

Education Trends

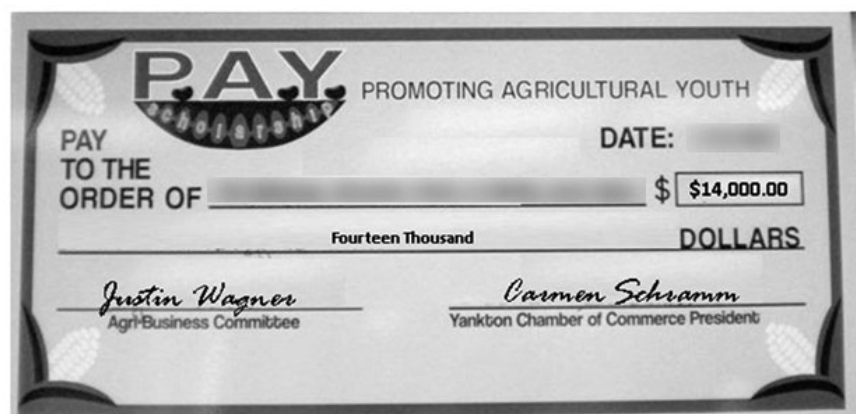


PHOTO: YANKTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

P.A.Y. Scholarship Program Continues To Grow

BY JORDYNNE HART

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In 2008 when the Yankton Chamber of Commerce Ag Business Committee got together, none of members thought that a \$500 scholarship for one area student would turn into \$14,000 for four students in just five years.

"When we first started out, we were actually struggling with coming up with the \$500 to make this scholarship happen because it was so brand new and people weren't quite used to it," said Justin Wagner, Ag Business committee chairperson and ag lender at First National Bank South Dakota.

Wagner said that the committee came up with the Promoting Agricultural Youth (P.A.Y.) Scholarship after discussing the importance of getting area youth involved with agriculture.

"We wanted to find a way to promote agriculture with the youth," Wagner said. "One of the directions we thought we should go with is through scholarships."

The P.A.Y. Scholarship's objectives is to: recognize local youth that are leaders in agriculture; provide local financial support for academic study and leadership development; and foster the development of future leaders in rural America, agribusiness and production agriculture.

Applicants for the P.A.Y. Scholarship must be high school seniors who will study an agricultural-related major in a two or four-year college. The applicants must reside in a one-county radius of Yankton County.

Since 2008, 13 area students have received the scholarship. Wagner said that each year, the scholarship and the number of P.A.Y. Scholarships that have been given out get larger.

Wagner said that the P.A.Y. Scholarship's main platform now is the annual Ag Gala held in June.

"This year, we don't have all of our expenses in, we are close to \$25,000 that we raised for this last scholarship," Wagner said. "It has just taken off."

He said that the committee has talked about giving away more scholarships depending on the number of applicants and the amount of money they raise.

"A \$3,500 scholarship is a pretty hefty amount of money," Wagner said. "We talked about lowering the scholarship amount to spread the money."

The Ag Gala is held to honor the agricultural industry and to recognize the vital role it plays in the Yankton economy. It is here that the scholarships are awarded to the area youth.

Last June, the four Yankton area graduates who received the 2014 P.A.Y. Scholarship worth a total of \$3,500 were Ben Barleman of Coleridge, Nebraska, Alexandra Vclek of Tabor, Jacob Kaiser of Fordyce, Nebraska and Ty Dybdal from Newcastle, Nebraska.

These recipients were chosen by the Ag committee not by their "smarts" but for their dedication.

"There are plenty of scholarships out there for kids that have really high GPAs," Wagner said. "That isn't the focus we wanted. We wanted someone who is hard working, that wanted to move back to this area and that wanted to get any ag-related degree."

Wagner said that the common theme for the applicants that usually win scholarships is that they grew up on a family farm.

"Some of them were actually raising livestock themselves to pay for college," Wagner said.

He said that all the recipients were very detailed on how they gave back to the community now and how they plan to give back to the community down the road.

Follow Jordynne Hart on Twitter at twitter.com/hartjordynne. Discuss this story at yankton.net.

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School Consolidation A Positive Move For Many Area Schools

BY JORDYNNE HART

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Consolidation continues to be a pressing topic for many small schools in the region.

In an era of shrinking populations and dwindling enrollment numbers, some small schools are turning to consolidation in order to become more efficient and provide a higher standard of education.

Despite many obstacles, the consolidating school districts in the area are making their transition positive:

HARTINGTON-NEWCASTLE

Hartington approached Newcastle to consider a merger two years ago. Newcastle was decreasing in the number of students at the time. Hartington-Newcastle superintendent Randall Anderson said that there were about 75 kids enrolled in the Newcastle district.

Anderson said that the two schools decided that it was financially necessary to consolidate the two schools together. The consolidation was finalized Aug. 1.

"We had room and a good curriculum and finances where we could do that," said Anderson.

In many districts that have consolidated, community members, parents and students have opposed consolidation because they believe that the culture of their communities will be destroyed and replaced with a new identity.

"Anytime a student is attending a school that is closing, it is very difficult for some students to accept that they are losing it," Anderson said. "We are trying to make it a comfortable transition for the students."

Anderson said that his staff wanted to make the Newcastle students feel like it's their school, too. He said that even though it's the beginning of the year, it's start-



PHOTO: RITA PEDERSEN

Students at the newly consolidated Hartington-Newcastle school district are shown studying together recently. The consolidation of the two schools became official Aug. 1. "The Hartington students and the Newcastle students have worked really hard to make this work," said Superintendent Randall Anderson.

ing to feel like home for everyone.

"The Hartington students and the Newcastle students have worked really hard to make this work," Anderson said. "If you were to talk to the students, you will find that they already recognize their new school as Hartington-Newcastle."

Randall said that all kids are adapting very well.

"It has been a positive transition for both schools," he said.

CONCORD-COLERIDGE

Concord-Coleridge is in its first year of consolidation. High school principal Jay Chance said that the consolidation has been going smoothly because the two schools have been sharing resources for years — "before we even had joint school board meetings," he said.

Chance said that the consolidation did not bother any of the students and that most of them knew each other even before the merger.

Also, no staff was cut this year.

"It's two districts officially, but it's operating as one," Chance said. "We have the same kids and the same needs, so we need the same staff."

Chance said that no one lost in this consolidation.

VIBORG-HURLEY

Viborg-Hurley is having a positive transition, as well. The two schools consolidated in 2012 because of declining enrollment.

Principal and District Coordinator of Technology Brett Mellem said that transition process is getting better each year.

"The kids are doing a great job of coming together," Mellem said. "When you put two separate districts together with student of various backgrounds and who are used to a setting and then you make them bond, there will be issues."

But Mellem said that now it is hard to differentiate the Viborg from the Hurley students.

"They have really gelled together," he said.

Mellem said that it has benefited both the communities because the schools were able to avoid an opt-out issue.

"We joined forces and did something that needed to be done and had to be done," said Mellem. "We hope to keep growing together."

Efforts to reach officials from Irene-Wakonda for this story were unsuccessful.

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