

NewsWatch

Oh, yeah! 'We Kan!'

By P.J. GRIEKSPoor

THE Whiting Cafe has been transformed.

In an event that drew more than 100 volunteers to the tiny Jackson County town on a blazing-hot late June weekend smack dab in the middle of wheat harvest, the little cafe that Rosa Thomas has operated for 25 years got a top-to-bottom makeover.

"We were hoping for maybe 30 people," says Marci Penner, whose Kansas Sampler Foundation was the genesis of the project, the pilot effort of the "I Kan Help Rural Kansas" and "We Kan Bank" initiative.

Early in May, Penner put out the call for help in her regular Sampler Foundation newsletter. The idea was a general cleanup, a new coat of paint, maybe some new curtains and a mural on the outside wall.

The Whiting Cafe was chosen for the pilot project because of Thomas' involvement in the community and her tenacity in keeping the business going for 25 years in a town of 200.

"We figured anyone who can do that deserves a gift," Penner says. "This was our gift to Rosa. She didn't come to ask for a thing. We picked her."

When the cars and pickups started rolling in on the morning of June 26, even Penner was amazed. They came from Pratt, Baldwin City, Wichita, Concordia, Osborne, Inman, Salina, Burlington, Carbondale, Netawaka, Muscotah, Lawrence, Tonganoxie, Kansas City, Oskaloosa, Meriden, Leavenworth, Horton, Holton and Longmont, Colo.

"It just took on a life of its own," Penner says. "People started just walking around, looking at things and saying 'I could fix that.' And it just grew and grew."

Skilled craftsmen brought along their tools and talents and made short work of carpentry, plumbing, electrical repairs and window installation. Trees were trimmed and a pretty little flower garden appeared in front.

Key Points

- The Whiting Cafe was chosen as the pilot project for "I Kan Help Rural Kansas."
- More than 100 people helped transform the small-town cafe.
- The money was raised from small donations, plus a few business gifts.



CAFE MAKEOVER: More than 100 volunteers helped renovate the Whiting Cafe. Owner Rosa Thomas was chosen for the first "We Kan Bank" project because of her outstanding contributions to the community.

When supplies were needed, volunteers left the site and reappeared with them. Phone calls went out to wives, husbands and friends urging them to come and join the effort.

Activity was nonstop from 8:30 Friday morning until 7:30 Friday night, and the crews came back on Saturday to work

from 8:30 a.m. to 10 p.m., and then on Sunday from 8:30 a.m. until 7 p.m. Then, they turned the "new" cafe back over to Thomas, who was open for business at 6 a.m. on Monday.

The "reveal" showed a sparkling white concrete block building with a red, blue and tan mural designed by Jim Stukey of Burlington and the slogan "Food so great you'll scrape your plate." The building has new windows, doors, shutters and screens. There are new curtains, new shelves, new upholstery on the stools, a new freezer, new air conditioning and a new exhaust fan. The floors, walls, ceilings and cabinets have been repaired and refurbished.

During the six weeks before the renovation, donations poured in from around the state to meet the "We Kan Bank" goal of \$5,000 for the project. The Jackson County Development Corp. kicked in a grant of \$1,000.

The money paid for everything except the air conditioner and exhaust fan, and Lower's Plumbing, Heating and Air Conditioning provided a bargain price on the AC, while Chiles Upholstery in Holton reupholstered all the stools.

Penner says there's a new feeling about the cafe now, as though it belongs not just to Thomas, but to the town, as well. "There's a sense of pride for the whole town, which is exactly what we hope to accomplish moving forward with the 'We Kan Bank' initiative."

Gene Merry, a Kansas Sampler Foundation board member from Burlington, was chief organizer for the project, and Bob Topping, Leavenworth, served as project foreman.

Penner hopes to build on the success of the pilot project. She envisions a Web site where the needs of rural Kansas towns can be matched with the skills and willingness of Kansas volunteers.

"I Kan Help Rural Kansas" asks for volunteer labor, and "We Kan Bank" collects tax-deductible donations of \$5 or more. Donations can be mailed to: Kansas Sampler Foundation, 978 Arapaho Rd., Inman, KS 67546.



KSU does well

KANSAS State University's tractor design team took second place honors at the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers 12th annual Quarter Scale Tractor Design Contest in Peoria, Ill., in June.

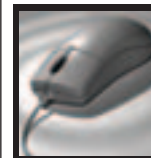
The ASABE contest included 23 teams from the U.S. and Canada. Engines are provided by Briggs & Stratton, and students work within a stringent set of design rules to build a vehicle to pull a variable-weight sled. In addition, the contest includes sections on maneuverability, serviceability, craftsmanship, public presentation, noise abatement, user safety, cost limits, manufacturability — and performance on the track. The culmination of high points in these areas gleaned K-State a plaque and \$700.

— Dan Crummett

Volume 147, Number 8

FAST FIND

| | |
|------------------------|----|
| NewsWatch | 3 |
| Opinion | 11 |
| Crop Production | 17 |
| Business Watch | 32 |
| Machinery/Technology | 36 |
| Land | 41 |
| Natural Resources | 42 |
| Livestock | 43 |
| Marketplace/Classified | 57 |
| Lifestyle | 75 |
| Marketing | 76 |



Keep up on ag news in the region! Check out www.KansasFarmer.com. We feature updates on a wide range of topics, marketing data and weather information you can put to work in your operation.

CONTACT US

Editor: P.J. Griekspoor
pgriekspoor@farmprogress.com
 6716 E. Bainbridge Rd., Wichita, KS 67226
 Phone 316-681-2100
 Fax 316-681-2102

Contributing Editors:

Tom J. Bechman, T.J. Burnham, Dan Crummett, Pam Golden, Paula Mohr, Alan Newport, John Otte, Holly Spangler, Arlan Suderman, Ann Toner

Executive Editor:

Frank Holdmeyer

Corporate Editorial Director:

Willie Vogt, 651-454-6994,
wwogt@farmprogress.com

Sales: 402-489-9331

Subscription Questions:

800-441-1410

For additional sales and company information, see last page of the Marketplace section.

POSTMASTER: Please send address corrections to: *Kansas Farmer*, 255 38th Ave., Suite P, St. Charles, IL 60174-5410

Kansas Sampler seeks a sponsor

THE Kansas Sampler Foundation would like to find a major sponsor to help the "We Kan Bank" initiative become firmly established. A tax-deductible donation of \$6,000 would pay for setting up a Web site and getting it effectively organized. The bank will collect "accounts of need" from volunteer-led rural communities, and people can open "accounts of support" that include both volunteer time and money.

Businesses or individuals interested in helping sponsor "We Kan Bank" can call Marci Penner at 620-585-2374 or e-mail marci@kansassampler.org.

