

Centerville Is Not Dying.

Part 2 of a 3 part look at the future of Centerville

By Jared Hybertson, Centerville Economic Development Coordinator

In last week's article, part 1 of this 3 part look at the future of Centerville, I shared with you a discussion I had with a teacher who had overheard some discouraging comments from a couple of his students revolving around the future of the school. In the article I stressed how important it is for us as a community to keep a positive outlook and stand united to overcome the challenges we currently face in our town. This time around I want to share another conversation I had recently revolving around the future of Centerville and its school district, and also how the culture that surrounds sports can relate to the overall success of a community.

Shortly after the New Year I was approached by a concerned parent of three, who happens to live within the school district, just outside of town in rural Centerville. The conversation revolved around the future of Centerville and its school district. "We've got to do something about these parents in our district looking at other options for places to send their kids to school." Naturally he had my attention, but I asked him to explain a little more about what he meant specifically. He said, "a lot of times it's not the families of the kids in town that you have to worry about leaving, it's the families with the farm kids that are just coming up on school age you ought to be having a conversation with." He then continued to tell me of three or four families that he either knew of, or had heard were considering open enrolling their kids to a different school district. Most of these parents were Centerville alumni with long standing ties to the community. I let this all sink in and I began to realize that this gentleman was exactly right. With open enrollment what it is today, and all loyalties to Centerville aside, these families that may live just as close to one school district as the next, are going to have options. Parents are going to look to do what they feel is best for their kids. And if these parents with young kids who are coming up on school age are only looking at the current situation Centerville is facing, with the down numbers in our high school and our sports programs, then I can see why it might be a tough decision for them. Without currently being involved in our school, these parents may not even realize how strong our numbers are coming up in the Pre-Kindergarten through 5th grade classes, with nearly 20 plus kids or more in each of those grades. Furthermore, these parents may not know of Centerville school's current accomplishments in academics compared to our surrounding schools. We are often out performing our neighboring community's schools and Centerville High School continues to rank among the top performing schools in the State academically year in and year out. But how can we better get the word out about all the positive things the Centerville school district has to offer? How do we reach these parents, before they decide to enroll their children elsewhere? And what are the true underlying factors that will determine their decision to stay or go? Is it Academic proficiency, student to teacher ratios, programs offered, or numbers in athletics? Maybe all of the above.

In a small town, the successes and failures of your high school sports programs shouldn't be the gauge for which a community is measured by, but the two often seem to go hand in hand. If your sports teams are strong it often means your numbers in the school system are good and your community is maintaining or thriving. Plus a good sports team can really bring a community together. People in small

towns sure do get passionate about their sports! I myself played in a variety of sports and consider myself an avid sports fan. More than likely my kids will play sports at some level. But for this article I tried to separate myself from my passion for sports in order to take a deeper look at high school athletics and what sports competition at this level was originally created to do.

The South Dakota High School Activities Association states that sports activities are there to “enrich the educational experience of high school students”. This statement is a little vague but puts the emphasis on education being the priority first and foremost and sports being there to enhance the experience. Another article I read from the Arizona Republic gets a little deeper with what they feel sports is about as they state, “No sports team is successful without working together to reach a common goal. Teamwork is essential to a good performance from any sports team, professional or not, and is a great way to teach children certain life lessons, such as cooperating well with others and taking responsibility for actions”. This statement puts more emphasis on the bigger picture of what High School sports are meant to do. Several other articles I found revolved around the life lessons playing organized sports can teach you in order to be more successful later in life, such as teamwork, respect, discipline, dedication, hard work, sacrifice, friendship, and dealing with successes and failures.

As a community, we needn't look further than our own gymnasiums to see these life lessons unfolding. Our own junior varsity and varsity kids are out there playing their hearts out, night in and night out, to represent their school and town. These kids are truly an inspiration. From the football team, to volleyball and the basketball teams, talk about life lessons unfolding right before our eyes. In the face of so much adversity, these young athletes could have just as easily looked at their situation and just stopped trying or quit all together. Instead they are out there giving it their all every time they compete, because it's their school, and their town they are representing. It's their pride on the line and they aren't quitting on themselves or their teammates. Most of them have come to realize, or they soon will, that it's no longer about winning or losing, but it's about those life lessons. It's about making the most of the hand they were dealt, continuing to improve, and growing as a person. I as a sports fan and a member of this community could not be more proud of these kids.

So what if we as a community could take a page from those life lessons that sports teach us? What if we could rally around our community like we rally around our sports teams? Take that passion we have for our kid's athletic events and invoke that same enthusiasm into creating a winning community. What might that look like? Maybe we would be more involved in what goes on in our community? Maybe we would volunteer more? Maybe we would make an effort to do more of our shopping locally? Maybe we would come to more town hall meetings or community gatherings and speak up on the ideas and creative solutions we might have to better our town? After all, we yell and shout and cheer during our kid's sporting events, hoping they will hear our enthusiasm and that it will somehow impact the game in a positive way for us, right? What if we got behind our town like we got behind our sports teams? Maybe it's time we cheer on our town in the same way? If we were to do that, with the same passion and enthusiasm, who knows the impact it could have on our community! Like our kids out there giving it their all, we need to come together as a community, and fight to keep our town moving in the right direction. We need to get more involved, and have the tough conversations that could help spark something to better our community. We need to deal with the hand we have currently been dealt,

continue to improve, and look for ways to grow, knowing that we are going to be a better community having gone through these tough times and faced these challenges, only to come out even stronger in the end.

There are several positives we already have moving in the right direction and need to capitalize on. Centerville's infrastructure is set up well to handle future growth. We have natural gas, an updated electrical power system, updated sewer system and an excess surplus of water through our agreement with Lewis & Clark Water Systems. Along with our close proximity to the interstate, these make us a very appealing community for potential growth.

Our housing market has come around and is solid, as quality, affordably priced homes tend to move very quickly in Centerville. We are also seeing new construction of homes in and around Centerville. We have one of the top performing schools academically in our region along with some of the finest educators. Our community library is one of less than a handful of 5-star rated libraries in the state. We have a very attractive parks and recreation system with several appealing outdoor activities available.

Centerville can support most medical needs locally, with a clinic, pharmacy and nursing home all within our community. Also in our downtown, we are fortunate to have things like a nice grocery store, eateries that remain open, unique shopping options, and recreational opportunities. Centerville's bank is about to go through a major renovation and update, as they continue to invest in their future, right here in Centerville. And of course the recent decision by Centerville's world famous and beloved Royal Bake Shop to reopen and stay in Centerville! There are many great attributes of this community. These are just a few of the highlights and positive things we have going that have us moving in the right direction! We need to showcase our strengths and build off of them.

Going back to the sports analogy reference; as a community, if we choose to get in the game and get more actively involved in being a part of the solution, rather than standing on the sidelines and merely just pointing out the problems, then there is no doubt in my mind we will rally, and continue to turn things around to ultimately do away with any negative perception of a dying town.