

Town suffers multiple setbacks

Novinger residents endure floods, fire and tornado

BY SHAWN SHINNEMAN
Staff Reporter

In a town where City Hall is located on a gravel road, Wayne and Pauline Burriss sit in one of the last remaining public buildings and lay out pictures of the destruction.

Things were different when the Burrisses first moved to Novinger in 1974. There was a drug store, a bank, a car wash. They could buy groceries without traveling to Kirksville. A slaughterhouse provided jobs for some of the locals.

But they didn't realize at the time that things were heading downhill. Businesses went under. People moved out.

And then — with a slumping economy in a vulnerable community — came a run of disasters.

"There's hardly anything of the old Novinger left," Pauline Burriss said.

The last two and a half years have taken their toll.

Pauline is sifting through photos of the city of Novinger, which is now flooded. Farmlands have become lakes, and parking lots are swimming pools.

Steady rains pounded the area in June 2008, and flooded the Chariton River to its third highest stage ever at 28.44 feet, more than two feet above what is considered a "major flood stage," according to the National Weather Service website.

"I've never seen one that bad before," said Wayne, mayor of Novinger at the time of the flood. "It was the biggest [flood] that this

area has ever seen."

Residents of seven houses were initially displaced. Some left town for good. Others moved to higher ground in Novinger.

Still others, lacking the money to move out or repair, stayed in homes located in areas where flooding could, and likely would, happen again.

About 11 months had passed when disaster number two came. A tornado struck the southern portion of Novinger on May 13, 2009, causing damage to more than 50 houses. The Ross building, a brick building that's been a constant in Novinger's business district since the 1800s, disintegrated under the high winds.

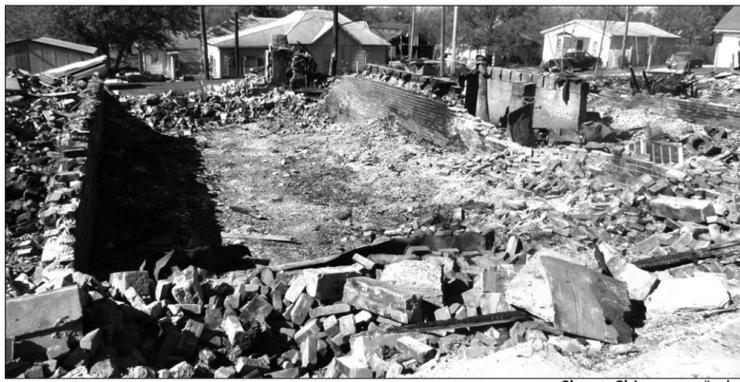
And then, by the accounts of nearly anyone around at the time of the event, something beautiful occurred — something different.

"It was amazing, the community response," said David Kittle, local farmer and volunteer firefighter. "And we had other people come in to help us. We pretty well got it cleaned up in a timely and organized manner."

By the end of May 15, the streets were cleared. A community was united.

But the next day, flooding again hit the area, with water levels rising to more than 25 feet.

As quickly as Novinger had come together to face the tornado damage, it was devastated by the second major flood in two years.



Shawn Shinneman/Index
Brick piles are all that is left of a Novinger building that once housed four local businesses. A fire destroyed in the building in September.

"No question about it, it's ...," Pauline said, pausing and looking up from the pictures of June 2008 laid out on the table in front of her. "It's really bad. The streets are bad. Some of the houses never did get fixed back up the way they should have been fixed. It hurt a lot of people."

The story might start in 2008, but the decline of Novinger's economy can be linked all the way back to the Great Depression.

Before that, Novinger was a coal-mining town of 1,743 people in 1920, according to "A Book of Adair County History." But when the Depression forced many of the mines to close, the population more than cut in half within a ten-year period.

"It's really bad. The streets are bad. Some of the houses never did get fixed back up the way they should have been fixed. It hurt a lot of people."

Pauline Burriss
Novinger resident



Krista Goodman/Index
Edna Campbell's bookstore owner Liz Srnka helps a customer try on a shawl. The store, which once served as the University bookstore, sells a wide array of merchandise ranging from greeting cards to shoes.

Downtown store evolves with time

BY BURGUNDY RAMSEY
Staff Reporter

Fifty-five years ago, you could have walked into Edna Campbell's Bookstore and seen a young Al Srnka working behind the counter. Today you just might find him there again.

Srnka started working at Edna's as a freshman while attending Northeast Missouri State Teacher's College, now known as Truman State University. Then, he worked with the original owner of the store, Edna Campbell. Now he owns the bookstore with his wife, Liz, who is also a Truman alumna. The couple, who bought the store in 1961, have changed just about everything about the original store, including the inventory and location, but even with all the changes, the Srnkas try to keep Edna's vision alive today.

Edna Campbell's Bookstore was the original campus bookstore. The store moved off campus in 1932, but Edna still cared about the University and supported the arts there. She also took pride in the quality of merchandise she sold in the store. After the Srnkas bought the store, Al continued to teach at the University, while Liz quit her high school teaching job to run the store.

"[Edna] knew what was good before it was good," Al said. "She had great insight into what good, quality merchandise was, and we have tried to emulate her and choices she would make in choosing some of the things."

The quality of the merchandise is something that keeps the customers coming back, store employee Phyllis Brummit said.

"It is what makes the store different from other gift shops in the area," Brummit said. "It started out being a bookstore with a few gifts. Now we're a gift store with a few books."

The shift in merchandise came approximately 10 years ago when Liz and Al saw that changes were hitting the book industry. Small bookstores were being replaced by bigger mall stores and online sales, Liz said.

"I really had a hard time giving up the books," Liz said. "It was like cutting my left arm off, but it's been long enough now that I realize that I can't not do it and keep my door open."

Because Al taught at Truman while owning the store, Edna's developed a very close connection to the school. The store sells tickets to the community for the Lyceum shows. Al directed the spring musicals at Truman and was faculty adviser for many of the clubs on campus. He even started Franklin Street Singers, Liz said.

Some of the Srnkas' fondest memories come from their relationship with the school. After the Lyceum performances, they would often invite many of the performers back to their home. They are still in contact with some of these performers today, Liz said.

This relationship to the people at the school and in the community is why Liz opens the door each day.

"I truly love what I do, and I love the people," Liz said. "I like the interacting with the customers. I'm at the point now where I don't have to worry about doing the displays and I don't have to worry about a lot of things that I used to do myself, so I can interact with the people even more than I ever did."

One of the regular customers is Stephanie "Stevie" Willet. She has been shopping at the store since she was six years old, when most of the inventory was still books.

"One of the things that's really been great is to see the shop evolve," Willet said. "You can still find something special, just like you could when I was little."

Willet, who lived in Phoenix for 25 years, has moved back to the area and has made visiting the shop a tradition. "I meet with my sister for lunch, and we try to do that once a week," Willet said. "Then we always come in here afterwards, even if it's just to say hi. There is always something new in."

The store continues to stock new items that appeal to everyone. Within the last couple years they have added the TOMS shoes brand, a brand that Edna Campbell would have approved, Al said, because of its philanthropic work.

The shoes have become a very popular item for the college kids, Liz said. They are also trying to reach out to the community online. They have their own Facebook page and are working on a website.

"We're hoping that is up and going at the end of November," Liz said. "We are real excited about that."

Despite all these changes, Al and Liz are still running the store just as Edna Campbell would have wanted it: with quality merchandise.

"We strive to find things that are unique and different," Brummit said. "Once in a great while, I find a store that comes close to being like Edna's, but no place really touches what Edna's is to me."

Since then, there has been a slow decrease from 846 people in 1930 to 534 at the time of the 2000 Census, with the economy falling with the population.

With major floods hitting the last two years, and a minor but substantial flood in 2010, most farmers have not harvested significant amounts of crops for three straight seasons.

"Even if we have three or four good years, I'll still be paying off '08, '09 and 2010," Kittle said.

Outside of the farming industry, jobs are scarce in Novinger. Most employed residents commute to nearby towns like Kirksville or Milan, Mayor Jeff Dodson said.

Dodson, who was elected three weeks before last year's tornado, said his main goal always had been to clean up the streets and run-down houses throughout the town. But dealing with the aftermath of natural disasters has gotten in the way.

Dodson remains optimistic. He said he believes Novinger

is a strong community that can turn its situation around. The first step, he said, is to get the city cleaned up, which will require help from federal and state funding.

"Then, that said, in the private sector people are going to have to regain a belief in the community — that we can reach out and actually do some things that will prosper," Dodson said.

Late on Saturday night, Sept. 11, more than two years after the initial flood, more than one year after the tornado and second flood, Dodson finished up his work at West Chariton Fellowship, where he is the minister.

Dodson said that at 12:02 a.m. Sept. 12, approximately 30 minutes after he had gotten home, he received a call from a Novinger resident. A building that housed four local businesses, across the street from Dodson's church, was in flames.

When he got to the scene, Dodson called the Fire Department to see where they were.

Students gain experience in Philippines

BY ALEX CARLSON
Staff Reporter

The Truman State University Nursing students continue to progress in their studies offered at Truman, but a trip during the summer to the Philippines changed the expectations for a number of nursing students.

Every May and June, nursing students get the opportunity to travel to the Philippines for three weeks of nursing practice while also earning clinical elective hours and intercultural perspective hours for their majors. While many students have traveled during study abroad programs before, the nursing department's Philippines trip is an interactive experience because of the emphasis on involved, hands-on activities instead of the traditional classroom atmosphere.

The students received the opportunity to perform tasks that aren't available to students in the United States, like assisting at births.

"What makes this kind of experience different than other study abroad programs is the hands-on experience," senior Emily Shaw said. "You don't just take classes. You actually go to a hospital and work using different medical techniques and resources."

The traveling students worked in both urban and rural areas of the Philippines.

"While we were there, we worked in the pediatric unit, the social hygiene clinic and got to visit more rural areas for community visits," senior Julie Dusheke said. "When we went on community visits, it was a big difference from the heavily populated hospitals. Being there for the patients is a big part of the nursing profession, so we were able to do that."

Students involved in the study also were exposed to the local culture while they explored the country. Dusheke and Shaw agreed with nursing instructor Kit Hadwiger that the trip is just

As it turned out, despite approximately 20 people in the street watching the fire, Dodson was the first to call for emergency assistance.

By the time firefighters arrived, there was nothing they could do to stop the flames from destroying the entire building.

Former mayor Wayne Burriss said his immediate reaction was that this was a loss that will reverberate through the city for months, possibly years, to come.

"The only thing holding this town together right now is the school," Wayne said. "We lose the school, we lose the town."

On a quiet Wednesday afternoon after the smoke had cleared in Novinger's depleted business district, Gail Greathouse is tidying the dining area of the dimly lit Chevy's Bar and Grill.

The restaurant, of which Greathouse is a manager, has served as a sanctuary for community residents, even though the burnt ruins and vacant lots left from tornado and fire damage are visible from the sidewalk in front of Chevy's.

"That's our biggest fear, [that] there's never going to be anything else go up there," Greathouse said.

In her daily customers, Greathouse witnesses the increased stress brought on by a run of disaster. She is hopeful, though, that the strength of this small town will win out.

But, while Novinger's heart might be strong, its face is scarred.

Gravel roads lead visitors around a town of several battered houses, broken windows and abandoned properties.

On the corner of a business district once ripe with activity, rubble and ash lay silent.

as much about cultural immersion as it is about learning new nursing practices.

"What I really want [the students] to learn is cultural proficiency and learn about being open to other cultures," Hadwiger said. "Working in the United States, we are a melting pot of different cultures, and they'll have patients from all different cultures."

The students learned about the Filipino culture while in the hospitals and during their free time.

"An important part of the trip was talking and learning about the culture there," Dusheke said. "It was a real experience."

Understanding and experiencing Filipino culture was just as important to the students as their nursing duties.

"There are differences between the U.S. and Philippines' lifestyles and cultures, so experiencing the culture there was a big part of the trip," Shaw said.

The department's annual trip to the Philippines isn't all work and no play. The students enjoyed the scenery, meet instructor Kit Hadwiger's family and even enjoy a Filipino dessert called "Halo Halo." Although the academic and cultural teachings are very important for the students, Hadwiger said she wants to teach the students about the value of living in America and not taking what they have for granted.

"[The students] will see college kids like them over [in the Philippines], senior nursing students like them," Hadwiger said. "They have less than a third of what our students have, and they're very happy. They realize that they can be effective nurses without all of the fancy health care equipment we have. They don't have a lot of the fancy diagnostic equipment, but they learn to manage their patients. And I think they also learn to be more appreciative of what they have."

The nursing department's next trip to the Philippines is scheduled for the summer of 2011.

"There are differences between U.S. and Philippines' lifestyles and cultures, so experiencing the culture there was a big part of the trip."

Emily Shaw
senior