

Opinion

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Editorials

Rural Iowa's challenge

Change of all kinds—economic, social, technological—is a fact of life for rural Iowa. Developments thousands of miles away reverberate here. The challenge for the state's small towns and countryside is to decide how to use those changes for their benefit. Which aspects of our communities should we improve, which should we maintain, which should we discard?

Every rural county confronts that challenge with its own unique situation, its pluses and minuses. For its part, Greene county has many assets and, in our opinion, is trying to make the most of them.

For example, our location—an hour from Des Moines, 45 minutes from Iowa State University, half an hour from Lake Panorama—is a true advantage. The quality of our schools, and the ways in which they cooperate for students' advantage, are recognized in educational circles throughout the state. The balance of our economic base among the agricultural, manufacturing, retail and service sectors is a real strength.

On the challenge side are other factors. Our housing inventory is relatively old, as is our median age. The availability of early childhood day care may not be adequate to meet present and future needs. The employment growth of our major

businesses in recent months strains the available labor supply. Commercial property taxes are relatively high.

Perhaps the best thing we've got going, though, is the commitment of so many individuals and organizations to the success and vitality of the Greene county community. Local governments are very supportive of development efforts, as are the many, many members of the county's business and development groups. For example, in just a few days in late February the newly-organized Greene County Community Foundation raised over \$30,000 from some 40 donors as matching funds for its grant application to the state. That kind of support has been duplicated many times in recent years, not only in financial support for worthy projects, but in volunteer help as well. The outpouring of help for the Gashi extended family of Kosovar refugees here a few years ago is a classic example.

Those of us whose organizational contacts take us throughout the state consistently find that Greene county and its communities enjoy an admirable reputation. Statewide, we're generally expected to flourish in the coming decades. That's a good thing to keep in mind as we try to sort out our future.

—Rick Morain