

# RETURN: COMING HOME TO BE PART OF REVITALIZATION

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8A

back to the Freeman community in the past few years.

Working in partnership with her parents in their farming enterprise, Waltner feels keenly the ways in which she is an apprentice in agriculture, recognizing how much she has to learn and how much the experience of her parents and the community's farming heritage have to teach her. While she hasn't currently begun to make significant changes in the farming operation, she can envision transferring some

components of the conventional operation to alternative practices, in both row-crop and livestock sectors. She sees value in raising her daughters on a farm with livestock.

Rural communities tend to be traditional and conservative. Farmers who venture into alternative agricultural production are often scrutinized. Women like Waltner, who manage their farms without significant assistance from their spouses, often face the same scrutiny. While Waltner has

experienced some of that, she feels greater frustration when her work and vocational pursuit isn't taken seriously by her community around her. Now that she is a mother, her choice to continue farming has raised several community eyebrows. Nevertheless, the "Welcome Home" she has felt has been overwhelmingly positive.

While farming is and will continue to be Waltner's primary occupation in the future, she hopes to continue playing and perhaps

teaching piano and being involved in the artistic and cultural life of the community. As for the future of a rural community like Freeman, Waltner is frank to recognize the challenges of ongoing decline in the rural population and community. She isn't sure the corner has been turned yet toward a real rural revitalization, but she has come home to be a part of that when it happens.

After all, it was for the sake of the community that she came home to

invest her life in this place.

**Rural Alternatives is a semi-regular feature facilitated by Rural Revival, a local organization that focuses on agricultural sustainability as a way of life in rural America. This author of this piece, S. Roy Kaufman, is a member of the group and a quarterly Courier columnist.**

# SERVICE: 'WE DO NOT WISH TO RECEIVE'

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3A

was not uncommon to drive along the streets that looked as though they were shrouded in fog.

But that began to change in the early 1970s thanks to PURE, which stood for Persons United for Recycling and Ecology, a local organization started at Freeman Academy in 1971 as a student-driven effort to increase the community's attention on ecology.

It began when FA student Rudy Brockmueller read *Everyman's Guide to Ecological Living* during a consumer education course. The book piqued his interest and, according to a 1973 *Courier* article, Brockmueller sent away for more information. He wanted to get involved in ecology in a real and practical sense and began researching ways that Freeman's garbage could be recycled. Brockmueller, Dennis Lehmann and David Ortman, along with consumer science teacher Kathy Harris and other students, helped establish PURE. During the 1972-73 school year, the group reported 30 members.

Besides selecting materials for recycling, students collected leaves each year to avoid the choking smoke that resulted from burning

leaf piles. In 1975, the fifth year that students had collected leaves, the city banned open burning.

Bernie Wiebe, Freeman Academy's president at the time, summed up the service mentality of the PURE program in a 1975 *Courier* article on the leaf collection.

"It symbolizes our willingness to serve," he said. "The community does many things for us. We do not wish to receive, but to serve."

The club was active until the late 1970s and, in the 1980s, morphed into a community group called Earthkeepers that decided to resume recycling efforts in Freeman. The FJC/FA campus served as the collection point for recyclable items for a number of years. Eventually, city of Freeman assumed recycling responsibilities, becoming one of the state's leading communities in recycling efforts.

But Freeman Academy continued to have a work/service day.

An article in the *Courier* in 2000 provides some history.

There was a period when students performed various job requests from members of the community — from yard work to house cleaning to carpentry as a

way to earn money for the school. But that changed in the late 1990s. Payment for services was no longer accepted and it came from the students themselves.

A group of students in then-instructor Bill Cooper's Bible class came to the conclusion it was their responsibility as Christians to serve the community through a helping hand. It was an idea generated from in-class discussions of how to live out the life of Christians as taught by Jesus.

And so an entire day was devoted to just that, and the entire school — then grades 5-12 and faculty — split up into groups and helped those in town who needed assistance.

"This was a way to live out what we believe," said Marlan Kaufman interim president at the time. "This is one concrete way we can help young people experience that."

In 2000, through phone calls, newspaper advertising and word of mouth, 40 jobs were lined up for the students and faculty to rally around this year. The number of locations where work needed to be done was significantly more than the year before, partially because residents were more aware of the project the school was putting on, partially

because of the school's aggressive approach in finding jobs to do.

Also different that year was the interaction between grade levels and faculty.

"By mixing up the age levels, the older students were able to be models for the younger ones, who watch very carefully," Kaufman said. "Also, friendships may be formed that could end up lasting a long, long time."

And the faculty's inclusion in the groups wasn't as much a way to oversee and advise, as much as get to know and work with their students on a different level. "They wanted to interact with the kids and take part in this day with them," Kaufman said.

In all, 14 groups of students and faculty — from four to six members each — split up and converged on the community. Devotionals were again part of the project, and focused on the lesson of the Good Samaritan as taught in the Bible.

The majority of the jobs involved raking and hauling away leaves on four pickup trucks and trailers that members of the community and school donated for the day.

"So many people couldn't understand why we were doing



Freeman Courier: 1974

this and not charging anything," Kaufman said. "Not on service day. This is our way of giving to the community and helping those who need it."

There were many rewarding things like the positive attitude taken on by the kids and their willingness to do the work before them, Kaufman observed.

## Hats Off To Our Farmers

Throughout the years we've seen several changes in farming and none of them seem to make things any simpler. So our hats are off to today's farmers. They deserve the respect of everyone.

With each year, farming seems to be getting more complex. Today's farmer must be an economist and agronomist, not to mention a mechanic, veterinarian, chemist, biologist, purchasing agent, commodity broker, computer programmer — and the list goes on and on.

When you stop to consider what today's farmers are up against, you realize just what kind of a job they are doing feeding a hungry world.

**Your hometown bank since 1899**

**EQUAL HOUSING LENDER • MEMBER FDIC**

## Merchants State Bank

**FREEMAN • 605-925-4222**

**HURLEY • 605-238-5255**

**VIBORG • 605-766-4255**

**IRENE • 605-263-0170**

**TOLL FREE 1-866-228-9747**

*just a click away at* **www.msb-sd.com**

