



MAY 2026

WHEELS ACROSS THE PRAIRIE HERITAGE CENTER

P.O. Box 1091 • 3297 Hwy. 14 • Tracy, MN 56175 • (507) 626-1949
www.wheelsacrosstheprairie.org • wheelsacrosstheprairie@gmail.com



Wheels Across the Prairie visitors will appreciate the new benches positioned around the heritage center's grounds, even if they aren't waiting to catch a train. Fashionably-dressed TAHS seniors Jada Schmidt and Addison Kainz stepped back in time near the heritage center's C&NW depot recently, discovering the benches are hard-to-top.

Wheels 2026 season kickoff set May 17

A flag tribute and bench dedication will help kick-off Wheels Across the Prairie's 2026 season Sunday, May 17.

The 1 p.m. ceremony will salute the military veterans memorialized in the 48-pole American flag array erected at Wheels Across the Prairie over the past two years, and thank donors who financially supported the project. Friends and family

of the honored military veterans have been invited to take part in a ceremony that will have flags flying at half-staff, then raised to full height. Plans are to have participants stationed at all flag poles across the Wheels campus.

"This will be very meaningful for everyone who takes part,"

Season kickoff: Continued on page two



A colorful design created by Natalie Illg has been selected as the "Let Freedom Ring" art winner in the grades 10-12 division.

Poster art touts 250th

Winners displayed at Wheels Museum for the summer

America's Spirit of 1776 is reflected in a student art-contest sponsored by Wheels Across the Prairie.

"Let Freedom Ring," the contest's theme, salutes the 250th anniversary of America's founding. It was open to

all Tracy Area Public and St. Mary's students in grades 4-12.

Judging took place in three divisions: grades 4-6, grades 7-9, and grades 10-12. Prizes of \$100, \$75, and \$50 will be

Poster Contest: Continued on page three

New benches placed around Wheels grounds

Appeal raises nearly \$50,000

Wheels Across the Prairie visitors will enjoy a more walkable and user-friendly campus this summer.

Forty new benches were placed around the Wheels grounds in mid-May, capping a successful project that involved several dozen donors and raised more than \$40,000.

The low-maintenance, all-weather benches were delivered to Wheels Across the Prairie and set up by teams of volunteers on May 14. The earth-toned, matching benches were strategically set up along the heritage center's flag-lined cement walkways, near the doorways of exhibit buildings, and in the midst of attractive green spaces. A few benches were placed inside buildings where visitors are most likely to congregate.

LeRoy Johnson, Elaine Fischer, and Dorothy Radermacher spear-headed the project.

"We felt that this was an improvement that will make our heritage center more welcoming," Radermacher explained.

The benches, purchased from the supplier "By the Yard," is similar to the Wheels bench that she and her sister, Elaine, purchased some years ago as a memorial to their parents, LaVonne and Meryl Hamilton.

Contributors could sponsor a memorial bench in six, five or four-foot lengths, and specify the memorial message engraved on



Commemorative benches were delivered to Wheels Across the Prairie in May.

the bench. Donors could also help support the bench project by donating smaller amounts.

Contributions were sufficient to also purchase eight recycling and trash receptacles that have been placed around Wheels buildings and grounds.

Individuals and organizations that sponsored a bench include:

- Mark & Lori Templeton
- Becky & Mark Beers
- Amiret Busy Bees 4-H
- Box Car Wind
- Dennis & Marilyn Christensen Family
- Joe & Cookie Cooreman Family
- Daughters of American Revolution
- Harold & Jackie Deal Family
- George, Lori, Mike & Melissa Erbes
- Elaine Fischer / Jenna Koenig
- Jim & Linda Furan
- John Galstad
- G & R Electric - Brad/Brenda Stoneberg
- Wayne & Joyce Greeley Family
- Francis Hamilton Family
- LeRoy Johnson (2)
- Knakmuhs Agency / Tracy Agency

- Tom & Cheryl Lenertz
- Bonnie Ludeman (2)
- Ron Mc Daniel
- Kim & Pam Peterson-Ronnie/Carol Dahl
- Cleone & Allan Richardson - Loren Klein
- Khris Radke
- Tim & Kris Rignell
- Wendy Sellman
- Tracy Chamber of Commerce
- Tracy Fraternal Order of Eagles 3918
- Tracy Lions
- Jon Wendorff

'Friends of the Wheels' bench contributors include:

- Dave Bosacker
- Richard Brown
- Jeff & Sandy Carpenter - Edina Realty
- Laura Deslauriers Realtor, Remax
- Gordy & Marlys Edwards
- First Independent Bank
- Homeless Treasurers-Sharon/Randy Hohler
- Horvath Funeral Services
- Vince & Jeanette Lanoue
- LaVoy's Repair
- Friends of Jack Miller
- Prairie View Senior Living
- Mark Pregnietz- State Farm Insurance
- Dorothy Radermacher
- Jim Radermacher
- Shaw & Associates
- Southwest Sanitation
- Steve Struchen- Real Estate Retrievers
- The Caboose
- Tracy Auto Value
- Tracy Food Pride
- Vintage Vault Boutique

Season kickoff: Continued from page one

comments Dorothy Radermacher, Wheels past-board president.

The public is invited to gather at the Wheels' veterans memorial. During the flag ceremony, a medley of U.S. Armed Services anthems will be heard, followed by a salute fired by a Tracy American Legion color guard and the playing of "Taps."

•••

The dedication of 40-new benches recently delivered to the Wheels campus will be another highlight of the May 17 gathering, which is also Wheels' annual meeting. Recognition will be given to

those who supported the bench project with nearly \$50,000 of contributions. Many benches are dedicated as memorials to loved ones, with commemorative signage etched into each.

Supporters of other recent Wheels projects—including sponsors of vintage lampposts installed along the heritage center's walkways last year—will also be thanked and recognized.

Lyon County Commissioner Rick Anderson and City of Tracy leaders have been invited to give introductory greetings. Heath Radke will serve as emcee.

Radermacher will summarize Wheels'

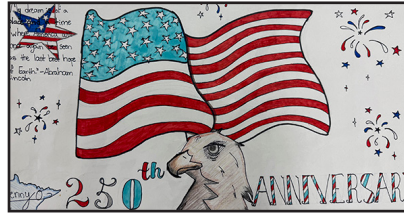
accomplishments in 2025, with 2026 President Amy Foster presenting goals for coming year. Wheels board members will be introduced.

Following the outdoor program, visitors are invited to two events in the Wheels' Main Barn. Pie and ice cream will be served in the family history and research center on the Barn's west wing. Keynote speaker Jay Hammond will discuss "Minnesota's Farming Heritage" at 2:30 p.m.

The public is invited to attend any of the planned events, or simply stroll around Wheels buildings and exhibits. There will be no admission charge.



Keiana Xiong - 1st Grades 7-9



Benito Ortiz - 2nd Grades 7-9



Anjay Vang - 3rd Grades 7-9

Poster contest: Continued from page one

awarded to the top-three entries in each division.

Carol “Cookie” Cooreman, Wheels board member who organized the art-poster contest, said that judges were very pleased with the quality of entries. The objective of the contest, she said, was to promote awareness of America’s 250th celebration while also challenging students’ artistic creativity.

Natalie Illg’s star-spangled celebration of America was selected as the winning entry in the grades 10-12 division. The TAHS junior’s design positioned the Statue of Liberty in front of an American flag on the left half of her art. Two soldiers—one from the American Revolution

era and the other a contemporary figure—salute the flag in the right foreground of the design.

She will receive \$100 as a division winner.

Emma Carter was judged the second-place artist in the grades 10-12 category, with Marcus Vue selected as third. They will receive \$75 and \$50 in prize money respectively.

Keiana Xiong’s entry was selected as the winner for grades 7-9, with Benito Ortiz’s design named runner-up. Anjay Vang created the third-place poster. Prize money of \$100, \$75, and \$50 will also be awarded for the grades 7-9 winners.

Entries for grades 4-6 had not been submitted for judging in time to be included in this

newsletter.

Judging criteria included artistic quality and craftsmanship, depiction of the “Let Freedom Ring” theme, patriotic expression, language, imagery, and message. The 11x17” posters were collected and judged in late April.

America’s 250th-anniversary celebration commemorates the July 4, 1776 signing of the Declaration of Independence by America’s Founding Fathers.

Wheels Across the Prairie will display enlarged versions of all the winning art entries at a Wednesday, May 27, open house, from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Free ice-cream treats from Lingen Dairy, Balaton, will be served. At that time, the overall

contest winner, with its \$200 grand prize, will be announced, along with the grades 4-6 winners.



Marcus Vue - 3rd Grades 10-12



Emma Carter - 2nd Grades 10-12

Thanks for the memories

Why is the Wheels Across the Prairie Heritage Center worth supporting? Isn’t the museum just a musty collection of “old stuff,” with little relevance to today?

Consider what would disappear without Wheels Across the Prairie as a perpetual caretaker of Tracy heritage.

For example, a rare March, 1966 edition of The Tracer—Tracy High School’s newspaper for decades past—is one of more than 750,000 items in the Wheels’ collections.

The half-century-old newspaper reminds us that Nancy Abernethy was the prestigious Daughters of the American Revolution award recipient that spring, and that “An Enchanted Forest” was the theme for the eagerly-awaited THS junior-senior prom. Another article details Scrapper wrestler Dave Van Meveren wins at the state wrestling tournament.

Without the newspaper’s ink, you might have forgotten that Jamie Ostgaard,

Nick Rolling, Lon Sweely Bruce Flesner, Mike Wyffels, Blair Anderson, Pat Stassen, Sue Ziemke, LaVonne Meyer, Pat Radke, Katy DeVetter and Nancy Leonard showed their theatrical flair in the senior-class play directed by young faculty member Kirk Landman. Or that musicians Martha Lee and Blair Anderson were good enough to play in the all-state band. Or Allen Withrow and Steve Vogel’s roles as leading scorers on a 12-6 Scrapper basketball squad. Or a Monday Musicales-sponsored vocal recital featuring Wayne and Carol Mitchell.

The half-century old Tracer also stirs memories of THS typing classes sending letters to local young men serving in Vietnam.

Such are the memories that Wheels Across the Prairie strives to preserve, along with countless other threads in the on-going tapestry of Tracy. Won’t you help Wheels carry out that mission with your financial support and membership?



Scrapper wrestlers earned a District 9 championship in 1966. Varsity wrestlers included (front from left), Marv Kurtz, Mike Holm, Dale Hellison, Wayne Anderson, Jim Campbell, Loren Greenfield. Back: Coach Peterson, Doug Knuth, Dave Van Meveren, Steve Knott, Brian Ludeman, Ray Cooreman, Neil Jensen, Assistant Coach Busch.



Senior class-play thespians in “The Torch-Bearers” included: (from left) Jamie Ostgaard, Lon Sweely, Sue Ziemke, Pat Stassen, Nancy Leonard. Student Director Nancy Abernethy checks the script at left.



The Amiret Busy Bee 4-Hers who gathered for a group snapshot near the Amiret train trestle in 1938 have been mostly forgotten today, but their legacy lives on. A new exhibit at Wheels Across the Prairie this summer salutes the Busy Bees' 100th year as an active 4-H club. The names of the Depression-era Busy Bee members are unknown. Anyone who can help identify the faces in this yesteryear photo are invited to contact Wheels Across the Prairie.

100 Candles for Amiret Busy Bees

New exhibit touts 100 years

By Seth Schmidt

Horsepower ruled Minnesota farms, and Babe Ruth was still slugging homers for the New York Yankees, when the Amiret Busy Bees held their first club meeting a century ago.

1926 was a hardscrabble time to start a 4-H club. Poor grain and livestock prices had caused a spike in farm foreclosures, foreshadowing the 1930s catastrophe of the Great Depression.

Yet amidst the darkening horizon for farming, leaders Annie Glynn and Opal Trout organized the Amiret Busy Bees with an initial membership of five boys and five girls. The first Busy Bees—whose names have been lost to the passage of time—entered 11 projects at the 1927 Lyon County Fair, beginning an

Amiret 4-H tradition that has endured 100 years.

“Back in the 1930s, most of 4-H projects pertained to sustenance on the farm,” explains Jeanne Knott, the Busy Bees co-leader along with Katie Lanoue. 4-Hers in that early era learned basic skills like baking, canning, sewing, gardening, and raising livestock and crops. Most 4-Hers were farm kids.

Today, Knott notes, 4-H project areas have expanded to include STEM (Science, Engineering, Mathematics and Technology), photography, arts & crafts, photography, and education. It’s become commonplace for town kids to be involved in 4-H too.

At the one-century mark, the Amiret Busy Bees have become well-known for their energetic community service projects. Each spring, for instance, the Busy Bees devote a day sprucing up the Wheels Across the Prairie campus. An Adopt-a-Highway

Busy Bees: Continued on next page



In 1941, the Tracy Comets took a club tour at the Will Nelson farm. The two girls standing at left are Clarice and Delores Nelson, older sisters of longtime Tracy farmer and former Lyon County Commissioner Phil Nelson. Dale Scott is the young lad in bib overalls. Arlene Wyffels is the tallest girl standing at right. The others in the photo are unknown.



A 1941 picture of the Amiret Busy Bees shows 4-Hers on a club tour. The identities of the 4-Hers are unknown.

Busy Bees:

Continued from previous page

sponsorship keeps a stretch of County 9 north of Amiret free of litter. During the bustling fall harvest season, Busy Bees spread goodwill by distributing farmer-appreciation lunch bags. Birthday-cake kits given away at the Kitchen Table food shelf are courtesy of the Busy Bees. Club signage with an American flag near Amiret's southeast entrance is a community landmark.

One-hundred years after their founding, the Amiret Busy Bees, with 27 active members, are one of eight 4-H clubs in Lyon County. Busy Bee activities continue to be rooted in the 4-H youth development slogan of "Learn by Doing" and the 4-H motto of "To Make the Best Better."

•••

And what does the 4-H name stand for? The four "Hs" of 4-H: Head, Heart, Hands, and Health, naturally.

The official 4-H pledge, learned and



The beat goes on for the Amiret Busy Bees. Club members who enjoyed an outing at Garvin Park last October include: (front, from left) Grayson Wulf, Madison Wulf, Georgia Peterson, Boden Peterson, Boden Carlson, Cooper Lanoue, Kinslee Johnson, Morgan Kaare, Madison Kaare, Carter Kaare, Corbin Johnson, Elizabeth Buyck, Evelyn Buyck. Back: Nolan Carlson, Noah Johnson, Jared Swenhaugen, Clara Buyck, Audra Swenhaugen (partially hidden), Elsie Knott, Ava Swenhaugen, Lauren Torkelson, Halle Roggatz, Chelsea Torkelson, Skylar Johnson, Shelby Knott, Caroline Lanoue

recited by all members, explains: "I pledge my HEAD to clearer thinking, my HEART to greater loyalty, my HANDS to larger service, and my HEALTH to better living for my club, my country, and my world."

The national 4-H organization traces its roots to 1902, when 4-H clubs were organized in Iowa and Ohio. A national

4-H organization was formed in 1914. Interestingly, the popular 1927 song, "I'm Looking Over a 4-Leaf Clover," has no connection with the 4-H organization.

The Amiret Busy Bees exhibit at Wheels Across the Prairie is expected to go on display by Memorial Day weekend.

4-H clubs fade into history

The Tracy Comets.

Garvin Hi-Fliers.

Shetek Royal Harvesters.

Many are the once prominent area 4-H clubs that exist only in memory, the attrition of dwindling demographics and changing times.

Today, the Lyon County 4-H program has 275 participants in eight clubs: Amiret Busy Bees, Lake Marshall Eagles, Stanley Busy Beavers, Coon Creek Cheerful Workers, Minneota Ribbon Wranglers, Swan Lake Skippers, the 4-Paw Runners (dog club) and the SW MN Llama & Alpaca Club.

Today's 4-H numbers are a sharp contrast to the 715 Lyon County 4-H participants in 1971, and 620 4-Hers in 1960, when the swelling post-World War II Baby Boomer generation filled schools across the region. In 1941 and 1950, Lyon County's 4-H membership stood at 460 and 491 respectively.

During the peak 4-H years, most county townships had their own club. Several townships had two or even three 4-H clubs.

According to University of Minnesota Extension records, in 1941 Lyon County had the following 4-H clubs:

Eidsvold (2 clubs): Lone Star & Lucky Star.

Westerheim: Willing Workers.

Vallers: Goal Hunters.

Lucas: (3 clubs) Lady Slippers, Live-wires, & name unknown.

Norland: Top Notchers.

Grandview: Willing Workers.

Fairview: Greens.

Stanley: Busy Beavers.

Island Lake: Zeps.

Lynd: Lions.

Lake Marshall: Eagles.

Clifton: Happy Workers.

Coon Creek: Lyons, Cheerful Workers.

Sodus: Hi-Fliers.

Amiret: Busy Bees.

Shelburne: Progressives.

Rock Lake: Go-Getters.

Custer: Go-Far Gophers.

Monroe (2 clubs): Comets & Go-Getters.

Busy Bees plan ice cream social

The Amiret Busy Bees annual ice cream social will have a new flavor this summer.

The Busy Bees ordinarily serve their pie and ice cream at the Amiret Town Hall. But this summer, to support of their exhibit at Wheels Across the Prairie, the ice cream social will be held at the museum.

The date is Tuesday, June 23.

All aboard! Mid-summer train

A popular children’s train will soon be up and running again at Wheels Across the Prairie.

The miniature Chicago & Northwestern “400” engine was sidelined for the past two summers due to construction projects across the heritage center’s grounds. It is expected that the train’s operations will resume by the Fourth of July weekend, after trackage is laid-down.

The railroad’s loop will be rebuilt on a built-up base aggregate base to allow the train cars to run as smoothly as possible. In the past, the train’s steel rails and wooden

ties were placed directly on turf. Having the rails on an improved base will minimize chances of train wheels derailing from the track.

The placement of the train tracks will be slightly farther northwest of the Main Barn, compared with the old route.

The train engine and accompanying cars were originally displayed near a motel in Winthrop. Wheels Across the Prairie purchased the train car and trackage in the 1970s. The train became operational about 15 years ago.



Riding the rails will again be a part of the Wheels Across the Prairie experience this summer.

Civil War fascination to be displayed in June

What does the Civil War have to do with Tracy and Lyon County?

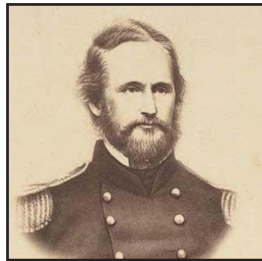
Actually, quite a bit.

Many Civil War veterans were among the wave of settlers who poured into the verdant tall-grass prairies of Southwest Minnesota in the 1870s and 1880s. Grave stones for these Grand Army of the Republic soldiers can be found in many area cemeteries.

A celebrated Union general. Nathaniel Lyon, was the namesake for Lyon County. A fervent abolitionist, Lyon became one of the Union’s first heroes by preventing a St. Louis, Missouri arsenal from falling into Confederate hands after the war broke out in 1861.

Ripple-effects from the Civil War also affected the outbreak of the 1862 U.S.-Dakota War that swept across Minnesota in August and September of 1862.

So it is fitting that Wheels Across the



Gen. Nathaniel Lyon, for whom Lyon County was named, lost his life in the battle of Wilson’s Creek in Southwest Missouri, on August 10, 1861. He was the first Union general to die in a Civil War battle.

Prairie will host a Civil War Round Table, Saturday, June 20. Two noted Civil War historians will speak during an 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. program.

Stephen Osman will discuss the role played by the Minnesota Third Regiment at the decisive battle of Wood Lake of September, 1862. The defeat of Dakota Indian forces led by Little Crow at Wood Lake resulted in the end of hostilities

in the U.S. Dakota War, and the subsequent release of white captives near present-day Granite Falls.

Osman, a St. Olaf College graduate, was a long-time program director at Historic Fort Snelling in St. Paul.

Fitzharris, author of “The Hardest Lot of Men: The Third Minnesota Infantry in the Civil War,” will discuss the Third Regiment’s service near Lake Shetek in the aftermath of the 1862 conflict.

Round Table participants will then participate in a sold-out bus tour of 1862 Dakota Conflict sites near Shetek, that will be led by Jesse James.

There is no charge for attending the 11 a.m. Round Table, although an \$8 admission to the Wheels will be in effect.

Wheels Across the Prairie buildings and exhibits will open at 9 a.m. on June 20. For more information, call 507-626-1949.

Become a member! Or renew for 2026.

LEVELS OF MEMBERSHIP (Dues annually on Jan. 1)

- _____ Individual - \$30
- _____ Business \$100
- _____ Family - \$50
- _____ Other Donation \$ _____

Your financial support helps the Wheels Across the Prairie continue our mission of preserving and sharing Tracy’s heritage!

RETURN TO:

WHEELS ACROSS THE PRAIRIE HERITAGE CENTER
PO BOX 1091 - TRACY MN 56175

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

email: _____

Amy Foster brings WG experience to Tracy

Amy Foster is no stranger to the business of running a museum in a small town.

Wheels Across the Prairie's new board president worked at the Wilder Museum in Walnut Grove from 1999 to 2023, ending her tenure as the Wilder Museum's executive director.

The Wilder center is a mecca for Laura Ingalls-Wilder fans, thanks to books like "On the Banks of Plum Creek" and the 1970s TV series, "Little House on the Prairie." Wheels Across the Prairie has a strong focus on railroad, farm and educational heritages. However, Foster notes that the Walnut Grove and Tracy museums are similar in that they cater to people who appreciate grass-roots history, and both heavily rely on local support.



Always open to new ideas in operating a museum, Foster took a field trip with other board members to visit the Stevens County Historical Society museum in Morris this winter.

The Wheels president is upbeat when talking about the coming year.

Several Wheels Across the Prairie projects this year will be highly visible. Landscaping enhancements "will be huge,"

she notes. Getting the museum's children's railroad set-up and running again, the possible construction of an automotive display building, interior finish work on the section foreman's house and Speeder Shed, and the placement of new benches will-all be eye-catching.

But much work is also being done behind-the-scenes, she points out.

Over the winter, Wheels bylaws were updated, and job descriptions reviewed. At the board's April meeting, a consultant gave an update on Wheels' web-site. Ideas were discussed for better utilizing social media to tell the Wheels story.

In addition, Foster wants to work on continually improving Wheels displays so that they

"tell more of a story," and more consistently rotate items in and out of exhibits.

"Sometimes, you need to put things into storage to rest. You don't want a dress on display for 20 years."

Other objectives for the coming year, include "sharpening up our policy for accepting donations and what we keep in our collections." Because of limits on storage space, Foster believes the heritage center must reduce the number of duplicative items in its archives.

She also wants to continue efforts to complete a digital inventory of Wheels collections with the software PastPerfect.

Foster succeeds Dorothy Radermacher, who served as board president in 2025.



Volunteer honored

Ron Boje has been honored on two occasions recently for his volunteer work at Wheels Across the Prairie. The first came at the Tracy Chamber of Commerce's annual banquet in February, when he was recognized as a "volunteer of the year" (above). This spring, he was selected as a Minnesota Alliance of Local History Museums award recipient. The rural Garvin farmer regularly mows Wheels Across the Prairie's expansive grassy areas, and is often called upon for general fix-up jobs. Boje is known for his "old time" demonstrations in the museum's blacksmith shop, and grinding corn and wheat.



Flags & flowers

Strolling around Wheels Across the Prairie isn't exactly like a "walk in the park." It might be better. Flag-lined pathways along vintage buildings, with colorful blossoms marking the way, make the heritage center a pleasant place to visit, regardless of the accompanying history.



**Wheels Across the Prairie
Heritage Center**
PO Box 1091 • 3297 Hwy 14
Tracy, Minnesota 56175
www.wheelsacrosstheprairie.org

'Garage' will display Auto-bug, model cars

Plans are gearing up for a new automotive-related exhibit building at Wheels Across the Prairie.

A Wheels benefactor, John Bendixon, has announced his intention to finance construction of a 20x30-foot display building that will resemble a garage on the exterior. Interior displays will include the Wheels' restored 1904 Auto-Bug, and a collection of scale-model classic cars. A host of other auto-related items — ranging from Model-T wrenches and decades-old license plates to early 20th century gas pumps and historic downtown Tracy's only traffic light—will also be displayed.

Space between Wheels' Main Barn and the Helmberger-Johnston building is proposed as the building's location.

The Wheels board has accepted Bendixon's offer to finance



A collection of precision-made models of vintage cars will be displayed in the proposed auto building.

the building, and is working with him on the plans.

Jon Wendorff, Wheels executive director, says that the heritage center has many auto-related items that could be better displayed in a designated automotive building. He thanks Mr. Bendixon for his generosity.

The new exhibit building, which will be air-conditioned and heated, could be built as early as this summer, Wendorff said.

Native plantings

Efforts are underway to introduce native grasses and flowers into selected areas of Wheels Across the Prairie grounds. Initial plantings took place last fall, near the Main Barn and around a septic-tank. Additional plantings are set along a walkway near the Amiret Post Office and a sloped area behind the country school. The native plantings will give visitors a colorful sampling of what the region's tall-grass prairie was like at the time of its late 19th-century settlement.

