

Ord in the spotlight

Founders club, strategic plans build economy, rate national attention.

Nebraskans who read the New York Times may have noticed a recent article that talked about the community vision in Ord, Neb. The Times chose well in citing Ord as a sterling example of forward thinking in rural Nebraska.

These accomplishments in Ord and elsewhere in Nebraska deserve recognition as part of The WorldHerald's recurring editorial series, "Nebraska Excellence":

- *Strategic vision in Ord* - Ord, in Valley County on the edge of the Sand Hills, offers many positive lessons in regard to community vision.

The Times appropriately directed attention to the way Ord, with a population of about 2,200, has used local foundations to help meet public needs, such as attracting newcomers and helping to pay for school and library projects. The Nebraska Community Foundation has been a key resource for Ord in supporting such a strategy.

An innovative step was Ord's creation of a "founders club," to which members contribute \$1,000 each. As Ord leaders explain, the club shows how a community can set up a funding stream for civic causes by tapping support from middle-income earners.

At the same time, Ord has benefited greatly from a generous \$1.2 million gift from residents John and Alyce Wozab. Interest generated by the gift is used for civic projects and has been a major boost to the community.

The positive developments in Ord and Valley County include many not mentioned in the Times article. Among them: An energetic cooperative strategy that resulted this year in the successful recruitment of an ethanol plant. The incorporation of entrepreneurship instruction into the curriculum at all Valley County schools. The recruitment of the Timberline Total Solutions call center, a wellrun operation with headquarters in Omaha, that has provided Ord with a major economic benefit. A community appearance project involving 11 downtown blocks. The completion of five strategic plans on various community needs.

Over a six-month period this year, Ord saw the creation of 17 new businesses.

Ord is not unique in pursuing most of these steps. But it sets a fine example of how they can be used as part of a comprehensive strategy - a strategy that is working.

Here are two additional items worth noting on the overall theme of Nebraska excellence:

- *The "Nebraska model"* - One of the main factors that helped Nebraska create its new, centralized voter registration system is the constructive relationship between the Nebraska Secretary of State's Office and county election officials. Such institutional cooperation, which some officials have begun to call the "Nebraska model," has led to success in planning for emergency management and terrorism preparedness, too.

- *Norfolk community appearance* - Norfolk has shown much vision this year with its impressive project to improve the look of downtown streets and sidewalks. The "streetscape" project has all the vital ingredients: community vision, a spirit of cooperation, use of well-qualified landscape architects and a commitment by civic leaders to keep moving forward.

Norfolk leaders are pursuing the project in segments, but they are guided by a well-conceived overall strategy that emphasizes the best needs for individual corridors. The plan involves the thoughtful use of brick pavers, tree and flower plantings, pedestrian lighting and flag displays as well as sound approaches to crosswalks and parking-space configurations.

These by no means exhaust the inventory of community-vision examples from across the state. Nebraskans, no matter if they live in west Omaha or on the high plains in the state's western reaches, can take pride in these achievements.

More successes will be noted here as part of Nebraska's ongoing need to understand not just its challenges but also its strengths.

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