The former Larissa Ward grew up in Palisade and attended Wauneta-Palisade schools. After graduating from high school, she attended Colby Community College where she received her Associate of Applied Science Degree in Physical Therapy in 2003.

That same year, she married Shane Gerhartz, also of Palisade. She spent one year working in Goodland, KS at the Good Samaritan Nursing Home. When Shane graduated from college, the couple moved to Kansas City, Mo., where Shane was employed as a CAD Technician in Bridge Engineering by HNTB Engineering Firm.

Larissa found work in the physical therapy department of Golden Plains Community Hospital in Clinton, Mo., which was a 70-mile commute one way. “The drive was not a lot of fun,” said Gerhartz.

During her time at Golden Plains, Gerhartz helped to establish a rehabilitation clinic that treated both inpatient and outpatient individuals.

After one year with Golden Plains, Larissa had the opportunity find work in Kansas City with Summit Care. Her main focus was providing physical rehabilitation services for several nursing care facilities in the area.

Eventually, she was stationed on a more permanent basis at the Johnson County Nursing Home, where she was the facility rehabilitation coordinator.

In the summer of 2008, the Gerhartzes had an opportunity to return to southwest Nebraska and pursue their careers. Larissa is employed at Chase County Community Hospital in the physical therapy department.

“I really enjoy the variety of work and learning from other staff such as Barry Marshall and Marianne Sullivan. I also like putting what I have learned from past experiences to work,” stated Gerhartz.

When asked why she and her husband decided to leave the “city” and return to rural Nebraska, Gerhartz smiled as she said, “To be near family and live in a small town where you have a sense of close-knit community.”

The Gerhartzes make their home in Palisade. Shane is employed by ESU 15 in Trenton as a computer specialist and trainer who works with area educators, parents and students.