



# GENERATIONS OF TRADITION

Eastern Nebraska high school football

STORY BY CHRISTOPHER AMUNDSON, ALAN J. BARTELS & JESSICA BOSCHEN

**S**SOME HAVE WON BIG. Others have suffered stinging defeats. Win or lose, the boys always play hard. When stadium lights and scoreboards light the night, the faithful show up to cheer on their hometown football teams in a strong Nebraska tradition.

## Howells-Dodge JAGUARS, CLASS D1 8-MAN

Locals were already talking football on a game day Friday morning at the Main Express convenience store in Howells. High school football began for Howells in the 1940s, and with the exception of a few years when the sport was discontinued due to a rash of broken legs, it has been a tradition here since.

Tradition upended when the neighboring communities of Howells and Dodge merged their sports teams in 2011, and then their schools the following year. With only six miles separating the communities and declining enrollment at both, consolidation made financial sense.

Combined, their football teams made the playoffs 24 times. Howells is still tied with two other schools for the most Nebraska high school football championships at nine, and Dodge brought six

historic titles of its own to the merger.

Howells had a good team, and Dodge had a good team, too, said Howells area farmer Jim Sindler. "We combined them and we got the best of both worlds."

Howells resident Norbert Langhorst remembers when the first Howells team took to the field some seven decades ago. He also remembers Howells and Dodge becoming sports rivals. "We had a running back who was better in the mud than on dry ground," Langhorst said.



The Humphrey St. Francis Flyers soared over the Wynot Blue Devils, 24-20, early in their 2015 season. Win or lose the community of Humphrey comes together for a traditional food and friendship-filled afterparty.

Christopher Amundson (both)



Christopher Amundson

Seward High School's cheerleading squad is bolstered by dozens of elementary school students when their Bluejays take to the field.

"One year it rained before the game, but we still got accused of watering down the field."

Decades later, Dodge wouldn't give up its high school to its sports rival without a fight. School board members were recalled. Then there was a lawsuit, fights and vandalism. Most of all, there were hurt feelings. The students pulled the communities together.

"I think some of the older folks might still harbor bad feelings about it," Sindler said. "The kids have gotten along fine since day one."

At Eat Restaurant in Dodge, formerly the Dodge State Bank, customer Cristi Krupka is banking on a win. She is on lunch break with co-workers from Smeal Fire Apparatus of nearby Snyder, but her mind is on tonight's game. "Almost everyone around here goes to the game. My daughter and I will go to every game this year. The kids who don't play sports, and

families without school-aged children, will go to the game, too."

At The Still bar in Howells, April Verba tends to the archive of Howells sports history hanging above the long shuffleboard table. One of the most treasured items is a pigskin signed by the players of the last Howells Bobcat football team before consolidation. "People here don't have a choice," Verba said. "The towns have to work together. They have to support the kids, and they do. We're proud of the past, hopeful for the future, and I hope we win tonight."

Anna Hays moved to Howells from Omaha in 2012 so her son, Gavin, could attend a small school. "When we moved here, he didn't know how to play football. The coach did a lot of extra one-on-one work with him," Hays said. "I was in tears last night when Gavin told me he'd be starting tomorrow. He worked hard to make it."

Coach Michael Speirs' success with the

Howells Bobcats – and now with the consolidated Howells-Dodge Jaguars team – has made him a target of sorts. "Several other schools have tried to steal him away," said Myra Langhorst, who works for Hays at the *Howells Journal*.

She adds, "He is a very superstitious man." When someone suggested that someone besides twin veterans Norbert and Robert Langhorst raise the flag before the game, Speirs wouldn't have it. The Langhorsts have been raising and lowering the Stars and Stripes for 10 years, and Speirs sees no reason to do anything differently.

Another tradition is the weekly devouring of a Twinkie cake made by one player's mother. It always happens after practice the day before a game; and so that the team isn't jinxed, the recipe must be followed exactly.

Before retiring, Leola Rhode taught school for 47 years, some of it at Howells, some of it at Dodge. Her son played



Leesa K. Bartu

Exeter-Milligan's homecoming pep rally is a game in itself. Below, only starters, like Justin Bazata, get to wear "black eye" at Howells-Dodge.

football when Dodge grew to be a powerhouse. She recalls a tradition of Dodge residents who were so well known for following the team to away games that the community ground to a halt before kickoff. "They'd put out this sign that said, 'Last one out, please turn out the lights,'" Rhode said.

Old habits, tradition and pride die hard. On the outskirts of Dodge today, a sign proudly proclaiming the community as the home of the Pirates still appears freshly painted. So does the green-and-white Bobcats sign six miles to the west. As the pep rally drains and smoke rolls off the grill at the Booster Club tailgate party where volunteers will serve 600 hamburgers, a dozen fans pour into their skybox overlooking the football field.

The weekly raffle for the skybox is a new tradition of the Howells-Dodge era. The lucky winners get pizza and pop delivered to the heated and air conditioned room at halftime, and Rosemary Vering, her husband, Reynold, and their friends had the best seats in the house. The couple hasn't missed a home game in the 53 years they've been married.

"Look at this hometown crowd, and by that I mean Howells and Dodge," Rosemary said. "No one can hear us in here but we're yelling and cheering for our hometown team anyway. Just like we always have."



Alan J. Bartels

## Pierce High School BLUEJAYS, CLASS D2 8-MAN

When Katie Barg moved to Pierce as a sophomore in high school, she learned that high school football is a big deal in Pierce. How big is it?

"If we made it to the playoffs and a game was scheduled for Halloween, trick or treating for Pierce children was moved to another night so everyone could go to the game," Barg said. "Then there are the miles of handmade signs put out along the highway, the fire truck escorts with sirens blaring when the team comes home, and the

parade of people lined up along the street thanking the team for their effort and sacrifice. I'd compare it to Nebraska's love for the Huskers. Those of us from Pierce are just as proud of our home team."

For many on the team's roster, playing on the high school gridiron is a matter of family tradition.

"A lot of guys on the team, their dads played football here a long time ago," said senior Brendon McCrady, who plays offensive guard and defensive tackle for the Bluejays. "It's a legacy thing."

Lucas Gnat is a seventh grader playing for Pierce's junior high team. His brother, Josh, is a varsity wide receiver and defensive back. "It's fun. We don't always get along," said the younger Gnat, which earned him a shove from his bigger, taller, stronger brother. "I look up to him though for what he's done on the field."

The siblings were with other players wolfing down pizzas and pasta at the traditional night-before-the-game team dinner. The meal is often served at the school. When we visited, the meal was in the large banquet room in the back of Taylor's Bar & Grill.

"We've had a good team for years. Friday night games really bring a buzz to Pierce," said owner Jamie Taylor. "Football is small-town excitement at its best. Some towns don't have much going on, so a lot of town pride comes from the town team. Football brings the whole community together."

Because everybody leaves town, Taylor's closes down when Pierce goes to state. But when the game is over and people are headed home, they call ahead to let Taylor know the convoy is on the road. "Win or lose, the whole town just takes over the place," Taylor said.

Stuffed to the gills, the Gnat brothers head home for homework and rest. "I enjoy football," Josh Gnat said. "I've made friends on other teams. Game time is go time, so when the game starts those friends are sort of like my enemies for two hours. After the game, we're patting each other on the back and we're buddies again."

With wins and losses come lifelong memories. For juniors Parker Baumann and Junior Aguilar, one of their most memorable games was during their freshman year against rival Norfolk Catholic. "It was back and forth all night," Baumann said. "It



Alan J. Bartels



Jessica Boschen

Angela Sedlacek and Renee Peters, both of Hadar, cheer as their Pierce Bluejays approach the goal line. Above, the Waverly Junior Vikings watch from the sidelines.

came down to a last-second field goal."

"They missed it and we won," Aguilar said. "That was the first time I really felt in me what is so special about football."

## Aquinas High School MONARCHS CLASS C2, 11-MAN

At the intersection of Nebraska highways 15 and 64, an eye-catching billboard announces that there's only one David City. While that may be true, this hard-working community has two high schools and two high school football teams. Community support is strong for both teams, and when it comes to supporting Aquinas Catholic High School, community extends

beyond city limits. Families from 13 surrounding parishes send their children here for Christ-centered learning. They've formed a dominating football dynasty in the process.

While the Aquinas school bus unloads students in Bellwood at the end of the school day, Deb Buell is preparing for the kickoff of the dinner rush downtown at the First and Ten Sports Bar. Buell's daughter played volleyball at David City Public High School. Her son wrestled across town at Aquinas.

"This is mostly a Husker place, but it really fills up on Friday nights after local high school games," Buell said while sling-ing a French dip special down the oak bar. "I'm an equal fan of both football teams, but I root for Aquinas when it comes to



Aaron Beckman

### Our Eastern Nebraska Communities

We visited these seven teams to discover the culture of high school football in Eastern Nebraska.

- Pierce
- Dodge
- Humphrey
- Howells
- David City
- Seward
- Exeter
- Waverly
- Milligan

wrestling. Some kids come 30 miles or more to go to school at Aquinas. They come from here in Bellwood, Abie, Brainard, Shelby and Rising City, and there's plenty of corn-fed farm kids, too. Around here, our community stretches countywide."

In David City, a yardful of signs tells a lot about who lives there. Tim and Diane Kozisek are football fans judging by the sign reading "House Divided," which refers to her love of the Green Bay Packers and his respect for the Denver Broncos ("I'm

the smart one," Tim told us when Diane was out of earshot), but the sign could just as well be a shout-out to their high school alma maters.

While his future wife went to school at David City Public, Kozisek attended Aquinas and watched all of the games. "She has family playing for Aquinas, so we're both fans of that team now," Kozisek said. "I'd say the town is split about 50/50. The two teams haven't played each other in a few years, so there's really no rivalry."

That may change soon. Aquinas plans to move up to C1 in 2016, putting it in the same class as the public school.

"I hate to see us in the same class – then the rivalry is back," said John Hein, while playing cards with friends at the Northside Cafe. His son, Wiley, is a freshman football player at David City Public.

"Will he be a superstar? We'll wait and see. I'm proud that he gets to play. They wanted me to play, but I was a farm kid and had too much to do," Hein said.

Jerome Vaura chimes in from across the table. "My dad told me that there would be no basketball and no football, and that if I felt like running track I could instead run home to the farm and get to work," Vaura said. "We're blessed with plenty of

strong, athletic kids here who work hard on the field and off.”

John Kirby spent plenty of time on the football field. He played high school football for St. Mary before the school was renamed Aquinas. He went on to play for the Cornhuskers and was a 1960 Shrine Bowl captain. After playing professional football for the Minnesota Vikings and the New York Giants, Kirby moved back to David City and coached at Aquinas.

“High school football is important to David City and every town in the state,” Kirby said. “Playing sports builds character, and getting together for games is the social structure of our communities. It helps them to meld and weld.”

Both teams play their games on the same city-owned Memorial Field, and at every contest, fans from both sides are on the same side, literally. With bleachers along the north rim of the stadium only, visiting and home fans mingle.

“Aquinas usually got the best of us,” said Anthony Hruska, a pharmacist at David City Discount Pharmacy and a 2005 graduate of David City Public High School. “We only lost to them by 2 points my sophomore year. That was about as close as we got. They beat us pretty bad my senior year.”

What is Hruska’s prescription for success? “We’re proud to have two schools here,” Hruska said. “Win or lose, and no matter if we play each other or not, it’s about supporting David City youth. That is who will keep this community going. Rivalry or not, David City is the winner.”

## Exeter-Milligan High School TIMBERWOLVES CLASS D2, 8-MAN

Kelly Baller’s 15 minutes of fame came while teaming up with country singer Lee Brice in a Super Bowl halftime commercial last February. The advertisement for Pepsi showed the duo in Baller’s downtown Milligan business: Kelly’s House of Meats.

Baller, a Creighton native, is no hopeful actor. He’s happier with his unscripted meat-cutting job and everyday claims to fame including his hot dogs, ring bologna and the beef he ages for 14 days.



Christopher Amundson

Three of Baller’s four beefy sons suited up for the local Exeter-Milligan football team. “When it’s game night, then the game is the place to be,” Baller said. “We joke that there’s nothing else to do around here on a Friday night, but the truth is that Exeter and Milligan both show up to support all of our sports teams. Our boys around here play their hearts out. Always have.”

The Evening with Friends restaurant fills with friends and the families of players on home game afternoons. Among them is Tammy Rischling. “Some moms are scared their kids will get hurt while playing football,” Rischling said. “I was never like that. I loved watching my sons play. It made me sad when they graduated and didn’t play football anymore.” Rischling and her husband, Jan, go to most of the games, carpooling with friends and getting there via the back roads.

While the games are played in Milligan, the high school is in Exeter, which is a 13-mile trip on gravel roads and where

Coach Dean Filipi holds daily football practices on Scott Field, former home of the Exeter Eagles. Filipi was a running back and a linebacker for Milligan. “Playing football was just something all the boys did,” Filipi said. “You just went out. Exeter was the same way.”

Filipi coached the Milligan team for 16 years before the consolidation, and he has coached the combined team for just as long. In 32 years of coaching, one thing has remained consistent for Filipi. “Every year I’m blown away by how the kids come together,” Filipi said. “They work hard and are unselfish members of the team. That’s what makes a season successful to me.”

At Generations Bank in Exeter, Sharla Dinneen always has time to talk about football. She grew up at Dorchester – a football rival to Exeter in those days – but is a dedicated Exeter-Milligan fan today. Her son, Jack, No. 96, is a senior this year. Playing football here is a family tradition. Dinneen’s husband and Jack’s father, Joe,



Jaelynn Wright, age 3, cheers on the Seward High Bluejays. Her mother, Katie Wright, coaches Seward’s cheerleading squad. At right, Friday night lights shine over Exeter-Milligan’s field in Milligan.

Aaron Beckman

played high school football for Exeter.

“Football brings everyone together,” Dinneen said. “I get so nervous. I just pace the sidelines all night. I don’t want anyone hurt, but it’s whether we’ll win that gets me excited,” Dinneen said. “I just love Friday night lights. The atmosphere is so exciting.”

## Waverly High School VIKINGS, CLASS B 11-MAN

The scoreboard shows more than an hour remaining before kickoff when friends, families and students begin crowding the high school football field in Waverly.

Laden with coolers, casseroles and cakes, baked beans, salads and other covered dishes, these fans kick off the game long before players take to the field. The tailgating tradition began last year. When there’s not a home game on the schedule,

## ‘A lot of town pride comes from the town team. Football brings the whole community together.’

– Jamie Taylor

spirited fans huddle in Waverly before taking their show of hometown support on the road, along with their large tents, fun foods, chants and smiling faces.

The tailgate parties are even larger at home where rituals old and new are part of the tradition. As seconds tick off toward game time, cheerleaders line up at the north end of the field near an old school bell. Two lines of fans form a tunnel with a few stretching a banner as the school marching band plays. Enveloped in billowing white smoke, the Waverly Vikings thunder past the fans, burst through the banner and take the field. Perpetuating the tradition and the future of the team, a batch of scrappy Junior Vikings follows.

In this new tradition, the younger boys

join the high school team in the locker room, run out onto the field with them and stand on the sidelines during the game. They’re introduced as stars to the cheering crowd at half time. This is Coach Tim Williams’ not-so-secret play for fostering hometown pride in the sport and building the future of his team. The community backs him up.

“The community is the foundation to our program,” Williams said. “They are there to support the school. Football is starting to become a big deal, and Waverly really wants their athletic teams to be competitive. Our kids fight really hard to be just that.”

In his short tenure as Waverly’s coach, one game sticks out for Williams. “It was our game versus Crete last year,” Williams

## Seward football inspired her to want to be an athletic trainer. She now volunteers with the team.

said. “Up to that point the kids were struggling to understand the system I brought to them. That was the game they started to figure out what I want. We lost that game, but it was the big moment when they realized that we could be successful.”

While the teams battle, tailgaters swap food and drink and generously hand off goodies to visitors. Though anchored in the Metro just 15 minutes from Lincoln, the feel of community surrounding the football field in Waverly could be compared to that of a smaller town where the weekly football game is the social event of the week.

“I’m not a small-town girl, so this tight-knit community atmosphere was weird for me at first,” said a Lincoln mother of one of the Waverly players. “It’s been great for my kids and for the community as a whole.”

As impending victory approaches, fans begin lining up near the bell again. The bell dates to 1970, and today’s players remember running past it as young children. The team shakes hands with their defeated opponents, huddles up, then storms back

to the bell where the tradition of a victory ring sounds out across Waverly once more.

Friends and family share hugs, high fives and congratulations with their players. If someone kept stats on the Waverly fans, it would show them spending more time on the field than their team. They’re here before the game. They’re crowding the sideline during. They linger under the lights after.

“Everyone hangs out for a while following the games,” said high school senior Justin Lawrence. “We have a great community behind us. We couldn’t ask for anything better.”

### Seward High School BLUEJAYS CLASS B, 11-MAN

Friday night football in Seward is no average small-town event. Thanks to a close relationship between Seward High School and Concordia University, the



David City Aquinas' faithful fans join in on Coach Ron Mimick's post-game speech. Below, 50 cans of spray paint transformed Jerid and Tracy Starkel's 12-passenger Bluejay bus from camouflage to gold and baby blue.

Erik Johnson



Alan J. Bartels

Bluejays and their fans take to the field in a college stadium complete with a jumbo video scoreboard.

In the moments leading up to the big game with rival Crete Cardinals, the giant video screen and stadium loudspeakers project images and audio of each of Seward's starting lineup players into the crowd. The boys become men in the bigger-than-life presentation in Concordia's Bulldog stadium.

Fans who gathered early for a barbecue in the university parking lot stream into the stadium and buy balloons from cheerleaders Arden George and Courtney Rathjen: a dollar each for blue or gold. In Husker stadium fashion, the balloons will launch into the night sky when the Bluejays score their first touchdown. Time Warner Cable is here adding to the hoopla, too, with a film crew to record and broadcast the game to households in the Nebraska State Activities Association's game of the week.

Seward High students fill a front-and-center section of the stadium stands. They

tote cardboard signs and are dressed not in the school colors of gold and blue, but in black. In a local tradition, the students send out messages through social media the night before the game to announce the student section's clothing color. This game would be “black out,” according to the messages. The excitement and energy for this high school game is contagious, and fueled by the rowdy and unified student section.

Down on the AstroTurf field, Raven Luth readies medical supplies and water by the sideline. Born and raised in Seward, Luth was ensconced in Seward High football through her upbringing. Her family's close friend Greg Welch coached the Bluejays from 1993 to 2012. Her older brother, Justin Luth, was a stand-out running back in 1999, and Justin's son, Logan Craig, No. 14, is suiting up tonight as a wide receiver and defensive back.

Luth glows when she speaks about Seward High and its football program. “I

was surrounded by Seward football my entire life,” she said. As the girl in a family of men, she helped how she could by tending to medical and training needs of the players. Luth now is studying exercise science at college.

Seward football inspired her to want to be an athletic trainer. She now volunteers with the team when she is not taking college classes. No surprise, if all goes as planned, she'll be back here at Seward High for a job after school.

Seward High School is a teacher magnet – especially for teachers who graduate from Concordia University. Football Coach Jamie Opfer graduated from Concordia and has earned the respect of the community and the students with his direction of the program. Among his fans is teacher Katie Wright, also a Concordia grad.

On football Friday nights, Wright can be found on the track between the football players and the fans as coach of the cheerleading squad. Sometimes as many

## Meet the MASCOTS



WAVERLY



HUMPHREY ST. FRANCIS



SEWARD



DAVID CITY AQUINAS



PIERCE



EXETER-MILLIGAN



HOWELLS-DODGE

# Practice Makes Perfect NOTEWORTHY CHAMPIONS

**GREAT MEMORIES ARE** made from great struggles, great effort and great wins. In high school football, Nebraska has scored more than a few.

Creighton Prep and Omaha Central each had 4-0 records when they met in 1960. Nearly 15,000 fans cheered as disciplined defenses battled skilled offenses. When a Central player snatched a dropped ball and ran it into the end zone, referees ruled it an illegal forward lateral, not a fumble. The game ended a scoreless tie. That call is still debated today.

When Cory Eikmeier ended his high school football career at Dodge in 1997 he'd set many records, including one for the most touchdowns in a season, 68. Yards gained by Eikmeier totaled nearly 5 miles.

Falls City Sacred Heart's football team was followed nationally, week by week, as it built a winning streak totaling 87 games. It ended in 1995.

One snap at a time, memories are still being made on Nebraska high school football fields.



Running back Noah Pelan runs in a touchdown for David City Aquinas Catholic High School.

Erik Johnson

**Your Locally Owned  
Public Power Provider**

**CUSTER**  
PUBLIC POWER DISTRICT  
Empowering Progress

[www.CusterPower.com](http://www.CusterPower.com)

**Celebrating  
Over 70 Years of Service  
in Central Nebraska**

East Highway 2 Broken Bow, NE 68822  
308-872-2451 888-749-2453

f t YouTube

as 80 children from the elementary school join 17 high school girls under her tutelage, plus her own 3-year-old Jaelynn, who suits up in a cheer skirt and blue and gold pom-poms. Wright also keeps a watchful eye on her 9-year-old son, Jacob.

"I call him a water boy, but he says, 'Mom, I'm a student manager,'" she said.

During football season, Jacob finishes school and rides his bike to the high school to help the coaches load up gear for practice. He then heads to the practice field at 5:30 p.m., carries equipment and hands out footballs for drills. By the time he gets home at 6 p.m., most of his friends have been playing for three hours. Jacob eats supper and gets going on his chores and homework for the night.

Wright said Jacob lives for Seward football, and especially helping the team through his responsibilities at practice and especially at games. A few weeks earlier, Jacob fell short on completing his chores at home, so Wright and her

husband, Roy, also a teacher, punished Jacob by making him stay home from the game. "You would have thought we lopped off his right arm," Wright said. But what's more, when Jacob did return to practice the next week, the coaches and a team trainer supported Jacob's parents by telling Jacob they need him, that he is important and that he must do his chores at home.

For a young mother trying to raise kids in this crazy world, those were golden words of joy.

"The village has arrived," she said. "We have community around our own kids."

## Humphrey St. Francis School FLYERS CLASS D2, 8-MAN

Pork roast for sandwiches, baked beans and potatoes simmered as Pat and Kelly Wemhoff cleaned out their machine shed

in preparation for Humphrey St. Francis' game on Friday night. The game wasn't going to be held in the shed on their hog farm east of town, but they would be hosting the players, parents and any friends of Humphrey St. Francis who cared to join them after the game.

At 5:55 p.m. that night, bare-chested teenage boys stood shoulder to shoulder in the locker room of Humphrey St. Francis High School. Lights dimmed and the coaches cued a highlight reel of last week's game projected on the cinder block wall. Heavy metal music blared "... bang a dang diggy diggy said the boogy said up jump the boogy ...". The film ended, the boys filed outside and started to suit up under the steeple of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church.

They cinched up their cleats and slipped into their athletic shirts. For each boy on the team, one much younger helper came along and handed him his upper-body pads, followed by his jersey. The young helpers held the helmets before the players

and waited for a signal to hand them up.

As one young helper stood watching his player tuck shoulder pads into his jersey, he looked down into the helmet and broke the silence by asking, "Do you like to wear your new helmet?"

The helper then slipped it on his own much smaller head and looked up for approval.

No response was given, except the positive affirmation of the player reaching down, removing the helmet and slipping it snugly onto his own head. He then turned and started walking resolutely with the rest of his team.

The Flyers began an eight-block march toward their new football field that they share with Humphrey Public Schools. Their cleats on concrete streets echoed the sound of a battalion marching through residential neighborhoods of this Platte County community.

Their march turned to a sprint as they neared the gates of the field. They let out

a prolonged hoot and holler while encircling their opponents stretching on the east half of the home field.

Throughout the night, the two teams battled – giving points, taking points, falling back and pushing ahead. Crowds cheered and announcers announced. When injuries came, the boys knelt silently with heads down and helmets in hands. The Flyers who stood on the sidelines remained shoulder to shoulder, never breaking attention to the game or to each other.

With a gruffness in their voices 30 years beyond their ages, they shouted: “Here we go blue, here we go boys, here we go blue ...”

When the fourth-quarter buzzer signaled the end of the game, each of the St. Francis players, young helpers and coaches assembled in a semi-circle near the 20-yard line. All took a knee and bowed heads while Coach Eric Kessler prayed over them, thanking God for the game, the day and for safety.

After the game, the players, parents and helpers drove through the dark a few miles south on Highway 81 then east on gravel roads to the Wemhoff farm where the warm food was waiting. Doris explained their tradition of senior mothers feeding the players after every game – sometimes in machine sheds, sometimes in barns, sometimes at the school cafeteria – but always hot, home-cooked meals. Sometimes they even feed the opposing teams.

“When we feed the boys, the parents come and we enjoy each other,” she said. “That’s how it is. We stick together.”

Dan Engel talked about “team unity” that transfers into unity of the community, even crossing the boundary of school colors in this town with both parochial and public systems. The same unity existed in Humphrey when he played ball here. He moved away and returned in adulthood to raise his family.

To Engel, the message of football in Humphrey is this: “Take ownership in what you do, win or lose. There are obstacles in life you overcome. Don’t be negative; be positive. If there is an obstacle, there are ways to overcome it, whether with yourself, a spouse or a friend. Excel and enjoy everyone around you, friends and family.”

The football players, friends and young fans feasted on the home-cooked meal made with love by the senior mothers. After the food was gone and bellies were satisfied, a funny thing happened – they stuck around. They visited, they laughed and they shared.

The parents and friends remained inside the machine shed, with farm equipment all around. The Flyers – the team – drifted outside and settled around a bonfire where they continued to laugh, swap stories and recount tales of the game they share together. ♡

**EXTRA POINT WEB SPECIAL** Win big by visiting NebraskaLife.com for more photos of Eastern Nebraska high school football.

Seward High’s players, cheerleaders and fans get the college football stadium experience thanks to Concordia University sharing its facilities.

Christopher Amundson



*Find Your Home Among the Pines*

Shirley Sellman  
Realtor

Mike Crawford  
Owner/Broker

Wayman Wild  
Assoc. Broker

Looking for prime hunting grounds, recreational property, ranch land or a new place to call home? We want to help you achieve your dream in the Pine Ridge area of northwest Nebraska. Contact us today at **308-432-8976** or [sandstonerealestate.net](http://sandstonerealestate.net) to set up a visit.

**SANDSTONE**  
**REAL ESTATE, CHADRON, LLC**

Home • Commercial • Farm/Ranch 623 W. 3rd St • Chadron, NE

1915-2015  
**A CENTURY OF LIGHTS**  
*Minden, Nebraska*

Events scheduled Thanksgiving weekend through New Year's Eve. Ice Skating Rink open Nov. 27-Dec. 12  
[MindenNE.org](http://MindenNE.org) ■ 308.832.1811

Visit Nebraska. Visit Nice!  
 100 YEARS OF GLEAM IN 2015

Getting away doesn't have to mean going *far away*.

Let the naturally-inspiring surroundings of the all-new Lied Lodge & Conference Center at Arbor Day Farm welcome you — for business, family fun, or a memorable weekend with those you love.

With an award-winning restaurant, indoor pool, a 50-foot tree-house to explore, and a historic mansion to tour, now's the time to rediscover what you love in Nebraska City, Nebraska.

**LIED LODGE & CONFERENCE CENTER**  
**Arbor Day Farm**

Nebraska City, Nebraska | 800-546-5433 | [arbordayfarm.org](http://arbordayfarm.org)

**Don't Miss the Eagles of Lake McConaughy**

**One of the Best Birding Spots in the U.S.**

Discover bird diversity with over 360 species in the area!  
 Heated eagle viewing facility below Kingsley Dam.  
 Open weekends, Jan.2-early March

[ilovelakemac.com](http://ilovelakemac.com) • [cnppid.com](http://cnppid.com)

800-658-4390  
 I-80 Exit 126, OGALLALA, NE

**KEITH COUNTY VISITORS COMMITTEE**

Photo by Joel Sartore, Freelance photographer for National Geographic Magazine, joelsartore.com