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S.T.A.R.T. Exchange Vol. 02, No. 02

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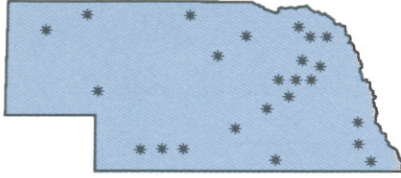
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START

Exchange



A NEWSLETTER FOR S.T.A.R.T. COMMUNITIES

Vol. 2, No. 2
Summer 1991

First S.T.A.R.T. Conference Scheduled October 29 In Columbus

The S.T.A.R.T. community's first conference will be October 29, 1991 in Columbus at the New World Inn.

For a nominal \$10 fee, participants may spend a full "sharing and learning" day with community leaders on topics such as: keeping volunteer momentum going, financing economic development, applying for community

grants, event planning and pointers, and other "how to" sessions.

Other sessions include Community Development Block Grants, the community impact of LB840 (the local economic development bill) and new directions for the Nebraska Department of Economic Development.

Sponsors are the Platte Campus of

Central Community College, UNO's Center for Public Affairs Research and the Peter Kiewit Foundation.

A brochure will be mailed to all S.T.A.R.T. participants later, and information may be obtained by contacting Karin Rieger, Central Community College at 800-642-1083 or Alice Schumaker, CPAR at 800-227-4533.

"SUPERIOR...The Name Says It All"

SUPERIOR'S founding fathers couldn't have settled with a better name. "SUPERIOR...The Name Says It All" in 1991 is staking its claim on a new identity.

The 2,500 residents in this southern Nebraska town are charting their top-of-the-line message on tee-shirts, signs and even a S.T.A.R.T.-inspired trolley car that they built to give historical tours.

There are a number of hometowners who have gone on to fame and fortune, but the heart and headstone of perhaps its most accomplished daughter, the Lady Evelene Broadstone Vestey, remains as the inspiration for a Superior festival.

Superior discovered its heritage and new identity only after its major industry, a cement plant, closed in 1985. That seemed to set a pattern, and more businesses and the community's vitality gradually disappeared.

Concerned citizens got together, studied and decided the S.T.A.R.T.

(continued on page 2)



"All aboard" for Superior's trolley and its future: (from left) Autrey; Glenda Thayer, Chamber of Commerce manager; Hansen and Sheets.

Superior

(continued from page 1)

program was the vehicle that could "get the town riled up," says Dave Autrey, who became the S.T.A.R.T. leader.

An S.O.S. (Statesmen of Superior) program was created to provide the required dollars. Donors are listed on a plaque in the park, which is further enhanced by flowers, benches and eventually a walkway. In just a year the fund has reached nearly \$30,000.

The first Lady Vestey Festival will be Memorial Day Weekend in 1992, honoring Lady Evelene Broadstone Vestey, who was born in 1875 and came with her Norwegian parents to homestead near Superior in 1879. She worked for Henningson Food Co. and later for the Vestey Meat Packing Company in Chicago. By the 1920s she was reported to be earning \$250,000 a year as a trouble-shooter for the international holdings of the Vestey family.

She married William Vestey, several years her senior, after the death of his first wife.

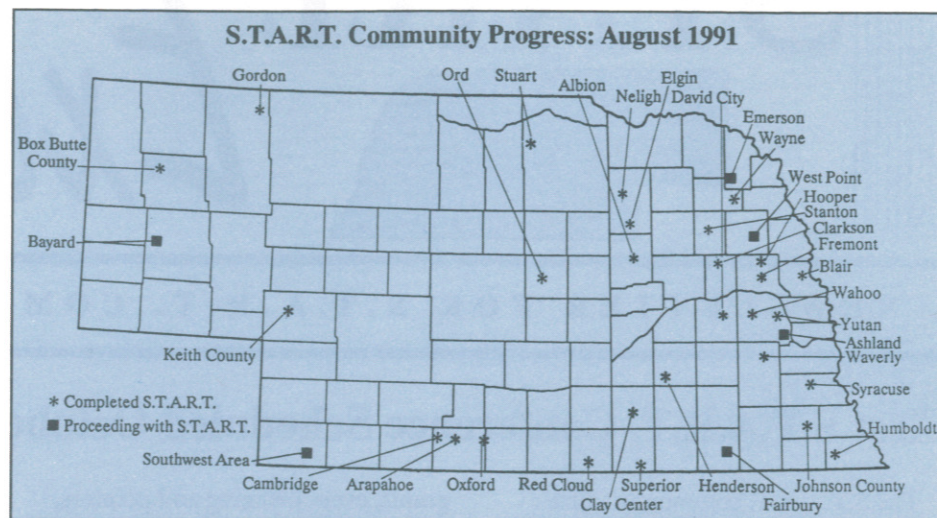
Ten percent of Superior's population — 250 residents — came to the S.T.A.R.T. Town Meeting in July, 1990, attracted by a county fair atmosphere of booths and showmanship that competed for volunteers. More than half (130) signed up for committees.

Five major task forces are chaired by "a strong resource team that is committed," according to assistant leader Deb Hansen, who sees herself as a good organizational match for Autrey's outgoing, promotional flair. (He's co-owner and manager of Farmers State Insurance Agency, Inc. and has lived in Superior only 10 years. Deb, a lifetime resident, is a partner with her husband in agricultural production, handling the bookwork and most of the field work in farming north of Superior.)

Activities are extensive, and major plans include efforts by Stan Sheets, designer of the 20-seat trolley, to designate four blocks on the National Register of Historic Places, to restore the 1930s Leslie Hotel and to renovate the WPA-built city auditorium into a cultural arts center.

Sports enthusiasts soon will have a

Benkelman Group Begins In August



The southwestern Nebraska communities of Benkelman, Stratton and Haigler will begin a combined S.T.A.R.T. process in August, becoming the eighth Nebraska "community" to enroll in the economic development program since January.

Other new S.T.A.R.T. communities, which cover a diverse geographical area, are Ashland, Curtis/Maywood, Hooper, Red Cloud, Bayard, West Point and Fairbury.



Facilitator Inspires Leaders

Corrinne Pedersen knows communities by their differences. As a S.T.A.R.T. facilitator, she

brings a "library of tools," her tag for her life-long experiences, to spark each community into making decisions that will make those differences pay off.

"Communities may have the same concerns, but they approach them differently for different reasons," she observes as she prepares for her ninth S.T.A.R.T. assignment at Benkelman.

Each community can make its differences count. She points out that Red Cloud has Willa Cather and Alliance has the railroad. Wahoo is 30 miles from Lincoln and 30 miles from Omaha, and is working at controlling retail leakage by providing better services.

Mrs. Pedersen collected her "library of tools" at various jobs or service in business and industry, education and health related boards. Today she is community development director for the Nebraska Municipal Power Pool and the Municipal Energy Agency of Nebraska.

She grew up in Cozad, and she and her husband, a retired County Extension agent, lived in Custer County for 30 years.

"The S.T.A.R.T. program provides a vehicle for the community leaders — and a community is whatever they envision even beyond the city limits — and what they see as their future. If I can facilitate them, through this process, to be better informed as leaders, that's what the process is all about."

Corrinne Pedersen

new \$120,000 Ed Weir memorial track in honor of the late Superior native who made great strides at UNL.

A few years ago it was easy to spot empty buildings along Main Street. Today buildings are filled; citizens have voted for a new fire truck, and

UNL architectural students have provided a 75-page master plan for beautification and recreation.

Superior's Autrey and Hansen are a team that believe "you have to combine city, business, school and community to achieve the best results."

Community & Economic Development I · D · E · A · S

◆ Competing With Mass Merchants: Practices That Help WIN!

Small retail businesses are feeling the crunch of mass merchandise retailers, and many have been forced to close or accept profit cuts.

Wal-Mart, for instance, targets smaller towns to build new outlets, and their sales between 1980 and 1990 jumped from \$1.2 to \$25.7 billion.

A prominent success factor for mass merchandisers is their highly effective and technical distribution systems. *Discount Store News* reported that Wal-Mart's distribution costs amounted to only 1.3 percent of its sales, compared to 3.5 percent for a major competing discount chain and 5.0 percent for a general merchandise chain.

A recent Iowa study among communities of 5,000 to 30,000 population suggests two identifying factors of winners and losers among small town competitors:

- Merchants selling goods or services that Wal-Mart does not sell become natural beneficiaries, for they receive spillover from customers who come to town for Wal-Mart.
- Merchants selling the same goods as Wal-Mart are in danger and are subject to losing trade unless they change their way of doing business.

Attitude tips for small merchants: It is possible to survive in this type of

environment, but methods of operation may need to be changed. A discount mass merchandise store probably will enlarge your town's retail trade area size. While all firms are free to compete, local officials should be careful not to offer overly generous incentives to large firms that could place server stress on smaller firms.

Merchandise tips: Try not to handle the exact same merchandise. Sell singles rather than prepackaged groups. Expand your lines to be more complete (giants usually handle only fast-moving merchandise), and try to handle complementary merchandise. Look for voids in the mass inventory, which often lacks higher quality or name brand ideas.

Marketing tips: Extended open hours are a necessity. Lower prices on

frequently purchased items (customers usually know and compare these). Focus your advertising, stressing your competitive advantages. Emphasize expert technical advice, for it is difficult to find knowledgeable workers in mass outlets. Where appropriate, offer deliveries, on-site repair, improved return policies and develop special order capability, making arrangements with certain suppliers or cooperating partner stores for priority shipments.

Customer relation tips: Make sure customers are greeted with a smile. Solicit customer opinions or complaints. Train employees often. Make employees "associates."

Source: Kenneth E. Stone. "Competing with the Mass Merchandisers." *Small Business Forum*. Vol.9 No.1, Spring 1991.

◆ Hints On Handling Meeting Behavior

Even extraordinary leaders have difficulty dealing with certain behavior during meetings. To keep a meeting on track, **Interaction Associates, Inc.** offers suggestions on how to avoid conflict with these "labeled" audience participants:

Latecomer/Early Leaver	Attacker
Broken Records	Interpreter
Doubting Thomas	Gossiper
Headshaker	Know-it-all
Backseat Driver	Dropout
Whisperer	Busybody
Loudmouth	Interrupter

Their intervention advice:

- **Avoid being defensive.** Arguing back when criticized will only provoke more argument.
- **Protect others from personal attack when possible.** Such attacks kill creativity and innovative thinking and may give an individual an excuse to not participate or return.
- **Avoid process battles.** Preventing lengthy arguments about which is the right way to proceed will save time and reduce con-

fusion. Choose a process at the beginning and stick with it.

- **Accept/Legitimize/Deal with or Defer.** Steps for this positive method are to 1) accept the idea without agreeing or disagreeing, 2) legitimize it by writing it on the group memory, 3) decide as a group if the issue or idea is more appropriately dealt with at the present or should it be postponed, 4) record items that are deferred and agree on when they will be addressed.
- **Boomerang method.** Return a question to the person who asked it or to the group, so the facilitator does not take responsibility for all questions.
- **Maintain/regain/focus method.** Assures that everyone is working on the same content, using the same process at the same time. Allows quicker and effective decision making.
- **Tactful and appropriate use of body language and humor.**

◆ Rural Meeting October 11

Lt. Governor Maxine Moul and Steve Buttress, Director of the Nebraska Department of Economic Development, are among the key speakers who will be in Wayne October 11 for the third annual Cooperative Rural Development Conference.

Contact **Connie Keck**, Director, Bureau for Community and Economic Development, Wayne State College, 402-375-7533.

◆ "Job Satisfaction" Ranks Highest In Small Firms

A recent study by the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee indicated that employees of small firms rated lower in categories of financial rewards, job security and job hazard, yet rated strikingly higher in job satisfaction.

Researcher **John F. Zipp** reports that larger workplaces with 100-499 employees ranked lower in overall job satisfaction, were less likely to recommend their current job to a friend or take the same job again themselves. Zipp points out that small establishments may provide jobs which require more creativity than both medium and large establishments and have substantially greater autonomy in the respon-

sibility over their work.

Zipp concludes his study with, "Those concerned with economic development have at times been more concerned with creating jobs than with creating quality jobs. These results indicate that jobs in both small and larger establishments each have some desirable characteristics. Thus, if the goal is to create quality jobs, policy-makers should recognize the strengths and weaknesses of each in order to help both create jobs with more quality."

Source: John F. Zipp. "The Quality of Jobs in Small Business." *Economic Development Quarterly*. Vol.5 No.1, February 1991.

◆ Survey Of Business Owners Reveals Stable Business Profile

A survey of business owners conducted during 1989 and 1990 in S.T.A.R.T. communities indicate that half or more of those responding own their own property, plan to expand in the next three years, get the most business from their hometown and advise staying open at least one night each week.

When asked why customers do business with them, an overwhelming percentage cited quality of goods and services (95%), quality of customer service (90%) and convenience (83%). Other reasons were price (68%), loyalty (62%), referrals (59%), promotions (53%) and store appearance (48%).

High percentages also responded to strategies they thought would be best for economic development: support or expand existing businesses (92%), attract new industries (85%), attract new retail business (74%), attract new service business (66%), attract tourism (51%) and provide consumer/business services (48%).

These and other major findings are based on a composite average made up of each community's average and indicate a stable business profile. The rating question percentages are for those rating the items "excellent" or "very good."

Retail businesses made up the largest share of businesses responding (41%), followed by customer services (15%), finance/insurance and real

estate (15%), with the remainder made up of other kinds of businesses. Seventy one percent of respondents were Chamber of Commerce members.

A complete summary report is available by writing or calling UNO's Center for Public Affairs Research (CPAR), Peter Kiewit Conference Center, Omaha, NE 68182 or 800-227-4533.

◆ Chamber Study Cites Improvements For State Public Education System

A recent study of Nebraska's public education system conducted by an Omaha Chamber of Commerce committee and a Denver-based consultant, **Dr. John Augenblick** of Augenblick, Van de Water & Associates, led participants to cite three key steps to improve the system:

- pupil performance objectives must be clarified,
- pupil performance must be evaluated,
- the results of each evaluation, aggregated to the school and school district levels, must be reported to pupils, parents and the general public.

◆ Pilot Program Underway For Health Services

Communities in Knox, Polk, Saunders and Thayer counties have been selected for a pilot program designed to enhance the delivery of health services and strengthen the economy of a community.

Coordinated by CPAR and the University of Nebraska Medical Center, the S.T.A.R.T. Health Services program uses community development strategies to assist small to medium-sized, non-metropolitan communities identify the issues and problems they face in the delivery of medical and health services.

Efforts of the new program will dovetail a current UNMC program, Rural Health Education Network (RHEN), which encourages students from Nebraska's non-metropolitan areas to study various medical professions. RHEN places strong emphasis on the issues and problems of rural America and requires a RHEN community to identify and address the issues confronting it in the delivery of medical and health services.

Both RHEN and S.T.A.R.T. Health Services have been enthusiastically received in Scottsbluff, Grand Island, Kearney, North Platte, Hastings and Norfolk.

The committee, working in cooperation with CPAR Director **Russell L. Smith**, concluded that Nebraska needs to take some specific actions and recommended eight objectives for the education system and the business community.

One of the eight objectives is to acknowledge the important role schools play in the development of viable communities in rural areas of Nebraska.

Another objective is to amend LB1059 to improve the equity and efficiency of state funds invested in public education.

The full report suggests methods to meet these objectives and compares the educational systems of Nebraska, surrounding states and the nation. Copies may be obtained by contacting CPAR.

Humboldt Turns "Ho Hum" Into "Heartbeat Of The Heartland"

HUMBOLDT may be 50 miles from the nearest MacDonald's, but its Marburgers, Bogle and S.T.A.R.T. "special order lineup" are prepared to serve a progressive business-oriented future.

This "Heartbeat of the Heartland" community is overcoming a "ho hum" threat that intensified ten years ago with the sale of a local feed company, resulting in a drop from 120 to fewer than 20 employees. In the past 30 years the town had lost 17 percent of its population.

Two residents, on the other hand, were "in migration" statistics, and with a "strongly supportive" committee and "town officials and organizations who listen," they're rebuilding with S.T.A.R.T.

S.T.A.R.T. leader **Dean Bogle** is a "newcomer" who moved to Humboldt in 1985 when he bought the NAPA auto parts store. He had just returned from a week's vacation this summer (his first in eight years) when he reminisced about Humboldt. He was involved with PRIME, a small community development group, that had nurtured interest, but felt they needed the knowledge offered by S.T.A.R.T.

Boosted by both S.T.A.R.T. and the TOP DOG program of Peru State College, Bogle has been instrumental in finding buyers of businesses as owners retire, revitalizing deteriorating buildings, forming the Quad County (Pawnee, Nemaha, Johnson and Richardson counties) and establishing workable relationships with developers and town officials to obtain a golf course and other recreational and industrial projects.

"My dream is for Humboldt to establish some economic roots that are not directly tied to agriculture and to improve our quality of life — able to earn a living, yet enjoy recreation and the pleasures in life."

Dean Bogle

Both Bogle and **John Marburger**, a steering committee member, feel that S.T.A.R.T. guided the formulation of thoughts, blended ideas from inside and outside the community and helped them find the idea that's "right for Humboldt."

"In a small town, you think every-



Humboldt leaders in front of the Locker that S.T.A.R.T. helped with the transition of ownership (from left) Lions Club president Mark Joy, Jeane Crooker and Dean Bogle.

thing continues the same way," cautions Marburger, who left the retail buying field in Kansas City a dozen years ago to return to Humboldt and carry on his father's business. (The Marburger shoe store has been in the family for over 110 years.) Also an original equipment manufacturer, he makes bags for 14 different brands of lawn mowers with markets in America, England and Japan. He also produces such specialized "bags" as surgical jump suits.

Marburger, who lives only three doors down from the house where he was born, said his business has "turned around" in the past six months. He boosted business by diversifying, by employing the "fine people who live in Humboldt" and by networking with nearby as well as international communities.

"The problem may still be there, but we're changing it to opportunity. There are assets in every small town."

John Marburger

Believing that there are no new ideas, just new ways of organizing, and that "the success of a small town depends on adapting to a mobile society," Marburger points to two implement dealers that attract customers

from a wide surrounding area. To help make Humboldt more competitive, he intends to go out for national shows, expand regional networking, visit the corporate offices of non-resident businesses and develop a Humboldt personality that highlights its strengths.

To preserve interest and promote versatility, Bogle is about to turn the S.T.A.R.T. leadership and monthly meetings over to fellow committee member **Jeane Crooker**, widow of Humboldt's former barber who has given much time to community projects.

The Leaders at Home

Bogle and his wife, Sharon, a school teacher in Fall City, have two children who live in Lincoln. Their son is assistant manager of the Osco drug store at Park Plaza, and their daughter is the public information officer for the Nebraska Department of Economic Development.

Marburger and his wife, Susan, an Oakland homemaker, send their four children, ages 11, 5 and twins, age 6, to "tremendous" schools in Humboldt.

What Does LB840 Mean To S.T.A.R.T. Communities?

Community-oriented state officials believe Nebraska LB840 will put progressive S.T.A.R.T. communities "in front of the parade" by supplementing their existing authority and by providing a critical implemental tool.

David Chambers, executive director of the League of Nebraska Municipalities, and Lynn Rex, assistant director, cite the S.T.A.R.T. analysis approach of identifying community leadership and potential as an "extremely valuable" factor for the success of LB840.

Chambers points out that LB840 allows a community to take general fund money to use, in a broad sense, for economic development. It replaces legislation that was limited in this application. "With adequate revenue, larger cities and aggressive smaller towns and villages who have the proper leadership will move 'in front of the parade.'"

According to Ms. Rex, LB840 had its beginnings about five years ago when city managers and administrators met to discuss ways to be effective partners with their local Chambers of Commerce. It became evident that there was a misunderstanding of existing laws, and LB840 now clarifies the authority of a community.

Chambers won't buy into a prevailing argument against LB840 that it would spawn competition among cities. He says that already exists. Instead he points to the importance that LB840 places in allowing Nebras-

kans to determine their own destiny on the local level.

"We've long been associated with and endorsed S.T.A.R.T., and I can't think of any time it was not valuable. Analysis and hometown leadership make it work, and now, LB840 emphasizes these characteristics."

"We're looking for leadership and ways to diversify the payroll. You can't expect that to happen in every community, but S.T.A.R.T. romps people up, and people have to be romped every once in a while."

David Chambers

The required process of LB840 is for a community to propose a plan, indicate how it would be structured and implemented, hold a public hearing and receive comments, adapt any recommended changes and take it for a vote before the City Council. If Council approval is given, the proposal then goes to the vote of the people in the community, and if accepted, the community is required to implement the plan. The proposed plan should include tools for implementation, such as the proposal, strategic plan and regulations.

Awards to Rex, Spire

Lynn Rex and former Nebraska Attorney General Robert Spire in May received the annual "excellence in public service award" from the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA). Ms. Rex, assistant director, will become director of the League of Nebraska Municipalities in September. S.T.A.R.T. manager Alice Schumaker is president of the ASPA Nebraska chapter.

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Save These Dates:

October 29 – S.T.A.R.T. Conference.

September 14 – Superior Tour.

Superior's trolley will take visitors on historical tours, departing from the Nuckolls Museum every 1 1/4 hours between 9 a.m. and dusk. The \$2 ticket includes the trolley ride and a visit to the Nuckolls Museum. Reservations are advisable, and may be made by contacting the Chamber of Commerce at 402-879-3419.

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- *LB840: What It Means*
- *Superior and Humboldt: Their Programs*
- *Views of a Facilitator*
- *Ideas to Consider*

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