By Russ Pankonin
The Imperial Republican

In 2008, Imperial continued a long tradition of investing in its future, evidenced by a number of building projects completed during the year.

Three of the biggest efforts were public works projects: a new $1.6 million pool and football complex completed by the city and the school; a new $960,000 headquarters building for the Upper Republican Natural Resources District (URNRD); and a new $285,000 airport terminal.

The pool/football complex spotlighted the results of what can happen when local entities cooperate, with the city and school joining together on the project.

The new pool house will serve a dual purpose, with the two entities sharing in the cost.

In addition to serving as the pool office, the building also includes locker rooms for use during football season, along with a new concession stand.

While the project was completed in 2008, the pool did not open before the end of the summer.

The locker room facilities were used by the Longhorns this fall. The football complex, which includes new bleachers, press box, visitor bleachers and new lights, will be ready for the 2009 football season.

In October, the staff of the URNRD moved into their new building at 511 East 5th Street.

The new building features spacious offices for staff, a conference room, a large shop for technicians and their vehicles, a large walk-in cooler for tree storage and a large board meeting room with kitchen facilities.

In October, the cornerstone was ceremoniously laid for a new 1,200 square-foot terminal building at the airport—a project that was 15 years in the making.

The building cost $285,000 with 95 percent of that funded from the Aviation Trust Fund.

The new terminal houses a lounge area, meeting room, flight plan area, storage and a room without windows to provide pilots a place to relax and sleep between flights.

Work on these projects began in 2007 with completion in 2008.

Building permits at $3.58 million

Further evidence of continued growth in Imperial is indicated by the amount of building permits filed in 2008.

For the year, building permits totalling more than $3.58 million were filed at the city office. This compares with $4.08 million in 2007.

The $3.58 million figure includes only projects started in 2008, meaning that the pool/football complex and NRD building were included in last year's total of $4.08 million.

Earlier this month, Frenchman Valley Coop began construction of a new headquarters at the south end of Broadway.

The new building will is projected to cost $1.7 million.

The coop purchased several pieces of property on the east side of Broadway, across the street from their present offices, and cleared the buildings to make way for the new office.

Broadway will see another major improvement, this one coming in the 700 block, with the start of a new fellowship hall for St. Patrick Catholic Church.

The long-awaited facility will provide the church with 6,400 square feet of new space, at a projected cost of $700,000.

Construction is nearly complete on a 10,000 square-foot addition at the Crossroads Wesleyan Church in northwest Imperial.

The church plans to begin using the facility in early 2009 and will complete additional remodeling in the present church building to finish tieing the two facilities together.

Completion of these projects is expected in 2009.

Markee Ag added a new $300,000 storage building to there operation on East Hwy. 61.

New businesses added in 2008

Another positive sign came in the form of three new businesses opened during 2008.

Cheri Burke and Mary Haarberg opened The Women's Gym in October at 420 Broadway.

This building formerly housed the law practice of Joel Burke, who relocated his office to his home in June.

Imperial native Calvin Weiss returned here and opened Weiss Chiropractic and Acupuncture in November at 530 Broadway.

The 12th Street Cafe, run by Kirk and Janet Sprague, closed this year but a new food establishment reopened in the building.

Leroy and Lavon Musick opened Smokin' Leroy's BBQ in September.

Ownership changes in 2008

The owners of 21st Century Equipment, headquartered in Bridgeport, purchased Midwest Farm Equipment in March and renamed the business.

Effective March 1, the Farmers Elevator Company, a cooperative headquartered in Kimball, merged their operations into Frenchman Valley Farmers Cooperative (FVC) based in Imperial.

The Kimball coop has 10 locations in Nebraska, Colorado and Wyoming, stretching from Chappell to the east to Burns, Wyo., on the west and south to Ovid, Colo.

In April, Progessive Swine Technologies, based in Columbus, announced they had purchased the three swine nursery and finishing facilities here in Chase County.

In June, Bob and Lori Mendenhall purchased Imperial Mini Storage on north Broadway fromToby and Eve Friemel.

July 1 was the effective date of the sale of Prairie States Communications. Rick and Jan Elliott purchased the business from long-time owners Rick and Linda Moses.

In late August, Dr. Ken Krausnick, D.V.M., announced that he was retiring and had sold his

practice, Stanbar Animal Hospital, to Drs. Dave Johnsen and Lex Thompson of Veterinary Services.

On Nov. 1, Ag West Commodities owner Mark Christensen sold his interest to Steve Knuth of Holdrege, who now owns full interest in the business.

In November, Kris Musick purchased Capitol Liquor at 12th and Broadway from Butch and Kathy Loring.

Business moves, changes

In mid-February, Hi-Tech Compuer Solutions relocated to the building that formerly housed Heavenly Dough at the corner of 5th and Broadway.

First Insight Eyecare moved from the hospital's clinic building to the hospital's annex building at 510 West 12th. The annex also houses Southwest Nebraska Dental Center.

Mid-Plains Community College purchased the former Hometown Pharmacy building at 14th and Broadway and will relocate their facilities there in the new year.

First State Bank changed its name to First Bank and Trust.

The NRD sold their building on West 5th Street to Calvin German.

Other business improvements

Scoular Grain added a new two million bushel grain storage facility at their location in Lamar.

Imperial Beef doubled its wet corn facility this year. It now holds 3.5 million bushels of corn.

Allo Communications added a temporary building behind their headquarters at 610 Broadway and plans to expand their facility in 2009.

U.S. Cellular completed a new tower to serve the Imperial area. The new tower is located just outside the southeast corner of the cemetery.

Emily Spady began offering barbering and cosmetology services at 632 Broadway with Don Maucher.

Her shop has been closed for several months due to health issues but she expects to reopen in early 2009.

Business closings

2008 officially marked the closing of Hofman's Repair at 129 west 5th with the retirement of Walt Hofman.

12th Street Cafe, under the ownership of Kirk and Janet Sprague, closed in 2008.

Imperial's lone coffee house, Java Jitters, at 126 West 6th, closed this past summer.

The Mill House restaurant in Champion, operated by Christy Boggs, closed.

Four new homes in the county

Four new homes were completed in Chase County during 2008.

They included the home of Tom and Lynn Luhrs at 126 Yucca Drive; the home of Mark and Kathy Christensen at 139 Yucca Drive; the home of John and Kara Engbrecht on Road 738, 3.8 miles east of Imperial; and the Jim Kunkel home four miles south of Highway 6 near Lamar.

Hospital activities

The past year proved a busy one for the hospital.

New generators were installed at the facilities along with new air conditioning units for the hospital.

A total of 22 beds were replaced and a new lab analyzer was approved, as well as some improvements in the labor and delivery room and nursery.

Dr. Steve Boyer announced that he would serve the clinic on a permanent part-time basis.

Recruiting efforts paid off with the addition of Dr. Doug Nicholson, who began his practice here in September.

His wife, Rita, is a nurse practitioner and offers a speciality clinic for aesthetics and women's health issues.

Nurse Practioner Brandi Hanes will be joining the staff of the hospital and clinic in January.

Her husband, Jamie, a registered pharmacist, has joined the family business, Adams Drug.

Several new speciality clinics by visiting doctors were also added in 2008.

Other notables

With no renovation plans in the works, the city council went ahead with a decision to demolish the old grade school on Broadway, north of the library.

The demolition began in mid-September and was complete by mid-October. Only some brick work remains to be finished on the east end of the city council chambers.

Since the implementation of a one percent city sales tax in Imperial in April, 2007, a total of $557,829.12 has been brought in. Of that total, $374,801.10 was received during 2008.

Proceeds are split 50/50 between community improvement projects, such as the new swimming pool, and funds for economic development projects in the city.

All sales tax proceeds from vehicle sales goes into the street fund, with that total growing to nearly $70,000 since its inception in 2007, including $49,009.95 received in 2008.

Farmers got some doses of good news and bad news during the year.

Commodity prices hit record levels on the board of trade this summer with cash prices in Imperial hitting all-time highs.

Cash price for wheat peaked at Frenchman Valley Coop at $8.75 per bushel in late June.

Cash price for corn hit a day high of $7 per bushel in late June, with a close of $6.93.

Prices have backed off those record levels at the end of the year, with cash prices for wheat around $5.36 per bushel and $3.60 per bushel for corn.

That was the good news. The bad news came in the form of high fuel prices and high input costs.

With oil at $150 barrel during the summer, prices for gas and diesel skyrocketed. In July, gas eclipsed the $4 per gallon cost, with diesel prices following accordingly.

Costs for fertilizer hit new highs during the year as well.

However, with the fall in the price of oil to under $40 a barrel, gas prices have dropped to the $1.75 per-gallon range.

Fertilizer prices have also backed off some as farmers make plans for the 2009 crop year.

Wauneta improvements

The past year proved to be a busy one for changes in Wauneta, as well.

Tracy and Janice Haarberg of Imperial purchased Crossroads, CBS Gas, at the corner of Tecumseh and Hwy. 6. Angie West of Wauneta is running the operation, now known as Wauneta Crossroads.

Tommy's Sports Club got new life in March when it was purchased by Craig and Jo Fanning, Mick and Gina Strand and Keenan and Tina Kitt.

Imperial Farm Bureau Agent Dustin Weiss opened a new office in Wauneta at 122 N. Tecumseh. Kelly Vitosh is the senior sales assoicate there.

Terry and Dora Harris, with the assistance of their daughter, Tiffany, reopened the Sweet Shop at 206 N. Tecumseh.

Kim Libby opened "I Want That," this summer at 118 N. Tecumseh. The store features gifts, household items, shoes and baby clothes.

Nancy Noble expanded her gift shop at the County Clipper and Charm located at 214 N. Tecumseh.