



**By Carolyn Lee**

***The Imperial Republican***

When Leslie Carlholm walks out of her office in the City of Imperial building Sept. 28, she'll be closing the door on a job well done.

As Community Development Director since October 2004, Carlholm has been involved in many projects that have benefited Imperial and the surrounding area.

She and husband, Randy, will be moving to Syracuse, Kan., which is 60 miles west of Garden City in southwest Kansas. He has accepted a position as site location manager with Skyland Grain.

He will leave his job as the feed division manager at Frenchman Valley Coop Oct. 4. She said she's "putting out some feelers" for jobs, adding that if she finds a similar one that would be great.

Carlholm began her job trying to figure out what the community wanted. She invited young people to discuss why they were living in Imperial, why they had returned to their hometown, and how the city could get their children to also return.

"We've tried to, through strategic planning, determine what are the community's goals," she explained.

Carlholm said the passage of LB 840 and the subsequent sales tax profit for the city, "was the most significant thing that's happened because it provided a funding source to do other things. It took a lot of community participation."

Some of the things LB 840 has funded are the new swimming pool; new Campbell and Max Addition playground equipment; the makeover of the city gymnasium; street maintenance on 5th, 9th and 12th Streets and an upgrade to digital movies at The Imperial Theatre.

Business loan programs initiated under the sales tax revenue during Carlholm's tenure include three business loans of \$220,000, one start-up loan of \$40,000 and five expanding business loans of \$467,500.

Loan clients created an estimated 18 jobs and retained 10 jobs still in existence. Business coaching clients created an additional 10 new jobs.

The business coaching program for people wanting to start a business has been a big success, she said, with Janeece Woofert teaching.

Carlholm participated in the Shop at Home program, one of her favorites, "because it was so well received by the community" since 2007.

Grants and partnerships resulted in new siding, windows and roofing at Sunrise Apartments.

Carlholm wrote grants for Southwest Nebraska Solid Waste Agency regarding its recycling program.

The Cornerstone project, another LB 840 recipient, has "huge potential," Carlholm said, but it's a 20-year program, not short term.

"The community is getting landlocked regarding commercial development. When the timing is

right the community will want to get some infrastructure in so businesses can have a location” to build in.

What she’s proudest about participating in, Carlholm said, is the partnership with Chase County Schools and Mid-Plains Community College and building on the dual credit system for fifth year students.

With emotion, Carlholm said, “Some students have told me that because of that, college was within their grasp. It opened a lot of doors.”

Carlholm won’t take credit for any of those projects. “I’m just a cheerleader and facilitator.”

City Council member Sue Moore begs to differ. “Oh, my gosh. We had a total prize there. She is so knowledgeable about grants and grant writing for the city. We’re really losing an asset to our community.”

Carlholm said she had to teach herself grant writing when she took the community development job.

She has found that partnering with other organizations is very important to towns like Imperial. Organizations have included West Central Nebraska Development District, Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, Mid-Plains Community College and Perkins County.

“It’s really critical because if you can partner with other organizations and take a regional approach, you can be more effective.”

In the future, Carlholm said, “It will be really important for Imperial to look back at its history and see how it got to this point.”

With all of the negativity on the national level, she said, which will inevitably trickle down to the local level, she sees people not wanting other people to get benefits they themselves don’t get.

That leads to a negativity of spirit and willingness to work without payment, Carlholm meant.

“Our success is the result of people planning, working together and making sacrifices.”

The dynamic blonde added, “We need to look with a fresh eye to see what our real needs are and work together to try to remove obstacles to our growth.”

City Clerk/Administrator Jo Leyland said of Carlholm, “She’s done so much. A lot of the things we’ve accomplished as a city are due to Leslie.”

“She’s an excellent leader and promoter of Imperial. She’s made a lot of excellent contacts for us. It’s remarkable what she’s accomplished in her short time here. It’s sad she’s moving on.”

The City of Imperial began advertising statewide this week for a replacement for Carlholm.