

**By Leslie Carlholm**  
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"There is just something special about Imperial."

This is the comment I hear repeatedly while traveling throughout the state. Imperial has a reputation for being progressive, embracing new residents, exploring new ideas, supporting local businesses and investing in the future.

Looking back at the accomplishments of 2008, I truly believe "the something special about Imperial" is the people.

Quality of life issues are determinant factors in enticing businesses and people to stay or relocate to our community.

In 2008, several of Imperial's indentified priorities became realities through the hard work and dedication of community leaders and volunteers. These accomplishments reveal the depth of our commitment to plan and invest in projects and infrastructure ensuring quality of life services and facilities for future generations.

The interagency cooperation between the city and the school to share facilities saved residents \$1,500,000 in the completion of the Chase County Sports Field Complex which includes the new swimming pool scheduled to open next spring. Imperial's service organizations met the Rotary Club's challenge and donated all the picnic tables and benches for the new swimming pool facility and park area.

Mid-Plains Community College expanded its services through the Imperial Extended Campus and its partnership with Chase County Schools. Chase County School students now have the opportunity to attend a fifth year program and graduate with an associate's degree as well as their high school diplomas.

Mid-Plains Community College also purchased and is making plans to remodel its new building to better accommodate the 5th year students as well as the needs of the area's adult student population.

Realizing the need for new theatre seats, the Theatre Board budgeted \$10,000 towards the project and raised the additional \$10,200 in local donations needed to purchase new theatre seats. Community volunteers donated the labor to remove the old seats, prepare the floor and install the new seats.

Another significant project completed in 2008 was the Airport Authority's new terminal building. The terminal building is often the first impression visiting medical specialists and corporate officers have of our community. The new terminal building represents the community well.

While most areas of the country have suffered devastating losses during the recent economic downturn, the Imperial area has experienced marginal impact. The current economic climate presents our community with a unique opportunity as families impacted by layoffs explore the possibly of returning home to Chase County.

Recent events clearly demonstrate we are competing in a global economy where location is often not as important as the quality of the product or service provided.

As the community moves forward in 2009, it will be important to keep Chase County Alumni apprised of the opportunities available here at home.

In addition to providing current job postings to alumni, the community should strive to foster a spirit of entrepreneurship by providing support and encouragement to individuals exploring business ownership as a career option.

Encouraging families to return to Chase County to live, work and raise their families in the community may require a hard look at the safe and appropriate housing options available to new and returning residents. Developing appropriate safe housing may necessitate creative problem solving through private-public partnerships.

Undoubtedly, 2009 will bring a myriad of new challenges to our community, but where there are challenges, there are also opportunities.

As a community we will continue to embrace new residents, explore new ideas, support our local businesses and invest in the future so we are prepared to act on new opportunities when they arise.

Heartfelt thanks to all the community leaders, businesses, educators and volunteers who invest your time, talents and resources in making our community "something special." Best wishes for the New Year.