

Elevators, Doctors, and Libraries: Fighting the Good Fight in Rural Manitoba

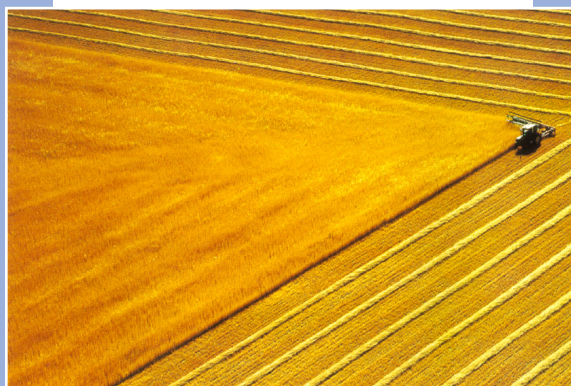
Many parts of the rural prairies face a bleak future if present economic and demographic trends continue. Declining farm numbers and stresses in agriculture have been resulting in the loss of a range of services including health care and education. Once the school or hospital closes, the closure of businesses is not far behind. However, along with the negative trends that exist, the horizon also includes gumption of the citizens to ensure that their communities remain viable. Benito and Rhineland, the two NRE sites in Manitoba, are perfect examples.

Grain Elevators: Preserving a Prairie Icon

At one time there were almost 6,000 grain elevators on the Canadian prairies. Now there are less than 600. The people of Inglis, Manitoba, about a half hour drive south from Benito, has preserved its entire line of five elevators that were built in 1922. The project is now a National Historic Site that attracts visitors from around the world!

While the village of Benito, one of two NRE sites in Manitoba, has lost all of its elevators, the Town of Plum Coulee (located in the Rural Municipality of Rhineland) has a remarkable plan to preserve its only elevator. Agricore United donated the elevator to the community in 2002. Since that time, and with the generosity of the Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation, plans have been underway to restore it. The current plans have the elevator being developed into a multipurpose

facility that would house a restaurant, interpretive museum, offices and restaurants, a senior's centre, and a day care. This ambitious project is slated to begin later this year. It is part of a larger community project that includes a streetscaping program and construction of a Heritage Square located on the historic site of the Canadian Pacific Railway Station and the Lake of the Woods Milling Company.



For more information or to make a contribution, see their Website: <http://www.plumcoulee.com/projects.htm>

Doctors and Libraries

The Village of Benito has a very modern hospital with an adjoining hospital. The Village even owns a house for the doctor who resides there. Trouble is, they have been unable to attract a doctor. Sharing a doctor with the larger community of Swan River to the north has not worked out. In a survey of residents in the summer of 2002, the lack of doctor in the community was the number one issue facing the community. The issue cannot be understated, particularly given

the fact that the seniors living in the adjoining centre require greater levels of attention. This is unfortunate because Benito has a relatively stable population and a variety of services (elementary school, fire department, library, community centre, parks, and businesses). However, the lack of doctor is proving troublesome for many people.

One initiative that may help Benito appear more attractive to a medical doctor is the library expansion. Benito resident, Lorraine Schneider, was instrumental in organizing a celebrity auction held in April 2004. Included in the auction were donations from the Toronto Maple Leafs, Colorado Avalanche, Green Bay Packers, and the Cowboy Junkies. Also donated was memorabilia from Benito's most famous citizen, Al ("the Wrench") Weersnik. The auction raised thousands of dollars, but perhaps more importantly, raised community spirits.

The NRE is pleased to host their annual spring workshop in the Village of Benito in 2005. This workshop will be part of the 100th anniversary celebrations in Benito. Held in Rhineland in 2002, the spring workshops bring together NRE researchers (Faculty and Students) from across Canada to coordinate research activities and to learn more about the communities they are studying. Being part of the centennial celebrations in Benito will be a source of pride for the NRE project.

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