

***By Russ Pankonin, The Imperial Republican Co-Publisher***

It's graduation season for our area high schools and colleges throughout the state. Regardless of whether it's from high school or college, graduation represents a giant milestone in the lives of these students.

We want to take this opportunity to offer our congratulations to all of our students who are receiving diplomas this spring.

Graduation personifies the rewards of completing one's education, as education is truly the door to a better life in the future.

Education opens up many opportunities as one begins to chart a course in life. Remarkably, some of those opportunities await our young people right here in Imperial and Chase County.

I was visiting with some of my newspaper colleagues recently and mentioned how fortunate we have been to have many young people who grew up in Imperial, return here as they begin or further their careers.

My colleagues said that's not the trend they're seeing in their communities.

In my opinion, the process starts with local attitudes.

In the past, when our kids graduated from high school, they were told to go to school so they could get an education and never have to come back here.

In recent years, efforts to change that attitude have been making great headway.

Do we really want our kids to leave and never consider coming back? I think not.

Local economic development coordinator Leslie Carlholm has done an excellent job of reaching out to our students, both in the high school and grade school. Through these efforts, our young people realize for themselves that there are opportunities here for them.

So when they are looking for a place to start a new business, move an existing one or work over the Internet from somewhere, they'll remember the pluses of rural life in Imperial. More importantly, they will know that we want them back.

We truly do have a lot to offer our young people if they want to come back to Imperial and Chase County.

As you graduates go out into the bigger world that awaits you, don't forget us down the road. You are indeed our future and we want you to consider coming back to Imperial when the time comes.

We want you!