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Stitching a hobby

Hesston couple quilts,
marries later in life after knowing
each other as children

Lifestyle

Roger and Pat Olson's
historic home
full of family heirlooms, photos

Cuppa Joe

The Meeting House
brings community
to Sedgwick

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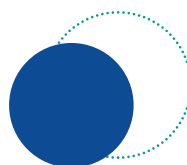
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From the Editor



Wendy Nugent, Editor

I'm just sitting here alone in the Newton Now office at 706 N. Main St. wondering what I like about summer. I do like the storms of summer, although I like it when property and people don't get damaged. It's Thursday, April 18, and there's a slew of stormage headed our way this evening. I'm writing this before anything hits us. I'm wondering if this will be the night we remember as the time the big storms missed us. Or maybe there was a tornado spotted outside of town. Who knows? Right now, it's in the future, and as you read this, it's in the past. Tornadoes are popping up southwest of us. I hope everyone remains safe.

I enjoy the barbecues of summer, vacations, the local fair and getting ready for fall. A lot of fall things happen in the summer, like fall clothes hitting the racks, and stores selling Halloween and fall items. The fair is always fun with all the excited folks judging and getting judged, and the carnival, the smell of the funnel cakes and kids excitedly, happily squealing on the rides.

This issue of Harvey County Now marks the beginning of our fourth year of putting out the magazine. I've been with it from day one, doing all the articles and photos for that first issue. It's been fun, and we've brought you a lot of articles about people and places in the area. If you have any story ideas, feel free to let me know by calling me at 316-281-7899 or emailing wendy@harveycountynow.com. If fact, the cover story idea for this issue was suggested by a reader.

Until the fall, have a great summer!

Wendy Nugent, editor

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ON THE COVER: Bernice and Wesley Eilers quilt together, and they each have their own sewing machine. Photo by Wendy Nugent/Harvey County Now

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Piecing a life together

Hesston couple quilts, marries later in life

HESSTON—Bernice and Wesley Eilers stitched the fabric of their lives together, first meeting when they were kids, but not getting married until decades later after their first spouses passed away.

Now, Bernice, 88, and Wesley, 95, reside at Schowalter Villa in Hesston and spend time together quilting. They've made quilts for the Kansas Relief Sale, as well as for Mennonite Central Committee, which ships comforters overseas for people in need. They've been married for 18 years and have lived at the Villa for 16.

Growing up in Marion County near Tampa and Durham, they lived near each other.

"We were neighbors," Wesley said. "She was scared of me. I'd go up there to use their telephone. She'd come out with her dad."

Wesley said he'd talk to her dad, and she'd hide behind him.

Looking back, Bernice believes God knew they were meant to be together.

"The Lord knew the situation where we would find each other," she said. "I honestly believe that."

Bernice's family moved to Pawnee Rock for several years and returned to Marion County, where she attended a one-room school called Maple Grove School.

"I was a bit more fortunate," Wesley said, chuckling. "I went to a two-room school."

Bernice graduated from the eighth grade at Maple Grove School in McPherson. She stayed with her grandma because her mother was sick.

"During that time, my grandma sewed crazy quilts," Bernice said. "I seen it, and I loved it."



Now Bernice makes crazy quilts. However, Bernice didn't start quilting until her children were grown. Along her life's path, Bernice also attended Bethel Academy, a high school in North Newton, graduated from Newton High School and attended the University of Kansas.

She married Ruby Neufeld, and they had three children, Kenneth, Sidney and Sally. After they grew, Bernice worked once in a while at Woolworth's in Newton.

"Then after a while, I was hired and worked for Dillons for 22 years," she said, starting at North Dillons in Newton and ending at South, leaving there in 1986. She and her husband traveled a great deal.

"And I started sewing," she said, adding that her husband got sick and passed away from cancer in 1997.

"That's when, about a year and a half later, I married this guy," Bernice said, indicating Wesley. "I started praying. What happened then was Wesley was shopping at Alco. That's where he met my daughter."

"I asked her if she knew anybody named Bernice," Wesley said.



Article and photos
Wendy Nugent



"She looked at me kinda wide-eyed. She said, 'That's my mom.'"

Wesley suspected the daughter, Sally, was related to Bernice because his wife, when she was alive, was good at identifying where people come from by their facial features. He told the daughter he wanted to visit with Bernice. At the time, Wesley didn't know the daughter got his phone number off of the check he wrote and gave it to

Bernice, who called him. They met for breakfast and have been together ever since.

"I'd say when we met it was love at first sight," Bernice said. "It was wonderful then. You were so lonely then. You had somebody to talk to."

"I asked her if she wanted to have breakfast with me, and she said yes," Wesley said. "I hadn't seen her since she was 2 and a half years old."

Wesley's first wife passed away around 1995.

Wesley is a retired farmer, and Bernice already had been sewing when they started dating. In addition, Wesley's mother was a

ABOVE: Bernice and Wesley Eilers of Hesston each have their own sewing machines so they can piece quilts. Wesley, a retired farmer, said he could plant a straight row of corn, so he thought he'd be able to sew a straight line. INSET: Wesley and Bernice Eilers, who reside at Schowalter Villa in Hesston, married later in life.



quilter.

"He gardened, and I sewed," Bernice said.

Wesley said he asked Bernice about sewing.

"I planted corn in a straight row, so I could sew in a straight row, too," he said.

Wesley makes most of the quilt tops, although probably not as many as he used to.

"I'm getting old, they tell me, and I've got macular degeneration, so I can't see anything (as well)," Wesley said. "I don't stay with it. I sew for 10 to 15 minutes. I leave, go do something else and go back to it."

Now, the couple works on quilts in the same room, and they each have their own sewing machines, which are Berninas.

"I make nine patches and four patches," Wesley said, and Bernice was working on crazy quilts in April.

At one point, Bernice said she started

taking quilts to the MCC sale.

"I've sold three wedding-ring quilts there," she said, adding most sold for \$600 to \$700, and a large one sold for more than \$2,000.

"After giving all those quilts away—of course, all our kids have quilts," Bernice said. "Anyway, I said in 2007, I said let's start counting these quilts. So by January 2017, we have made 250 quilts."

Many of them are small and were sent to MCC in North Newton to be shipped overseas. These quilts are around 60 by 80 inches and are tied comforters.

"I think the joy that we know somebody has a quilt also," Bernice said in April for the reason they do this. "This is our mission work. That's our hobby, and we enjoy it, and as of now, we have five more tops to be knotted."

Wesley has made his own patterns.


"He would cut up the blocks, make his own patterns and sew that top, and then sometimes he would sew two of them in a week," Bernice said, adding Wesley has been good helping move the quilting frame in and out of the house, since Bernice hand quilts.

"This is our life," Bernice said. "We enjoy it. We do this as a hobby."

They both like quilting.

"Life's been good," Bernice said. "I love this quilting." She added they don't know what to do in the evening, so they quilt. "I guess it's our mission, and we love it, and we do it."

Wesley gave other reasons for enjoying it.

"It takes a lot of time, and it helps the people in the foreign country," he said. "An idle mind is the devil's workshop, so it keeps you busy." 

Bernice Eilers made this double-wedding ring quilt. The Eilers couple has a number of quilts they've made at their Hesston residence, and they've made many hand-tied comforters they've donated to Mennonite Central Committee to be shipped overseas.

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Article and photos
Wendy Nugent



Living history

Olson residence graced with family photos, antiques

NEWTON—There's a large, vintage-style chandelier hanging in the formal dining room in Roger and Pat Olson's home in Newton. Just before Easter, it was adorned with transparent glass eggs, and it's one of the focal points of the room.

This grand light fixture was destined for the landfill before Roger discovered it in a relative's garage, however. One of their relatives had purchased it, and they got tired of it.

"We happened to stop at their house on the way home from Minnesota, I believe," Pat said. Roger saw it in their garage and was aware their relative was going to throw it out.

"The next day, he was going to put it on the street with the trash," she said. "We rescued it."

In addition to the chandelier, the 3,276-square-foot home in the northwest part of Newton features 1,528 square feet on the first floor, pocket doors, four bedrooms—one of which doesn't have a closet—a second-floor veranda, original interior woodwork, a grand staircase and entranceway, a full unfinished basement with several rooms, floored attic and loft in the carriage house, Queen-Anne style architecture and a plethora of history.

At one time, their unattached garage was a carriage house. There's



LEFT: Pat and Roger Olson of Newton look over a magazine in the entranceway of their home on the northwest part of Newton. ABOVE: This statue is in the Olson's dining room. TOP: The Olson's living room has a mix of vintage and newer décor and furniture.



also a variety of antiques, family heirlooms, a photo of the home housed in the entranceway taken around the early 1900s and a painting of the home adorned with snow by Lawrence Davenport. Pat had the painting made for her husband as a Christmas gift.

The large home was built in 1885, and the first owner was Albert H. McLain. Throughout the years, the home has served a variety of owners, including Ezra and Mary Branine from 1910 through 1950, Melvin and Lorene Goering (Melvin, at one time, had the top position at Newton Prairie View), the late retired District Court Judge Ted Ice's

grandparents, and now the Olsons, who purchased the home in 1993.

Other owners include Cyrus M. Beachy, who became famous during his 40-year leadership at Steffen's Dairy in Wichita; Charles Branine, a district court judge and law firm founder; Ezra Branine, who resided there for 35 years; Mildred Branine Ice and her family, who lived there from 1946 through 1950; W.S. Bunnell; A.S. Pearson; Carl and Tempe Lawrence; Tom and Gretchen Reimer; and Kate Coleman.

Pat said Ted Ice visited his grandparents when they had the house and even signed his name in the attic. However, that



TOP: The Roger and Pat Olson home sits grandly in the northwest part of Newton. **RIGHT:** Roger Olson made this mantel, which is in their living room.



.....
The dining room is decked out for Easter.

signature is no longer there. Ice's mother inherited the home, and Pat said Ice lived there for a few years when he was in junior high school.

When the home was built, the front two rooms, which now are a living room and dining room, were twin parlors, according to Pat. Where the laundry room is now, she believes this area was a breakfast nook, and there used to be a tennis court outside.

Pat said when the Reimers had the house, they used the large east bedroom as their master. "They would take their coffee out on the veranda then," she said.

She said the Goerings "did a lot of work" to restore the home. They added a small master bath to one bedroom that she called "the little bedroom."

The Olsons also have done some work on the house, which includes Roger adding the original pocket doors that separate the front room from the entranceway, changing part of the two-car garage into a workshop,

and adding steps to the attic. In addition, the couple put in a gas fireplace to the parlor living room.

"After the terrible ice storm, we decided we needed some other form of heat," Pat said.

Roger created the mantel, mirroring the wood columns that stand between the parlor living room and dining room.

The Olsons moved to Newton in 1983 after purchasing a house on East First Street, where they lived for about 10 years. Roger, who works at Norcraft, noticed their current home was for sale while driving by. They had almost bought the home less than five years before actually making the purchase, Pat said, and when they did buy it, it was even before there was an open house.

"I think we got situated and settled that fall, a vanload at a time," she said, since they spent the summer moving into this home that carries some of Newton's

history.

At least once, that history visited them in the form of Carolyn Jane Blosser Sanford from Seattle, who toured the home about a year ago when she was in Newton for her 50th high school reunion. She's one of the Blossers' daughters, and her parents had their master bedroom on the first floor, where the Olsons have a family room.

"The oldness" of the family room is one of several reasons why Pat likes the home.

"It's so spacious, especially the dining room," she said. "There's plenty of room beyond the table here. I love my new little converted office. I like that private family room, too, and I like the pocket doors—two complete sets of pocket doors."

About a year and a half ago, Roger reinstalled the parlor living room doors to the entranceway, which were stored in the carriage house.

Throughout the home are personal touches, which include family photos, Bing




.....
Windows in an upstairs bedroom appear to frame an antique carriage filled with dolls.

& Grondahl pieces, a large teal cabinet Roger built for their First Street home, a large table made from two tables in the dining room that seats 16, a Peace Lutheran Church pew Olson's children acquired for her, dolls as part of Pat's doll collection, an antique lamp purchased at Wharf Road Antiques, a large nativity on an antique armoire in the entranceway (since Pat said they have a little bit of Christmas in their home all year long), a family tree on Roger's side in the entry and a photo of all of their nine grandchildren sitting on the Olsons' vintage couch in the country.

"Grandchildren are quite prevalent in the house," Pat said. "You see them everywhere."

There's other items, such as a buffet that belonged to an aunt and an old church clock, which was owned by a paternal grandfather.

In addition, there's also a white cabinet in the dining room, standing next to the teal one Roger made.

"I went to Minnesota with my daughter, and when I came home, he had painted it," Pat said about the teal one. 

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The Meeting House brings community to Sedgwick

SEDGWICK—Growing up in Sedgwick, there really wasn't a whole lot for Emily Bebermeyer and her friends to do. Entertaining themselves meant gassing up a car and driving to Newton or Wichita to hit up a coffee shop for some caffeine and conversation. Now, as the manager and community outreach coordinator of The Meeting House in Sedgwick, she is hoping to bring some unity within the town itself with a place for people to gather.

"Our mission is to bring community back to Sedgwick," Bebermeyer said, "and just connect with everyone, with all the leaders and businesses to be all on one page and bring community through programs and events that get people out of their house. It is also to have a place where kids can come, just to come here after school to hang out."

The Meeting House is a non-profit coffee shop that opened its doors on Feb. 11 at 507 N. Commercial Ave. with donations from all over that allowed the place to open debt free. The goal was to make enough money to be self-sufficient without donations in the first two years. They hit that goal before the end of the spring.

With a bunch of people searching for a "third place" in town, the shop was packed all day long during the soft opening.

"It is just more of a third place," Bebermeyer said. "Your home is your first place. And then there is your work or school and that is the second place.

The third place is the other place, to get away or feel at home, too."

While the Meeting House is a coffee shop serving up coffee of all kinds, smoothies, sandwiches, salads and desserts, it is about much more than coffee. It also serves as a place to showcase local talent with art and music. Art from Sedgwick High School students covers the wall inside and will be kept up throughout the summer. The art inside the place will rotate, but because the soul of what the place is about is the youth, kids from Sedgwick will have their creations hanging longer than artists from outside the community.

There are also music performances if you are looking for a show in Sedgwick, with events happening about every other week. With the stress of opening, Bebermeyer has been busy working in the shop and hasn't had a lot of time to work on events. But with the place finding stability almost instantly, she is starting to have more time to focus on the community outreach.

Part of that community outreach is in starting programs that can be a helpful resource to the youth of Sedgwick they might not be able to find elsewhere.

"We are just kind of now on the first stage of creating programs, just because we have been trying to get open and running successfully," Bebermeyer said. "So I have had to help out a lot with that and be working here. But our goal is to do programs. Our heart is for the youth. I feel like a

lot of the program ideas that we have are for them, to help impact them through programs that the school doesn't offer, like resume building, mock interviews, or possible internships or networking. There are tons of other ideas, but we have to go through them and make sure to see which ones we actually want to do and what will impact them."

One of the ideas is a matrix plan, putting people in the community with talents in certain areas to help out. Former teachers can provide ACT prep classes or writing classes. By using the resources all around them in Sedgwick, the idea is to unify the community as one cohesive unit that is stronger than a group of individuals.

"The board, they weren't really set on a coffee shop," Bebermeyer said. "It was more like, we could have been a sandwich shop or

a pizza place or a laundry mat. The coffee shop isn't what it is all about. It is about the community we can build through this place."

But as a coffee shop, The Meeting House provides a natural gathering place with the comfort of a warm beverage. It provides a relaxing place that has already become a place for groups of regulars to spend their time.

"We have people that have meetings here," Bebermeyer said. "Or some girls do a Bible study here on Tuesday nights. They will come in on their own and do a Bible study and use this place for that. There is—they are called the Nerd Herd. They play games after school on Wednesdays at the school. Sometimes they will come in here and do that."

While The Meeting House has only been officially open since February, the place was two years in the making. Local fixtures in the

community Damon Young and Jeff DeGraffenreid used their connections with businesses and hosted events, looking for donations to bring the project to life. The plan was originally to open in November of 2016. The opening had to be pushed back, and it was almost pushed back in February, too. But Bebermeyer insisted they go ahead and open the doors. In spite of the apprehension, the place is already become a fixture in the community, filling a need people had.

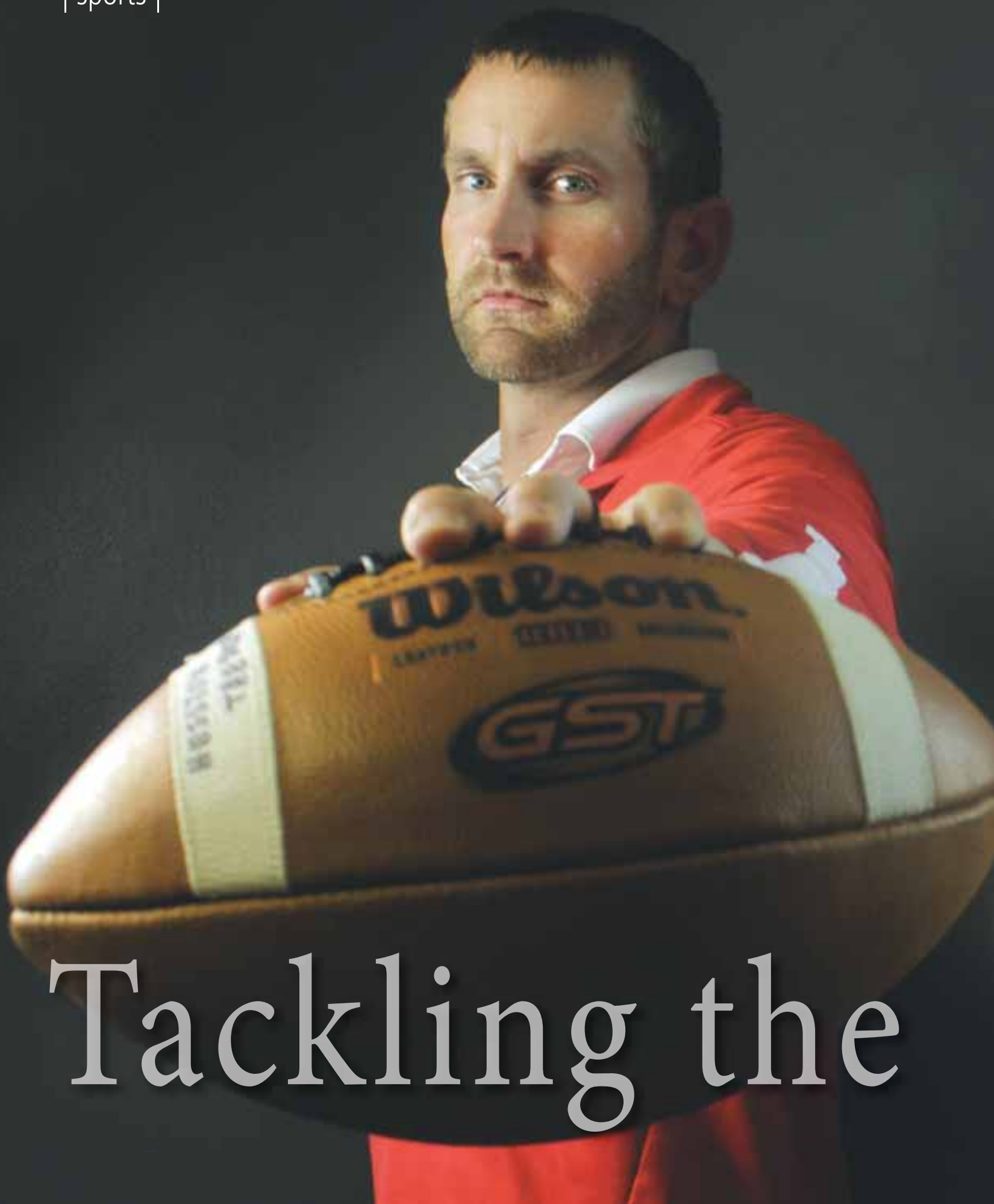
"Coffee is like comfort," Bebermeyer said. "It is the kind of vibe or feel you get when you go into a coffee shop. I know that is always what I get when I go into a coffee shop." ➡



Opposite: Emily Bebermeyer makes a latte at The Meeting House in Sedgwick. Bebermeyer is a manager and the community outreach coordinator of the non-profit coffee shop that strives to provide a place where people can come together.

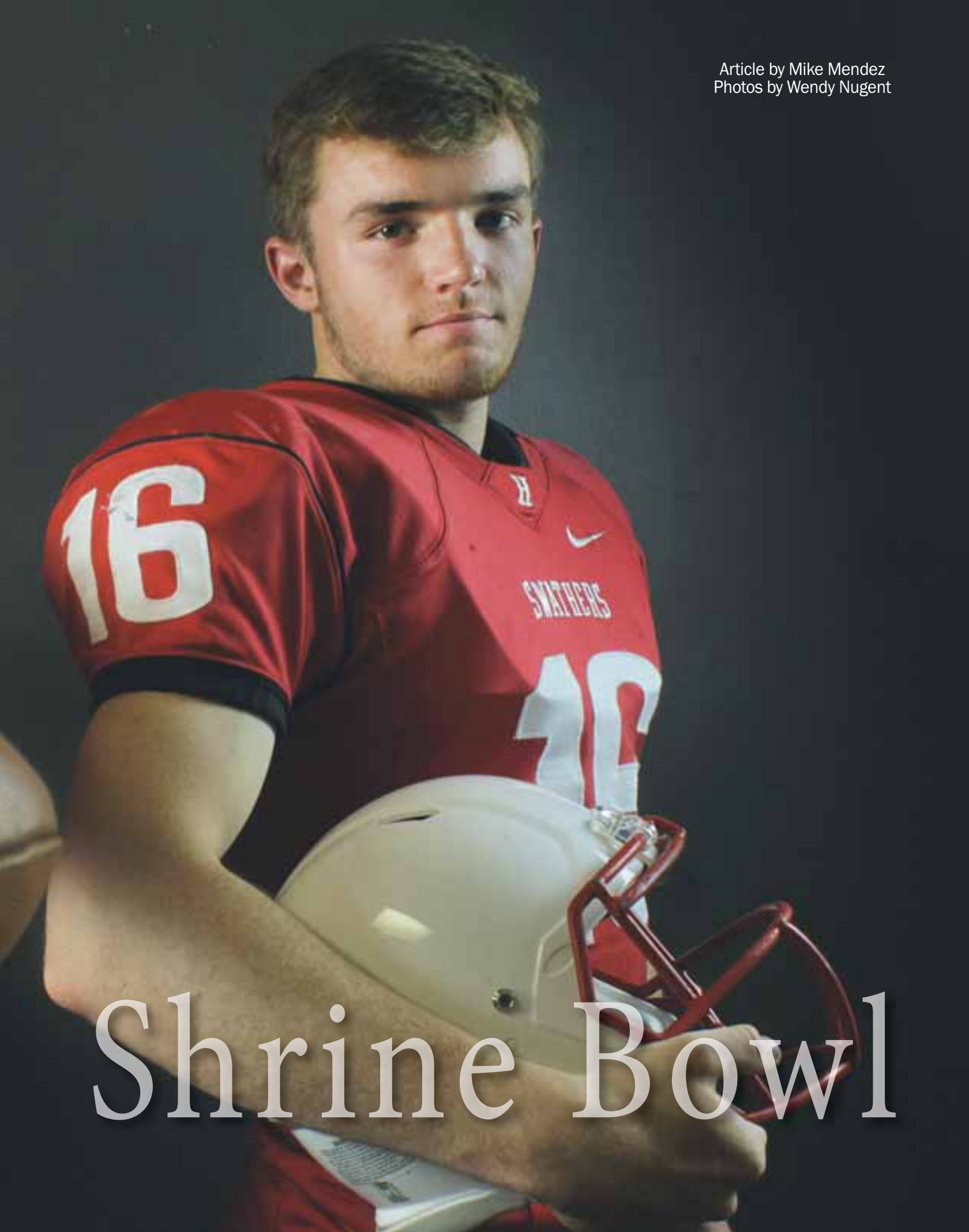
Above: The Meeting House offers a variety of cookies for sale, such as chocolate chunk, peanut butter chocolate chunk, snickerdoodle and Almond Joy.

| sports |



Tackling the

Article by Mike Mendez
Photos by Wendy Nugent



Shrine Bowl

ONE. LAST. GAME.

Harvey County gridiron standouts selected for Shrine Bowl



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ABOVE: Layke Heimerman, a linebacker with Halstead High School, left, and Marshall Rutschman, a Sedgwick lineman, are headed to the Shrine Bowl in July. PRECEDING PAGE: Also headed there are Clint Rider, left, who was football coach at Hesston High School until getting a job recently at Blue Valley Northwest, and Zach Esau, quarterback with Hesston.

When Marc Marinelli comes onto the field at BG Products Veterans Stadium in El Dorado, there will be a lot of firsts. It will be the first time anyone has been to this stadium for a Shrine Bowl. It will be the first time any of his players and many of his other coaches have had the experience. It will be the first time Marinelli has had the opportunity to be the head coach of a Shrine Bowl team. But having been an assistant coach last year, he has had the life-changing Shrine Bowl experience and he can't wait to share it with a new group.

"I really didn't know the impact it would have on me personally," Marinelli said of being an assistant coach in the Shrine Bowl last year. "Now going into it, Coach [Clint] Rider is on the staff: he's never done one. Coach [Brent] Pfeifer, he's never done one. Coach [Grant] Stephenson, he's never done one, and a whole group of kids who have never experienced that. I look forward to seeing that impact and that change in their lives."

It makes sense that going into an all-star football game, Marinelli would be most excited about getting to make relationships with the players, fellow coaches, and making a difference in the lives of the kids the Shriners help with their hospitals. Since leaving Andale as an offensive coordinator with a couple of state titles to begin his head coaching career in Hesston in 2010, he has centered his entire coaching philosophy around building relationships with people that go deeper than the game of football. It is a philosophy that helped build his current school, Goddard Eisenhower,

from scratch into a power in a few short years and has earned him the honor of being the head coach of the Shrine Bowl just six years into his head coaching career.

"I have always believed that the kids have got to know you care for them to understand how hard they have to play to win a game," Marinelli said. "When you get them to understand how much you care about them and that you are going to push them for the right reasons, it goes a long, long way. Nothing in this game is easy, but you seem to get a little bit more out of the kids when they know you care about them, that's for sure."

On the roster for the best senior football players and coaches from the west, Harvey County will be well represented in El Dorado. On top of Marinelli as a head coach, who got his start in Hesston, Sedgwick will send Marshall Rutschman, Halstead will have Layke Heimerman, and the Swathers send Marinelli's successor, Clint Rider, along with quarterback Zach Esau.

One of the biggest things Rutschman has taken away from his time in a successful program at Sedgwick is also deeply rooted in the relationships formed in the game.

"I think I have learned what it means to be a part of a family," Rutschman

said. "You have always got your brother's back, and he's always got your back. You are able to rely on somebody. It is more people that I can rely on because we have formed such a bond on the field."

All-star football is kind of something that runs in the family for Rutschman. His uncle played in an East/West 8-man all-star game, but when it comes to the Shrine Bowl, it will be a first for Rutschman, who has never been to watch the game or seen it on TV. But coming from a small school, he is eagerly awaiting the opportunity to see what some of the best in the state have to offer in schools of all sizes.

"I am sure it will hit me when we actually get up there and I see some of the talent I will be playing with," Rutschman said. "But I know when I first saw I was super excited because at a small 2A school, we don't get to see too many big guys. I have been excited ever since."

While Rutschman is completely new to the Shrine Bowl experience, his Halstead counterpart, Layke Heimerman, was at the game a year ago. When Heimerman was a sophomore, big things were in the making with the Dragons with the hiring of a new head coach in Jason Grider. In a short time, Grider has put a jolt into the program with a lot of

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June 20, 7 pm: Cowboys & Clerics, Burchill
June 27, 7 pm: B&W Photography, Wellfelt
July 3, 12:30 pm: The Cowboys Movie
July 18, 7 pm: Cowboys in Harvey County
Mystery Lover's Book Club, June 7 & July 5
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help from some players who bought in immediately to what their new coach was selling them. The result was a back-to-back appearance in the state semifinals and some well-deserved recognition for players like Eli McKee and Blake Beckett, along with Grider himself all making the Shrine Bowl a year ago.

"Coach Grider changed a lot of things," Heimerman said. "And it was tough getting used to at first, but he is an amazing coach. I couldn't ask for a better one. And he really made the program what it is, and it has been quite the run."

Having gone to the game a year ago, one of the biggest things Heimerman took away from the game was how many people were in the stadium and how loud it was. With such a big representation from Halstead on the roster, there was also a big group of Halstead people in the stands.

But with the program seeing a bunch of postseason success in the past few years, the community that has always been passionate about the Dragons has been kicked up into a frenzy with a taste for big games. Big games are something Heimerman has grown a taste for as well, which came to a head this season with a run through a brutally competitive Central Kansas League (CKL).

"I think at the Hoisington game last year, that is the most people I have ever been around or played in front of especially," Heimerman said. "It was quite the experience. It was really nerve racking at first. I was very nervous to go out there and play in front of all those people with a big game on the line like that. But once you get in the game, everything zones out and it is just fun."

Hesston was a team that knew all too well how tough the CKL was in 2016. Having a couple of years piling up wins, but having a tough time with some early exits in the playoffs, the Swathers had a different outcome last season. The team that ran through the league, winning nearly every championship of the league's existence, lost the first three games of the season. But competing in a league that features 4A Div. II champion Pratt and a semifinalist with Hoisington, the Swathers learned something. They learned they belonged with the best and how to compete.



The upcoming Shrine Bowl in July will be the first time Marc Marinelli, left, will be a head coach for a team there. *Courtesy photo*

It led to a semifinal win over Hoisington for a trip to the state championship game, where Hesston made it to overtime before losing a thriller in the bid for the school's second ever state title.

"As you start seeing other teams in your league in the playoffs continue to win and do some good things to other really good teams in the state, then it really kind of fuels that," Rider said. "It is one of those things where iron sharpens iron. We wanted to play a really tough schedule, and we got it. I would rather go 6-3 in the regular season if we can go to the state title game every year rather than going 8-1 or 9-0 and losing in the first or second round. You couldn't take a week off, and it forced everybody to be at their best."

One of the major pieces of the runner-up season for Hesston was the leadership of Esau at quarterback. The ride Esau and Rider had along with the rest of the Swathers was something none of them will forget. It was a ride that has the two heading to the Shrine Bowl together for one last opportunity to make the memory of a lifetime.

"It was a magical experience," Rider said. "It was something that I told our players behind getting married and having my daughter, I don't know that I have experienced something that was that exciting and that exhilarating and that fulfilling. Those are bonds that are going to last with those players for a long, long time."

When Esau was a sophomore, though being an incredibly talented underclassman, he had to wait his turn behind senior Grant Raleigh whose athleticism has him playing basketball at McPherson College. The team had just suffered a loss in the playoff to cap a 10-1

season when Rider pulled him aside and told him he was going to be something special. What Esau did two years later was lead the team to the state championship game, something only two other Swather teams have done.


"It was awesome," Esau said. "That was something I have been dreaming about since I was just a little kid in the backyard just playing games against an imaginary defense, imagining being in the state championship game. It was a dream come true. It was so surreal. I just with I would have stopped

and looked up and taken in the crowd and been in the moment instead of trying to worry about the game so much."

The lesson learned about enjoying the moment is one he is looking forward to carrying into the Shrine Bowl, where he plans to enjoy every minute. He is also looking forward to meeting the other players and some kids he has a ton of respect for.

"I am just excited to meet new people," Esau said. "You know, get to know all the best players in Kansas and go to the hospital and meet some of the greatest warriors in the world, those kids over there battling for their lives."

The Shrine Bowl will be played on July 29, 2017, at Butler County Community College in El Dorado. While the game will feature some of the best and most competitive players in the state faced off in what has become a fierce rivalry for bragging rights between the East and West. But the real winners are the kids who use or will need to use the 22 Shriners Hospitals for Children. Since the first Shrine Bowl game in 1974, the event has raised over \$2.5 million for the network of hospitals.

"It is just one of those things that you bring those guys together and there are 36 players, two managers and two trainers and six coaches and all of the sudden that experience is there with us for the rest of our lives," Marinelli said. "Totally realize that what we are doing is way bigger than ourselves. I think that is the biggest benefit is to watch these kids realize that they have got it pretty darn good. They go out there and they ball out and do their job and they raise money for kids who don't get that chance. That is probably what I am looking forward to the most." 

Article by Adam Strunk
Photos by Samantha Anderson

Not a drive-through

Emporia a great destination town

EMPORIA—For many years I knew Emporia for two things: my Great Aunt Emma and its Braum's. We'd visit her and her ancient dog, Tinkerbelle, and as a reward for my, and I think my father's, patience, we stopped at Braum's.

Such life experiences made Emporia a mixed bag. Later, when making many a trip through the city from college to home, it was a blur of a few houses, a couple roundabouts and a nearby turnpike stop.

Emporia's location as the halfway point between the state's two largest metro areas means many folks experience it as a pass through or the place where you get a quick bite to eat before moving on to bigger and better things.

But a mile or two away from the well-traveled roads reveals a city that is a destination as much as a drive through, with

well-maintained and impressive public amenities, a thriving business district and downtown and plenty of places.

Amenities and history

Emporia is a "one more" sort of town. You visit one monument and then hear about another, and then you head there, and then someone else recommends a museum and then a zoo or a bridge. A day trip to Emporia could be taken up with tours and museum visits alone. There's a lot of history there, and much of it is thanks to a number of famous residents.

We celebrate Veterans Day in part because of an Emporia shoe salesman, Alvin King, who celebrated it locally and then had the idea championed by both a Kansas congressman and then a Kansas-claimed president, Dwight D. Eisenhower.

With that history in mind, it makes sense that Emporia hosts a large All Veterans Memorial, one of the first of in the country when it was built.

It sits on the Cottonwood River next to an historic "rainbow" bridge, the Marsh Arch, which spans the water and has been included on the national registry of historic places. The spot provides a good location to walk around, observe veterans' contributions to the country, or enjoy a spring day as we saw a good number of Topeka residents doing on the closed bridge. The bridge sits over a small dam, making it a popular fishing location as well.

Emporia also has a Hispanic-American World War II Veterans Memorial, as well as Spanish-American, Vietnam, and Civil War memorials located within its limits.

Thanks to Emporia State, historically a

Emporia sports a number of bridges with great views over the rivers that surround it. The Marsh Bridge, built in 1928, spans the Cottonwood River and sits next to the All Veterans Memorial. It's a popular place for people to enjoy the outdoors.

teaching college, there's the National Teachers Hall of fame located in the city as well as the Johnston Geology Museum and Peterson Planetarium located on the ESU campus.

Adding to that is the long-reaching legacy of perhaps Emporia's most famous citizen, William Allen White.

White ran the Emporia Gazette and became famous for his editorials and for his nationally syndicated columns. White won a Pulitzer Prize during his long career, and his home in Emporia, Red Rocks, hosted U.S. presidents, such as Theodore Roosevelt, celebrities and various intellectuals of his time.

White played a large role in combating the spread of the KKK during his time and also nationally took up the cause of providing aid to the Allied Powers during the early parts of World War II.

Despite his national contributions, White's legacy is most on view in Emporia, from the Emporia Gazette Museum and his family's continued ownership of the paper to his house, open for tours, to Peter Pan Park.

The park is a sprawling, 51-acre park containing a fishing lake, shelters, an amphitheater and other amenities.

White donated the land for the park in honor of the memory of his daughter, Mary, who died in a riding accident. The name comes from White's statement that she was a Peter Pan who never grew up. The park also hosts a well-known Frisbee golf course.

We visited the place on a Sunday and found it full of families enjoying the May weather and picnicking. It also was nearly devoid of trash and well manicured.

And all of this listing does not include perhaps the nicest Emporia attraction, the David Traylor Zoo.

The zoo is free and supported by donations, volunteers and tax dollars.

When you hear the term free zoo, you think of a small operation such as the one that exists in Riverside Park in Wichita.

While the David Traylor Zoo is not massive, it's one of the smallest accredited zoos in the United States, and it makes up for it with both an intimate setting with the animals and a well-maintained and inviting environment.

The place looks like a botanical garden where animals live. There are 80 individual species and 400 animals. Their exhibits line the pathways through the zoo, and there's both the local and exotic. One moment you'll be next to a cougar, some geese and a bobcat, then around the corner appears an endangered Chinese deer and a large lemur exhibit. The mix of animals leaves a sort of guessing game on what you'll see turning each corner.

Some animals are separated by cages and others by knee high fence, and all of the exhibits are blended in to the landscaping.



Further down, larger animals—buffalo and llamas—are housed with a large collection of peacocks, which seem to go where they please.

The David Traylor Zoo is a great place for a nice shaded stroll and 40 minutes of diversion during a spring day.

Main Street

A reader's choice poll conducted by USA Today named Emporia's Main Street as the best Main Street in the country after a group of 20 streets were nominated for the process by experts. Nominations were compiled based on history, local ownership and community-centric spaces.

A good number of shops dot Emporia's Main Street, with plenty of restaurants, a good number of bars and entertainment venues, such as the Granada Theatre, as well as plenty of places to shop.

One thing you notice in Emporia is it has a large antiques scene. Antique malls and flea markets dot the Main Street and city as a whole, and it's a popular destination for those interested in the antiquing pastime.

Of all the locations, perhaps the most well-known antique shop is Paper Moon Antiques. The shop is named after the 1973 comedy set in Kansas, which is a favorite of owners John and Becky Doan.

The shop originally opened in Wichita before locating and finding its home in Emporia, Becky's hometown.

Today it sells a wide variety of antiques, specializing in glass and lamps and draws business from across the country.

The couple estimated about 90 percent of the customers come from out of town.

John was involved in antiques for more than 50 years and organized antique shows after getting his first start in Fargo, N.D., as a way to pay the bills. He developed an eye for it and was traveling across the country, putting on shows, before he eventually gave it up for a while. With Becky in the scene, the couple picked the livelihood back up.



Radius Brewing serves Emporia and has become a popular watering hole for both town residents and those passing through. The beer pictured is the Radius Brewing Brown.



Their shop is eclectic and can be either dazzling or nerve-racking, depending on one's clumsiness. A trip and fall could destroy hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars of collected antiques on display. But, on the other hand, the location is a kaleidoscope of color and history.

Becky said she's only had a major accident resulting in breakage once, as she was in a hurry to turn off the heater before leaving.

Food and drink

Upon entering town, hungry from passing semis on Highway 50, we were cruising to Peter Pan Park when a purple building proclaiming "Panadaria" caught our eye.

At first, assuming it was a bakery, we entered the place called El Marmol (The Marble).

Instead of shelves of pan, we were treated to a full on restaurant, offering a particularly authentic set of Mexican foods. Tripe and menudo (soup made from tripe) were on the menu, as well as lengua (tongue), which could be ordered in tacos. The

place also sported tortas, a Mexican sort of sandwich, authentic shrimp cocktail and a Mexican recipe for beef soup.

We went with two tacos, a tongue and beef, and took them with us for a snack at Peter Pan Park, which is nearby. They came served with a lime, two radishes, which help cut the heat, and homemade chili verde and an especially spicy sort of adobe sauce. I want a bottle of it. It's delicious.

If you're a fan of the kind south-of-the-border food that's not served with piles of refried beans and margarita specials, this is the place to go in Emporia. We later found out that the place has quite the following as well as a second location within Emporia's downtown.

We got some coffee at Gravel City Roasters, a pretty neat local coffee shop that does its bean roasting in Emporia. It's a nice place to hang out and lounge, especially between shops downtown.

Finally, we stopped at Radius Brewing Co.

Now, while almost all of Emporia was new to me on this trip, I know Radius quite well due to my working and travel relationship with Publisher Joey Young, who frequents the place every time he goes near Emporia.

It's a brewery and restaurant, with good food and quality beer. I've made my way through the list at this point and would recommend Rumor Has It, an IPA for the hopheads in the crowd, Low 5 Pale Ale, for those wanting something more chill or looking to knock back a few, and the simple Brown Ale, for those looking for something a bit darker.

All are good. The place also offers flights.


As Emporia is a college town with plenty of working college students, the one knock I'd say on Radius after multiple visits is the service can be hit or miss. We visited on a Sunday, and a few servers seemed to be recovering from Saturday night.

But the place made up for it in the food. The place is known for woodfired pizzas as well as solid sandwiches.

Both are solid options, and the pizza easily feeds one person if not another. The Reuben is hard to beat, because it piles on the meat and dressing.

And side wise, we see no reason to order anything else but the place's mashed potatoes, which come mashed with the peelings, filled with flavor and covered with great gravy. They have to be horrible for you from how good they taste but are worth a stop just to sample.

As for other dining in Emporia, the other places that came up a lot in conversation with locals were Casa Ramos, and Bobby D's Merchant St. Barbecue. Both are in the downtown, making it possible to sample and mix all three. A little beer and a bit of barbecue or Mexican food isn't a bad way to do it.

So, all in all, we left Emporia full, exhausted and wanting to come back. 

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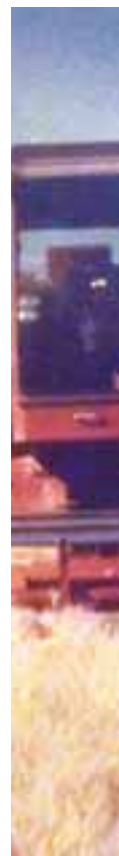
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Customer relations

Wade Brubacher has spent a lifetime building relationships

NORTH NEWTON—There is nothing physically demanding or difficult in sitting down and writing a letter. But when Wade Brubacher sat down to pen about 19 of them in 1990 to let his customers of over two decades know that he was getting out of the custom harvest business and he wasn't coming back, it was the most difficult thing he ever had to do.

"That was hard," Brubacher said. "That was bad when I heard back from them, because they were not happy. There were some tears shed over that deal. That was the hardest thing, still to this day, that was the hardest thing I ever did: was telling those people that I wasn't coming back."

Brubacher was 44 years old when he got out of the harvest business. Until that decision, a life on a combine was about all he knew. When he was a kid growing up in rural Walton, his father and grandfather did some custom cutting in Oklahoma, Western Kansas, and Western Nebraska. He and his brother Jim spent their summers hustling trucks, loading them up with wheat for the hired men to take into town. He had been put on

the seat of a combine to drive when he was 12.

As he and Jim got older, they were given more responsibilities and were put in charge of hiring the crew and taking the machines out. Having those responsibilities gave them an idea that changed things in a big way.

"In '69 we finally wised up and bought him out," Brubacher said, "and said, 'Hey if we are going to be doing this, let's just do it on our own. We bought him out and we hit our first run, it was in 1969. And then we pushed that thing hard. We bought four used combines and four used trucks from our dad and went down and found some work in Texas, which was entirely new ground. But by the time we ran that thing, and Jim and I partnered for 21 years, and by the time we were done with that deal, we were cutting from Northern Texas to Southern Manitoba."

The brothers built a custom harvest giant that cut wheat fields in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska, Montana and into the Canadian province of Manitoba. They ran as many as eight combines at one time before paring it back to

six, with each brother taking three and splitting up with their own crews.

It was an empire built by not only getting customers but keeping them with customer service and building lasting relationships and bonds.

"We always told them, 'If you let us in your field one time, we will be back, guaranteed,'" Brubacher said. "We had people that when we started that deal out, customers that we scrounged up, still had them 21 years later. It was a great relationship."

The relationships the Brubacher brothers built with their customers was one sealed with trust and hard work. They spent their lives doing business in a way that is rare in the modern world of transactions.

"When we got done cutting, we always sat down at the kitchen table, figured up how many acres, how many bushels, all this kind of stuff, and settled up: get the checks written, give everybody a hug and say, 'I'll send you a Christmas card and see you next year,'" Brubacher said. "We exchanged Christmas cards, maybe a phone call in the early spring [...] and coordinated that way. The thing

Jim and Wade Brubacher pose with their combines in a wheat field during the 1970s by the Canadian border. *Courtesy Photo*

“You have got to find customers and keep them happy and keep them coming back.”

about it is, as compared to how things have changed today, is our stuff was nothing but your word and a handshake. There were no contracts. Our deals were made across the hood of a pickup standing out alongside a field and a guy would say, ‘How much is it going to cost me to get this field harvested?’ You’d work it out right there and go to work.”

The relationships that were built were relationships that still last today. There are old customers he still has pheasant hunting trips with in Western Kansas that serve as reunions. There were also history lessons learned hearing stories from customers who lived through the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl. There was a customer who remembered seeing a cloud of dust roll in so thick it choked out the motor in the car so it wouldn’t run. When he was older, he lived in a sod house and shot jackrabbits to feed his family.

But though the time spent on the road built lasting relationships, the life was starting to take its toll.

“There was lots of times that I was gone before Memorial Day, down south, and if a guy had everything in the barn by Thanksgiving, I was grateful,” Brubacher said. “It was a profitable deal, but I just got to a place in my life where I just considered myself to be standing at a crossroad. If I continued on the deal then I was going to run combines for another 20, 25 years. And I don’t know, there’s about so many wheat fields you can see. A stubble field is a stubble field.”

As a 44-year-old, he had never spent a summer at home in his life. He had a family and thought about all the things he missed out on sitting on a tractor or a combine like church camps and summer baseball. And with a family of his own, he wanted to get out, though he didn’t have much of a plan beyond that.

“My wife [Joan] was kind of the worrywart,” Brubacher said. “And she said, ‘Well, if we are not going to go combining, what are we going to do?’ And I said, ‘Well, as soon as I figure something out, you are going to be the first to know.’ But I have said that all that I know right now, at this point in time, is I know what we are not going to do.”

The solution came in a newspaper ad for real estate classes in Wichita. After a week of sitting through seven hours a day of classes, he took the exam. He had also booked an

auction but had never been to auction school and figured he ought to learn something about it before the sale.

After taking the real estate exam, he took off for Kansas City for a week of auction school, putting another iron in the fire.

“The auction school experience, that was kind of a neat deal in a lot of ways, but you learn just enough to make yourself dangerous,” Brubacher said. “You’re no polished professional when you come out of auction school. But I got that deal done.”

While he was in Kansas City, he called home, and his wife informed him he had something in

entire life. It just worked out that way that I have been self-employed. And if I don’t go out there and scrounge and customer up, I ain’t gonna have a customer.”

As an auctioneer in the area, he has found not only another way to make money in his life after harvesting but a way to give back by earning money for others. Having the ability to do what he can volunteering through benefit auctions has meant the world to him.



“At this point in time I have a farming interest, an auction interest, a real estate interest, a great big garden and I do as much volunteer work as I can,” Brubacher said. “That has been, for the last five, six years, I have really, really tried to concentrate on giving back.”

Brubacher has worked with Habitat for Humanity for about 10 years and also holds an annual benefit in the fall for the Harvey County Safe House. He also has

the mail from the real estate commission. He told her to open it, and she found a congratulations letter that he had passed his real estate exam.

Newly armed with a real estate license, he got to work in a career that continues at Berkshire Hathaway in Newton. Throughout his career, he has carried the same need for face-to-face customer contact that was such a big part of his life on a combine.

“You have got to find customers and keep them happy and keep them coming back,” Brubacher said. “And I have done that my

done big sales for the Mennonite Central Committee in both California and Washington state, as well as a benefit auction at Yale when his son was in medical school there.

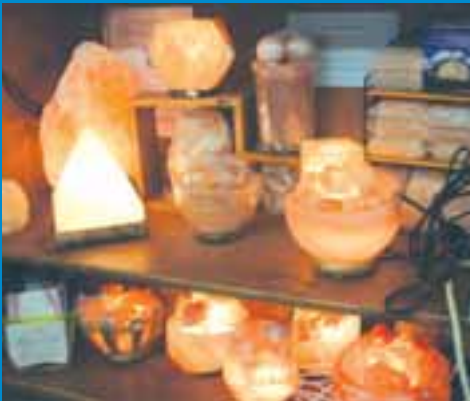
“I have had some things that have been real money makers, and I’ve had some other deals that have been damn poor,” Brubacher said. “But you know how that goes. But the auction thing has allowed me, especially doing benefit auctions, another avenue to give back. For me it’s a fairly easy way to help out. Time just marches on.”

Top right: Wade Brubacher, right, auctions off some antique tractors. *Courtesy photo.* Middle: The wall in Wade Brubacher’s man cave is covered in photos, memorabilia and memories from his time as a custom harvester. *Mike Mendez/Harvey County Now*

Convenience of *running a store*

Articles and photos by
Wendy Nugent

VanRossun has business in Walton for 15 years



WALTON—Hilltop Convenient Store seems to be a Google, of sorts, as they're asked a lot of questions. Owner Twila VanRossun said they're kind of the information center of Walton.

For instance, they're asked directions, like how to get to Wichita or how to get to Albuquerque, N.M., among other things.

"One that kills me—what state are we in?" VanRossun said. "Some of the questions they come up with, really? You're on the road driving?"

The convenience store is on U.S. Highway 50 between Newton and Peabody right in Walton. It's a place where folks can stop, use the restroom and buy food.

Outside, customers are greeted by flowers in planters from Walton Rural Life Center. Inside, they're greeted by the smell of pizza cooking, or perhaps VanRossun or an employee welcoming them.

Beyond information and snacks, the store also is where folks can go when they need help. VanRossun said sometimes people run into the building, asking them to call 911 for one reason or another.

In that vein, VanRossun wants to put a sign in the window that says "safe zone," so people know the location is a safe place for them to be.

VanRossun enjoys her work.

"I like dealing with the public, and I have to stay busy," she said. "Dealing with the public—customers, vendors—that's probably the best part about it."

Her business philosophy has to do with customers.

"Treat customers like you'd want to be treated," she said.

Along those lines, near the beverages on a chalkboard, there's a sign that reads, "Never underestimate the power of a kind word or deed."

VanRossun changes the sign from time to time. A while back, the sign read, "Always have at least one friend with a pickup." She thought that was appropriate for people living in the area, she said, laughing.

All friends in pickups need food, and the convenience store has a lot of it. Some is cooked and ready to eat, like pizza, roller items that are cooked on a roller, chicken bites, chicken wings, poppers, jalapeño cheddar bites and fish sticks.

"Anything we can pretty much run through the oven," VanRossun said.

They also offer sandwiches and burritos for lunch and breakfast pizza, breakfast sandwiches and breakfast burritos for the first meal of the day. In addition, VanRossun said they can make omelettes, egg sandwiches, biscuits and gravy, and breakfast casserole.

VanRossun does a lot in the store, including making food, although, she added, she doesn't do maintenance.

"I do it all," she said.

This includes running the register until the help gets there, office work and bookkeeping.

She works weekdays and usually is there at 5 a.m., although store hours are 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily. The opening hour is a little blurred, however, because VanRossun said, "Once I'm here, we're open."

"I have customers that are here before 6 o'clock," she said. "It's nothing that I put my third breakfast pizza in the oven by 6 o'clock."

VanRossun doesn't live that far away from the store, so if employees call, she can be there pretty quick, if need be, since she resides in rural Newton.

"If the help ever calls, I can be here in three minutes, as long as there's no train," she said. "I'm usually here until 3 o'clock, if not later. I have help that comes in the mornings. In the summer, there's days that it takes two of you to run things."

In addition to food, the store sells items

such as dog treats, salt lamps and spinners. Spinners seem to be a fad right now, and the store went through four boxes in the same number of weeks. VanRossun said it's hard to get them from suppliers now, and they come in a variety of colors, like red, blue, green, white, yellow and black. Spinners are little gadgets a person can put between his or her thumb and a finger and then spin it around. She also carried some that glowed in the dark.

"They're terrible hard to get," she said. "It's crazy, the fad of those things now. They really have been a big hot item."

One hot item for the VanRossuns was getting into the convenience store business. They bought Hilltop in Walton in 2002, and in February 2009, a fire destroyed the building. On July 3, 2009, they opened at their current location, and VanRossun is the sole proprietor.

Before they owned Hilltop, VanRossun's husband, Rick, planted a seed in her mind.

"Rick came home one day and said, 'Wanna buy BJ's? (BJ's is where Hilltop was.)'" VanRossun said, adding she replied she didn't want to work 24/7. Then she thought about it and told Rick she was interested. He said, "I thought you said you didn't want to work 24/7?"

"I said maybe 12/7," she said she told Rick. "Little did I know that would be true the first few months."

VanRossun's daughter, Monica, helped out at first.

"She was in between jobs at the time," VanRossun said. "She probably put in as many hours as I did."

Monica also was instrumental in helping clean the place.

"They used to allow smoking there, and the help smoked there," she said. "It needed a good, good, good cleaning, so that took several weeks."

The building they're in now has been there since the early 1980s, VanRossun said, and MKC is their landlord. The building used to house the co-op and had a variety of items sold there, like nuts and bolts, tools and other co-op-like items. ➡



OPPOSITE: The convenience store sells a variety of items, including salt lamps. TOP: Twila VanRossun, right, owner of Hilltop Convenience Store, shares a laugh with employee Roni Stewart in the store's kitchen area. DIRECTLY ABOVE: Twila VanRossun stands at the register at Hilltop Convenience Store in Walton.



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GRACE HILL WINERY

A VINE TIME

Article by Adam Strunk,
Photos by
Samantha Anderson



WHITEWATER—Harvey County ain't Napa. But the acres of vineyards, the tasting rooms, the venue and the picturesque setting might just fool you at Grace Hill Winery.

Harvey County has its own local vineyard in the far southeast corner, and for the last eight years, it's been pumping out hundreds and thousands of cases of rosé, cabs and moscato.

On a sunny Saturday afternoon, a crowd fills the vineyard's tasting room. A group of women are celebrating an engagement. Another couple chats away busily.

And in the middle of the room, pouring, chatting, cracking jokes, is Adam Perkins, long time vineyard employee.

Perkins, who has just poured a flight, also happens to be the nephew of David and Natalie Sollo; the couple, both doctors, started the winery.

He explains the tastes of the various wines. Each has a quirky label and each has a story. There's El Gato, a moscato, named after an old venerated farm cat that still wanders the property. Peckerhead, the best seller that Perkins calls adult grape juice, was named after an ill-tempered rooster. Chloe's Cuvee gets its name from the vineyard's first bull dog. Dodging Tornadoes, that's a good barbecue wine and as Kansas as it gets. Originally, the Sollo's wine cellar was also their tornado shelter, so they got a good bit of drinking done during the storms, or at least that's what the bottle label says.

"Literally everything is named after something," Perkins says.

He's a people person. He tailors his approach to the crowd. He starts off with broad questions: Do you like red or white? Do you like sweet or dry? And, if asked, he starts describing the notes in a wine and

the finish.

He's tall, quick to smile and throw in a joke or two, some off color, others deprecating. It's just the right approach to people a few glasses in or a bit self conscious about a beginner's knowledge of wine.

Perkins knows his way around a bottle, but he doesn't make you feel stupid if you don't.

The practice likely comes from experience, as large amounts of people visit the winery each year that continues to grow in popularity.

He said some people are passing through, but others come from places like Wichita or Hutchinson.

"We get tons from Newton or from El Dorado," he said.

The location also functions as a venue, hosting weddings and parties.

In all, the vineyard produced 4,000

Adam Perkins shows off the barrel room of the winery, which stores some of the wine and also offers private tastings in the cool, underground cellar.

cases of wine last year and grew 25,000 pounds of grapes. It's sold in 83 liquor stores in Kansas, mostly in the south-central chunk of the state.

About 4,500 plants, some still reaching maturity, dot the property.

While the vineyard continues to grow, it hasn't been without its challenges.

Perkins said the owners originally bought an old dairy farm and turned it into a vineyard because they had a love for wine. And while a cow lot seems like a good place for growing plants, the nutrient-rich soil produced a lot of leaves but few grapes at first Perkins said.

So plantings were moved. Grapes matured. But in 2014, the vineyard was hit by what they call "drift".

A pesticide to kill broad leaved plants was being used nearby and caught the wind, killing plants. It's taken a few years for that area of the vineyard to recover.

And then there are the birds. Perkins said birds are a major pest and concern and something that the vineyard has to work at to combat.

To do so, they have netting they use to cover the rows of grapes.

"You see an oriole, don't tell him about it," Perkins said of David, who has a special dislike for them.

While challenges come with the territory, getting help picking is easy.

The vineyard doesn't pay laborers to pick its grapes. It gets people to do it for free. And the idea is a hit—so much so that there's a grape picking waiting list.

Perkins explained that the picking usually starts and ends at 11:30 a.m. at the latest. In exchange for their labor, pickers get a tour of the winery, barbecue for lunch, free wine to drink during the day, 20 percent off any wine purchased that day at the winery and 10 percent of purchases on the property for the rest of the year. ➡



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TOP: Grace Hill serves as a vineyard, store and event venue. **MIDDLE:** A group samples various wines at Grace Hill in its tasting room. The property sports a number of rooms and outbuildings, allowing guests to relax, enjoy a bottle and soak up the weather. **BOTTOM:** Grace Hill Winery, located near Whitewater, has 4,500 grape vines on the property at various stages of maturity. The vines produce 25,000 pounds of grapes a year. **ABOVE LEFT:** Growltiger, an old and beloved farm cat on the property, interrupted a tour of the property to get petted and picked up. It's his picture on the winery's El Gato Moscato, and most of Grace Hill wines are named for various pets, animals or vineyard-related happenings.



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