

Small towns in S.D. facing big challenges amid pandemic and historic declines

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South Dakota News Watch
Editor's note: This article is the first of three parts of a special report by South Dakota News Watch called "Small Towns — Big Challenges."

The COVID-19 pandemic could not have come at a worse time for many of South Dakota's small towns.

The deadly virus has further complicated the already herculean task of keeping cherished rural communities vibrant and reversing a historic downturn in population and economic stability.

Though mostly spared from major outbreaks, small towns that once served as the backbone of rural South Dakota have been stung by the indirect economic and emotional outcomes of the pandemic.

Revenues have fallen at main street businesses critical to maintaining a high quality of life. Even before the virus, many such businesses were struggling to stay afloat as their customer bases continued to shrink amid a long-term decline in agriculture incomes, the

flight of young people to more urban areas, a shortage of affordable housing and limited health-care options.

Morale has dropped and community spirit has waned during the pandemic as summer festivals and local events have been canceled, school districts have ended in-person classes, sporting events and graduations, and the brief conversations and personal interactions so common in small towns have become scarce.

As of 2019, 38 of South Dakota's 66 counties saw population declines. Rural populations are getting older, too. In 2016, people over age 65 accounted for 18% of rural populations, a 22% increase from the year 2000. The percentage of people under 18 in rural counties declined by 9% during that period. Without hardware stores, hospitals, grocery stores and restaurants, small towns have become less attractive, and the treasured way of

Small towns
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Last Friday, the Clark Rotary Club put on this Burger Feed in the alley between N. Commercial St. and N. Smith St. This event was held to show appreciation for the community and to the local businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Above, Rotarians serve those in cars and those who walked through the line. At noon, there was quite a backlog of cars as the Burger Feed was well received.

Swimming pool is open - restrictions are in place



It was a beautiful day to go to the pool last Friday afternoon in the city of Clark. Young mother Alex Meier holds Charlie as his sister Ava is in front of him among the energetic swimmers. The Horace Bennett Memorial Swimming Pool has seen the staff constantly cleaning during the summer of COVID restrictions.

The swimming pool is open and the water is cool, clean and inviting as the Clark pool season has now started.

Kari Hurlbut and Madison Sippel are sharing the manager position for the summer with one or the other on duty.

Everything has changed now with the protocol of going swimming at the Clark pool due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We take everyone's temperature now before they sign up to go into the pool," explained Kari Hurlbut. "They also must sign a special waiver acknowledging - that they are coming in of their own free will during this time."

"This year, too, we're not handing out the kick boards, rings and other pool toys, for sanitation purposes, however one may bring in their own items and take them home when they leave," stated Hurlbut. "We do have life jackets to lend out, from infant size to adult, as well as arm floaties."

And even though the hot summer sun is beating down on the water which contains a bleach, a lot of sanitizing is being done on the chairs, tables and handrailings of the ladders.

They have a weed sprayer used at the end of the day to cover more area with the commercial strength

Swimming pool
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SBA Economic Injury Disaster loans available to SD small businesses

Small nonfarm businesses in nine South Dakota counties are now eligible to apply for low interest federal disaster loans from the U.S. Small Business Administration, announced Director Tanya N. Garfield of SBA's Disaster Field Operations Center-West. These loans offset economic losses because of reduced revenues caused by excessive moisture and flooding in the following primary counties that began March 13, 2019.

Primary counties: Clark and Codington; Neighboring counties: Beadle, Day, Deuel, Grant, Hamlin, Kingsbury and Spink.

"SBA eligibility covers both the economic impacts on businesses dependent on farmers and ranchers that have suffered agricultural production losses caused by the disaster and businesses directly impacted by the disaster," Garfield said.

Small nonfarm businesses, small agricultural cooperatives, small businesses engaged in aquaculture and most private nonprofit organizations of any size may qualify for Economic Injury Disaster Loans of up to \$2 million to help meet financial obligations and operating expenses which could have been met had the disaster not occurred.

"Eligibility for these loans is based on the financial impact of the disaster only and not on any actual property damage. These loans have an interest rate of 4 percent

for businesses and 2.75 percent for private nonprofit organizations, a maximum term of 30 years, and are available to small businesses and most private nonprofits without the financial ability to offset the adverse impact without hardship," Garfield said.

By law, SBA makes Economic Injury Disaster Loans available when the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture designates an agricultural disaster. The Secretary declared this disaster on June 15, 2020.

Businesses primarily engaged in farming or ranching are not eligible for SBA disaster assistance. Agricultural enterprises should contact the Farm Services Agency about the U.S. Department of Agriculture assistance made available by the Secretary's declaration.

SBA
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WEATHER			
Robert Cole - Official Weather Observer			
	HI	LO	PR
June 16	86	73	0
June 17	92	73	0
June 18	91	63	1.33
June 19	72	57	0
June 20	71	58	0
June 21	74	62	.06
June 22	74	59	.07
2020 precipitation to date	8.58		
2019 precipitation to date	14.28		

Ally Monson is law firm intern prior to heading to law school this fall

"Ally always has a positive attitude and has been productive and helpful since day one," stated attorney Susan Jennen of Boos Jennen Law Firm.

Allyson Monson, a 2016 Clark High School graduate and a recent 2020 graduate of SDSU is working in the practice of law before going to law school.

The daughter of Jerry and Brenda Monson of Clark, 'Ally' is interning this summer for attorney Susan Jennen of Boos Jennen Law, located in Clark.

Undecided yet between the University of Kansas or Wisconsin, Monson has already taken her law school entrance exam and is ready to enter law school for the next three years.

For now working in Clark has brought her back to her home town. "It's a fun part of this job, seeing local faces again," admitted Monson. "I've been away for a while going to college so it's been fun to reconnect with people in my home town."

"I'm learning a lot from Susan, technology wise and law wise. Her mind is really in sync with technology and with her office embracing technology, I'm really learning a lot

from her.

"I've really enjoyed working with Susan. She's been a good mentor and is easy to work with," continued Monson. "She really puts her clients first and is good hearted. That's admirable I think."

Law firm duties

Monson is working in the firm 8:30-5:00 p.m. four days a week. She will work into early August before preparing for college classes.

Working as a legal program developer, she helps with legal forms, creating efficiencies. "I work on how we can make the client experience more efficient for them and for us in the office," explained Monson. "The more efficiency we have, the more clients we can serve timely in our region."

"It seems we're very busy. We're excited to help people."

Serving clients remotely with digital signature solutions - signings of legal documents online, notarizing legal documents and video conferencing, even digital hearings now with Zoom has continued 'business as usual' within the law office.

Monson is also working with setting up and preparing procedures with Zoom conferencing.

Pandemic protocols

Working remotely - the law firm has been busier than ever, since the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns. Within the office, their conference room - is now set up for meetings with clients with plenty of room for social distancing and a disinfecting station by the entrance, protecting both the client and the staff. A white board and projector also help with the meeting process if necessary. Sanitizing between clients is also a must and clients are asked in advance on whether they prefer masks to be worn during the meetings.

Choosing medical law

When in high school, Monson attended Girls State in 2015. She campaigned and was elected the South Dakota American Legion Girls State Governor for South Dakota.

"Campaigning was fun and I got asked a lot if I was going into political science," stated Monson. "That may have planted a seed, as I was thinking back then of going into the medical field during my senior year."

Monson was also in FCCLA in high school and for 2015-2016, she served as the FCCLANational First



Ally Monson, a 2016 CHS graduate and a 2020 South Dakota State University graduate, is working as an intern at the Boos Jennen Law Firm in Clark this summer. The daughter of Jerry and Brenda Monson, she plans on attending law school this fall focusing

on the healthcare and medical law side of her practice. Hoping to stay in the Midwest, she hopes 'to make a difference through law' with her profession.

specific to FCCLA." Deciding on making a difference through law in the healthcare/medical law side of things is combining

both of Monson's interests.

Monson
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