

# Are hunting and fishing factors in economic growth?

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By Roger Wiltz

The naming of Gregory as the site of a new manufacturing plant is exciting news. The fact that Howard has a new business that is short on employees is surprising.

A more appropriate word than “surprising” might be “ignorance.”

Howard, like so many smaller South Dakota communities including Gregory, has a great deal to offer. I will list these items, point by point, beginning with employment. Ranking these items as to importance depends on personal priorities.

When, during the past 40-plus years, I have tried to talk someone into taking a hard look at rural South Dakota, they have asked about job availability. Jobs appear to be to No. 1 question. Well, Howard obviously has the jobs.

Today we must look at how safe a community is. There was a time when every child who lived in town walked to school. I lived in Chicago and walked a mile to school every day as a first grader! That was in the 1940s. My mom and dad didn't know what a pedophile was.

Times have changed.

Even though my grandchildren live in affluent communities, their parents give them rides to and from school. They, and the other parents, don't feel comfortable with who might be out there.

If our America has any safe communities, I'd bet on Howard and other towns like it.

How good are small town South Dakota schools? I believe that our schools rank with the best. A school's primary function is developing students who can successfully compete with the best on the next level. Our schools do this consistently.

Here's a point to ponder. Same, my fourth grade grandson, dreams of someday making the high school basketball team. This will be a challenge in a community of 8,000. There will only be 12 spots. In our small South Dakota towns, a boy or girl who works hard to make the squad will have a spot. This is also true of music, newspaper or the school play.

Some say that our small schools offer limited opportunity when compared to larger schools. I want you to think about one of my former Tripp-Delmont students. This past year Jared Reiner played for the Milwaukee Bucks of the NBA.

How many NBA players were members of the band, chorus and participated in plays?

Jared did.

Who probably came from the smallest school? So which students have the most opportunities? Larger schools tend to force a choice such as marching band or football.

If owning one's home is the American dream, we have too many folks who will never realize this dream—especially when the average American home runs \$200,000-plus.

I'll bet my paycheck for this column that many of our small South Dakota communities, including Howard and Gregory, offer good solid homes for less than \$40,000.

We've talked about jobs, safe environment, and schools. Does recreational opportunity have a place on this list? I certainly think so. Many of our smallest communities have affordable golf courses.

What about hunting and fishing?

Hunting is a sport that many who live in larger non-South Dakota communities have written off. When I was a young, would-be hunter in Chicago I craved a place where I could carry my shotgun in a field. It didn't really matter whether or not the field held birds. Let's take a hard look at Howard.

Howard is on the threshold of outstanding fishing opportunity with Lake Thompson to the north.

The Howard area also holds a wealth of public hunting areas that offer deer, upland and waterfowl.

How could any sportsman not consider Howard, or any of our rural communities, so long as work is available?

At the beginning of today's column, I offered the word “ignorant.” Are frustrated families in our nation's urban areas ignorant of the opportunities available to them in South Dakota? It would appear that they are. If they aren't what, exactly, is the problem?

Do the words “ South Dakota” hold some mystique that outsiders conjure up in their minds? Back in the 1970s, the South Dakota Arts Council brought our Wagner school superintendent, Dale Hall, our elementary principal, Evelyn Rueb, and myself, the high school principal, to Connecticut to look over a modern dance program.

When a waitress asked me about my funny accent, (she was the one with the funny accent) I replied that I was a high school principal. She went on to tell me that she was a special education teacher looking for work. I told her that we could do an interview on the spot as all the key players from Wagner were on hand. She then told me that she would go absolutely anywhere for a teaching job. When I said, “South Dakota,” she said, “No” and walked away. The truth be known, you couldn’t pay me enough to live in Connecticut.

See you next week.

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