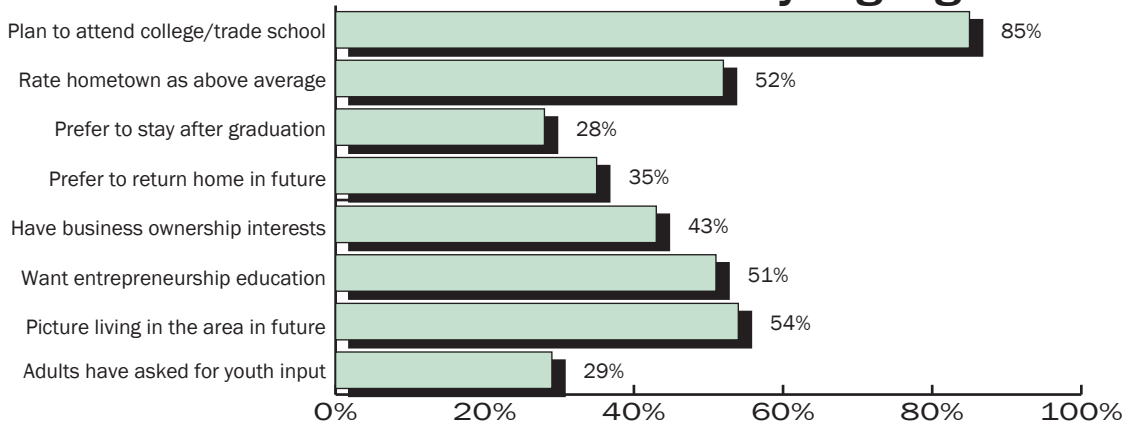
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Survey results

Find more extensive results from the survey of Northeast Nebraska students by clicking on this story on the home page.

Northeast Nebraska Youth Survey Highlights



Source: Nebraska Community Foundation

DENNIS MEYER/DAILY NEWS GRAPHIC

THE ABOVE chart shows some of the most interesting results of an extensive survey done involving more than 1,800 junior high and high school students from 15 communities in Northeast Nebraska. More than half rate their hometown as being “above average.”

Youths

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The survey found that 52 percent rated their community as an above average to excellent place to live. Fifty-four percent pictured themselves living in their hometown if quality career opportunities existed.

“That’s much higher than most people would expect,” Day said.

THE MOST disappointing statistic to Day was that only 29 percent said an adult had asked for their input on how to make the community a more attractive place for young people.

“That says to me that we have these kids who like their hometown and feel a strong connection, but we, as adults, aren’t helping them make the decision to come back here. We’re just assuming every kid from rural Nebraska wants to pack up and leave,” he said.

And that’s really the whole reason behind doing the survey, Day said.

“We give a lot of lip service to the problems of declining population and brain drain. What we’ve done is adopted this defeatist attitude, and we don’t ever take any steps to do anything about it,” Day said.

Day serves as a board member of the Norfolk Area Recruiters, a group that was set up to attract graduates from the Norfolk area to return to the communities where they were raised.

While the group’s work has proven to be successful, it’s much more difficult to wait until young people go off to school, establish themselves in another community and then try to re-

cruit them back to the area.

That recruitment process needs to start much earlier, he said.

“We need to give them some ownership in the community and make them feel from the get-go they have a vital role in the community. . . . We won’t see the results for at least five years, more likely 10 years, but that doesn’t mean it shouldn’t happen,” he said.

DAY SAID HE hopes others find the survey results “eye opening” and that communities start to take action.

“Right now I think anything that would be done is better than what we’re doing now, which is almost nothing,” he said.

Students from Bancroft, Cedar Rapids, St. Edward, Columbus, Elgin, Humphrey, Lindsay, Newman Grove, Norfolk, Orchard, Stanton, Wayne, West Point, Wisner and Pilger were represented in Northeast Nebraska’s survey results.

The area survey results yielded little variation from results gained from a total of 40 communities throughout the state.

The survey was completed over the 2008-09 school year using a Web-based survey tool. Students were sent in to computer labs to complete the survey at designated times.

Along with The Connie Fund, the survey was also funded by the Nebraska Community Foundation. There was no cost to local schools to participate in the survey.

Support in conducting the survey was provided by Central and Northeast community colleges.