



□ *Editor's note: This is the one in a series of feature stories about people who have returned with their families to their hometown of Imperial, after working in other communities.*

By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

There are a number of reasons that Randy and Donna Vlasin and son Matt moved back to Imperial after two years in Lincoln. Family, a job, owning a business. But the biggest reason is the sense of community and belonging to that community.

The Vlasins lived in Imperial from 1983, when Randy was hired as an ag educator and FFA advisor at Chase County High School, until 2007, when the family moved to Lincoln.

While living in Imperial, the family had operated Holiday Farms, first from their home in the country, and then through a greenhouse built in 2005 on East 5th Street.

Donna, 48, and Matt, 26, ran the greenhouse. Matt has a degree in horticulture from Front Range Community College in Colorado.

Randy, 51, retired from teaching in 2006 and became employed by the National FFA for a year, working from his home. Not wanting to move to the national headquarters in Indianapolis when asked, he took a position with FutureForce Nebraska in Lincoln, partnering with colleges, high schools, business and industry to “do a better job of teaching” students.

When the family relocated, Donna and Matt became employed by Campbell’s Nursery in Lincoln, which Donna explained as “two years of paid schooling. Matt and I learned so much.”

The Vlasins were in Imperial visiting son and daughter-in-law Jeremy and Amanda Vlasin over a year ago, debating where they wanted to put down roots.

Then Randy learned that the Chase County Community Hospital board was considering creating a Community Foundation Executive Director position. He applied for the job and the family moved back in October of 2008.

Donna and Matt reopened Holiday Farms. Matt also does yard work and landscaping, while Donna worked for awhile at Alco.

In addition, Matt is head high school and head junior high school wrestling coach.

While Randy said part of the reason the family moved back was his job opportunity, they were also disillusioned with Lincoln. It has doubled in size from when the couple attended school there 20-plus years ago, which “brings problems,” he said.

Donna added that she was “tired of feeling so threatened all the time” in Lincoln. She feels safe in Imperial. “You can do pretty much anything. You know everyone and have a connection with them.”

Matt added that he enjoys the small town life. “I had two years of the big city and that’s enough for me. People are so much friendlier here. We only knew the people in the duplex next to us in Lincoln.”

Randy said Imperial is special because there’s a sense of community and knowing people. In

Lincoln you don't get to know anyone outside of your "circle."

He also pointed out that he "had a really good experience as a teacher here." Donna added that she trusts people in Imperial.

Matt said that if he was trying to "sell" Imperial to someone looking to relocate, he'd stress the community support. "If you get involved in the community you get a sense of support built around you, whatever you do."

Randy stressed Imperial's progressive attitude. "The community is willing to try new things, make things happen. Sometimes the people of Chase County don't appreciate what you have."

He said moving to an urban area made him realize Imperial has "one of the best school systems in the state, a great hospital, great active churches for a community of our size."

The Vlasins are members of St. Patrick's Catholic Church, where Randy is a member of the Knights of Columbus and Donna is a member of Alter Society.

Randy is active in the Young Farmer/Rancher biomass project, and Matt is planning to become a YF/R member.

Randy is also involved in Leaders for a New Frontier, a project to train young adults in both civic and business roles, to become active leaders in the community.

Son Jeremy is a teacher at Chase County Schools, while son Adam is planing to move to Imperial soon.

In addition, Randy's parents still live near Hayes Center, and his brother, Rick, lives in Imperial.