

Modern Day Homesteading Catches On

By C. F. Marley Contributing Editor

Two tough Kansans have started something of a mini revolution that has brought renewed prosperity to their town. And, there's promise that their idea could work elsewhere as well.

They came up with a modern day version of the Homestead Act. They're providing free building lots to qualifying "settlers" who promise to build homes and live on the land for a year.

Local banker Allan Lindfors of Marquette, Kansas, and city councilman Steve Piper, the town's third generation grocer, spent hours thinking about the problem. Then they hit upon the idea of giving modern homesteading a chance. Both are amazed at the way it's working out.

In Marquette, the school was the driving influence. "We were going to lose it if we didn't do something," says Piper.

Both Lindfors and Piper are graduates of Marquette High School, which closed in 1985. They're determined this isn't going to happen to their K-8 grade school.

The lot giveaway has attracted interest from across the country, and a lot of media attention.

Marquette, which had a population of 520, saw it grow to 700 in short order. Lindfors says they thought if they could build 20 houses and bring in 10 children in 10 years, it would help a lot. But they've done much better than that.

Lindfors and five other business leaders formed the Marquette Development Company. They bought 50 acres of farm land for \$100,000 and turned it into 80 lots. Homesteaders came from all over the U.S. While the lots are free, new homesteaders are required to build a house and live in it for a year - just like the homesteaders of old. The first lots were offered in November 2003.

These Hand Pumps Work!

Unless an old hand pump is in excellent working order, you might as well turn it into a lawn ornament, says Jim Smith, Smith Steel & Supply.

"Even if you find a hand pump on granddad's farm that's in good condition, there may not be any replacement parts available," he says. "Many companies that built them don't exist anymore. Unless you have an aptitude for making parts, you may not be able to keep it working."

Smith is in building construction in north central Tennessee, but sells pump systems on the side. He says it is a growing market with urban people moving to the country.

"It's an interesting group of people who buy the pumps," he says. "They are fairly affluent and well educated and moving back to the land for a lot of reasons. They want more control over the environment their kids grow up in."

Smith installs pumps that draw from springs, rainwater cisterns and even deep wells. One model can lift water from as deep as 300 ft. when attached to a windmill or motor and will pump from as deep as 150 ft. by hand. It can produce 60 lbs. of pressure and push water 30 to 40 ft. or more above the ground. The 50L sells for around \$650 without sucker rod.

"In this area, we will put a remote 1,000-gal. tank in the attic or barn loft and then gravity flow out of it for the house, barn or stock tanks," explains Smith.

Smaller pitcher pumps are installed on cisterns and spring basins. The PHB model has a 3-in. stroke and pumps water up to 30 ft. above the source. It sells for about \$190.

"If you have a spring in the yard, you can run a flexible 1-in. hose out to it, put a foot valve in the bottom of the spring to prevent



Photo courtesy Liz Ponting, The Marquette Tribune

Banker Allan Lindfors of Marquette, Kansas, and city councilman Steve Piper hit on the idea of giving modern homesteading a chance.

Last summer Marquette had given away all 80 lots and began developing 20 more acres.

What really got the development company going was the realization that Marquette just wasn't going to attract any meaningful industry. But what they've come up with is far more significant, because it involves very interested living and breathing new citizens who are thankful to have space, light, and air.

Lindfors says the settlers do need other income and they seem to find it, although commuting is often involved. In many cases, having title to land has given them the backing they need to build homes.

Ten other communities in Kansas, and more in other states, are getting involved in the same kind of thing.

For more information go to www.kansasfreeland.com; www.chugwater.com; www.cityofrichmondmn.com; or www.curtis-ne.com.

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Jim Smith installs old hand pumps that draw from springs, rainwater cisterns and even deep wells.

back flow and your pipe stays full of water," suggests Smith. "You only have to prime it the first time."

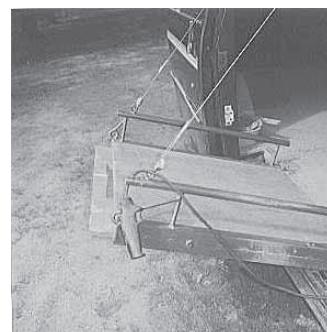
He carries a variety of simple mechanical pumps made by Heller-Aller. The firm has bought out a number of other makers and is now one of the last domestic pump manufacturers.

Smith says a lot of his customers put in a mechanical pump for the same reason they get a wood stove...security. "If the power goes out, you can still get by," he says. "If you only pump with electricity, you're out of luck."

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Ken Voigt can telescope his wheelchair ramp from his van right up to a front porch. When it's time to put the ramp away, ramp sections slide in on their own.



Home-Built Wheelchair Ramp

Getting a wheelchair out of a van can be difficult enough. Getting it up a set of steps can be even tougher. Ken Voigt solved both problems with the same solution. His wheelchair ramp can telescope from his van right up to a front porch.

"My wife was disabled for many years before her death and confined to a wheelchair," says Voigt. "Most wheelchair ramps block the exit window of the van. I wanted her to be able to see out the window, so I built one that only comes up as high as the bottom of the window, but telescopes out when the door is opened."

The ramp consists of three pieces of plywood. Retracted, they sit inside a 3-in. channel iron slide made from two sets of 1 1/2-in. angle iron welded together. The channels are hinged at one end to the floor of the van. The first ramp section (3/4-in. plywood) is bolted to this set of channels. Two of the ramp pieces sit inside a second set of channels 1 5/8 in.

wide that slide inside the first set. The second ramp section (3/4-in. plywood) is bolted to this second set of channels, while the third ramp section, a 1-in. plywood sheet sits loose inside them.

The first section is 33 1/2 in. long. The second section pulls out to extend the ramp to 59 in. The third panel pulls out to extend the ramp to 86 in. Each panel overlaps 6 in. on the previous panel.

Side rails built out of 3/4-in. pipe are attached to the first section of channel irons.

"To lower and lift the ramp, I bolted an electric winch to the floor opposite the ramp," says Voigt. "Cables run through pulleys attached to the roof of the van."

"When it's time to put the ramp away, I lift it to a 45 degree angle, and the ramp sections slide in on their own," says Voigt.

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Mini Chopper Built For 10-Year-Old Grandson

William Jennings' 10-year-old grandson wanted an ATV of his own, but Jennings felt they were too fast to be safe.

"They'll go 60 mph, and I knew he would, too, so I told him we would build one," says Jennings. "He is mechanically inclined so he helped build it."

The frame, front forks with wheel and brake drum, and the gas tank were salvaged from an old 550 Honda motorcycle. A Murray garden tractor provided the rear end drive assembly axle and brakes. A 12 1/2 hp Briggs and Stratton provided the power, and a jackshaft and clutch assembly transfer the power from engine shaft to drive shaft.

"I had to use an idler pulley and spring for the clutch assembly with a foot clutch releasing the spring tension so my grandson can shift it," says Jennings. "We kept the regular five-speed transaxle rear end from the Murray."

Connecting the motorcycle frame to the garden tractor rear end was almost as much of a challenge as the clutch assembly. The first step was to cut the Honda frame down so it would match up with the Murray rear end.

"I cut 4 in. out of the rear risers and 2 in out of the top tube that comes down to the rear risers," says Jennings. "Then I cut 3 in. out of the front tubes and cut the frame off where the swing arm to the rear wheel went."

He welded cross supports under the frame to support the running boards and cut a plate of 3/16-in. steel as a base for the engine. He cut a hole in it for the engine shaft and bored out mounting holes to match the engine mounts.

"The motorcycle frame was about 12 in. overall, so I had to widen it and bring it back



To build mini chopper, Jennings connected an old Honda motorcycle frame to the rear end off a Murray garden tractor.

on both sides to fit the mounting brackets for the transaxle," explains Jennings. "I welded 1-in. tubing up for the rear fenders and covered them with 1/8-in. plate. I left the rear tubes for added strength and welded steel plate between them and the rear risers. It's kind of built like a tank in the rear end."

Jennings built a seat over the top frame tubes using 3/4-in. plywood and foam covered it all with Naugahyde. While the rear wheels are original, the hubcaps came from a golf cart.

"My grandson wanted to dress it up a bit with the hubcaps and flame kit," says Jennings. "We have had it in a parade or two and he has driven it for six months. It is geared to only run 10-12 mph, and he has been after me to speed it up. I want to be sure he has a handle on it before we put anymore speed to it."

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