



Community Focus

Nature Center overnight...a unique program for youth!

The Pioneer Park Nature Center offers a very interesting overnight program designed for third through seventh grade youth. The program immerses participants into nature with staff naturalists guiding different nature exploration activities until nightfall. Then, with guidance of naturalists and under the shadow of night, participants become nocturnal critters and explore the woods and prairie of the night. Later, groups will sleep in the Malinovskis Auditorium and greet the next morning with a hike looking for animal tracks and more of nature.

Program Details:

When: year-round; any night of the week except holidays

Suggested Organizations: 4-H clubs, scouts, schools, church groups, other youth groups

Age: 3rd through 7th grade (others given consideration)

Time: 7 p.m. to 9 a.m.

Fee: \$15 per child

Number: 10 to 25 children (one adult per every 4th child is required, no fee charged)

Nature Center Staff: The Nature Center provides a staff naturalist for the entire program.

Supervision: Sponsoring adults are expected to provide supervision.

Food: Eat dinner before arriving. Groups are responsible for providing their own breakfast. A microwave and refrigerator is available for use. The Nature Center provides drinks, cups, napkins.

How: For reservations, call with a two week advance notice.

Prepayment of \$150 is required (10 children minimum).

For more information: Contact the Pioneer Park Nature Center, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Phone: 441-7895. Fax: 441-6468. E-mail: hunt@nrcdec.nrcstate.ne.us. (GB)

Community service for kids

Part of being a good citizen is participating in life as a community and giving service to others. Often community service is used as a punishment and as such has made many students hate it. A much more productive use of service is intense involvement of young people in a project prior to participation.

All service has value. Service is problem based learning. However, the more an adult takes over, the less the student gets from the experience. Service can be a family activity, but must include planning and involvement from all family members. Letting youth take leadership is gratifying. They are incredibly talented and committed if given the chance to be a part of community solutions. They tend to become apathetic and uninvolved, however, if their opinions and ideas are not valued or incorporated in the experience.

Community service is part of the Character Counts! citizenship pillar and a core component of character building. Young people do want to make a difference in themselves and in others. Most just need to know how and where to begin. Many want to have a purpose in life and are anxious to share their gifts with others.

It is never enough to just talk to young people about service. They need to be taught, they need to experience by doing, and they need to have positive role models. As they volunteer on the week-ends or tutor a younger child at school, they are developing positive character. Not only will this help them widen their experience, they'll experience being valued themselves. (LJ)

Character Counts! Rally great success

Nearly 350 youth and adults attended a rally at the State Capitol Rotunda in celebration of Character Counts! Week and over 170 youth participated in four Super Character Camps held in the city.



The occupation of farming

Farming is one of the world's oldest occupations. It has been hailed as one of the most noble of occupations by Thomas Jefferson and countless others throughout recorded history. Tilling the soil and husbanding the livestock as a resource steward in the seemingly-endless cycle of seasons, this remains in the minds of many as the basic stereotype of a farmer.

However, beyond these idealistic notions, the question to address is, "what is a farmer today in American agriculture?" Particularly, what is the nature of those who account for the bulk of commercial agricultural production in this country?

This is a difficult question since agriculture is very complex and getting more so. It is further compounded by the fact that farm families often merge off-farm income/employment with farming to raise their household income level. In fact, the importance of off-farm income can be so great in many of these households that the term "farm household" should be replaced by "rural household."

The thought occurred to me recently that one way of thinking through this question of "what is farming?", is to start with an analogy from the building and construction industry. Take today's typical "home builder" and compare that person with the "carpenter" of a generation or two back. The carpenter of times past was a multi-skilled artisan who participated directly in virtually all phases of the building project, whatever the project. For example, when a house was to be built, the carpenter, along with his helpers, dug and poured the footing before taking a trowel from his tool chest and laying up the foundation. He would then frame the house, roof it, plaster the interior walls and trim it out, including building all the cabinetry from scratch. When that house was finally completed after many months, it certainly represented

both the seat and the skills of that carpenter builder. His touch was evident from the basement floor to the ornate trim in the gable peak.

Contrast the above with the home builders of today who serve as general contractors to manage and oversee the

complete construction process. Their tool chest may be rather empty relative to their carpenter grandfather's. In fact, it often consists largely of a cellular phone and a laptop computer with a fax modem—all of which is easily accessible in the cab of their 4X4 truck. Rather than intensive physical labor and skills of the hand to carry out nearly every phase of the building process, they exert considerable mental energy, networking and coordinating with input suppliers and the countless number of sub-contractors who carry out the increasingly specialized phases of the building process. When they are not doing that, they are dealing with the "codes" people, utility companies, accountants, marketing specialists and yes, considerable time with the customer/client as well. For today's builder, management and coordination skills have replaced the skills of the hand. Even management, which was also important to the carpenter-builder of the previous generation, has changed to reflect a more fluid emphasis upon delegation and oversight of the total process. If carried out in a successful fashion, the end product—a home built today—will be one of quality that probably surpasses by far the house built a few generations



ago. And yes, the home builder's touch is still there, even though he or she never drove a nail or sawed a rafter. It's there in the effective coordination of a tremendously complex undertaking which makes for a high-quality end product.

Now, using that analogy, let's get back to farming. Can we not see some amazing parallels? Were not yesterday's farmers "jacks-of-all-trades" just as their carpenter counterparts? And obviously, mental energy in today's production agriculture replaces much of the physical labor of farming in an earlier era. But, the subtle changes over time are much broader as the following list implies.

Yesterday's Farmer:

- solitude with the land
- services by the farmer
- on-farm inputs
- labor intensive
- independent
- total participation
- pride in the farm
- diverse enterprises
- technical skills
- commodity-focused
- owned assets
- neighborhood networking

Today's Ag Production Coordinator:

- active communication with people
- services subcontracted

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Japanese developments important

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If you're a Nebraska farmer or rancher, Japan's economy may not be on your radar screen. Too many things going on at home, you say, to worry about what's going on half-way around the world.

But wait. What about those low commodity prices? Could a change in Japanese economic policy help increase those prices? I think the answer to the latter question clearly is "yes." It won't happen overnight, though. Patience will be necessary. That takes nothing away from the good start that's been made in recent days.

Japan needs to be understood in each of two roles.

First, for many years, Japan has been the United States' single largest customer for agricultural products, typically accounting for about 20 percent of our total sales. In 1996, Japan's imports of U.S. ag products reached a record \$11.7 billion. Since then, however, her purchases dropped to about \$10.5 billion in 1997 and seem sure to sag again in 1998. This is especially important for Nebraska producers: Japan buys more feed grains and red meats—two products we specialize in—than anything else.

Why the drop in imports? No, Japan suddenly has not become capable of producing all her own food. But as the Japanese economy stagnated over the past two years, importers collectively cut back as much as possible. The decision to trim

imports became even more compelling as the value of the Japanese yen fell relative to the dollar. This made our products more expensive from the Japanese perspective.

Beginning in early 1997, Japan's dominant role among all Southeast Asian countries also began to change. With Japan's economy sliding, fewer imports were purchased from her neighbors. Countries like Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia felt the impact in their own domestic economies. Perhaps more importantly, Japanese banks, which previously had provided aggressive financing for business projects throughout the region, abruptly pulled back. This does not mean that mismanagement did not occur in other countries. (Indonesia is perhaps the best example.) But

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