

Morrill community pulls together on KAN STEP

Morrill, Kansas is a small town located in northwestern Brown County just a few miles south of the Kansas-Nebraska state line. In the late summer and fall, the town pops up along the black-top highway out of rolling hills covered with tall corn. The town's water system serves 130 taps. It has a gas station, an auto repair shop, an elevator, welding shop and auto body repair shop. Organizations, such as the Chamber of Commerce, 4-H and Fire Department put on fish fries, breakfasts and other fund raising events. The Annual Morrill Days celebration draws big crowds. Presently, fire equipment is housed in two small buildings. The existing community building



Shane Holthaus
KAN STEP Tech

is even less adequate as it is an old one-room schoolhouse that was moved into town. But the community has needs and community members have the spirit to accomplish what it takes to meet them. That spirit of volunteerism is

helping demonstrate their capacity to construct a new combination fire station and community center through the KAN STEP program. The amount of the KAN STEP grant awarded to Morrill for the building: \$399,665.

Like many small Kansas towns, a review of Morrill's history shows that the town once had a blacksmith's shop, grocery store, livery stable, locker plant, a

lumberyard and a "blue plate special" café. Morrill, again like many other small towns in Kansas used to be booming with business. Nearly all had grade and high

towns still have safety and social needs. That's one of the reasons that the KAN STEP program has been so embraced by communities and water systems across the state.

Photos courtesy of Harland Schuster, Morrill KAN STEP volunteer



This project sign stands appropriately facing the street for all to see. The sign was created by Kansas Rural Water with KAN STEP volunteer Greg Duryea and KRWA Tech donating the materials and the construction of the sign.



Workers begin to stand the trusses on September 5. A severe wind storm made this part of the project double work as the previous set of trusses were blown down. Luckily, workers were just finishing; no one was injured.

schools with lots of other activities. Today, many of these towns have fewer people, in large measure due to consolidation in agriculture and agri-business, thus requiring fewer workers and businesses for support. But these

The program provides resources for local people who are willing to invest their hard work and talents to build "sweat equity" and acquire facilities they otherwise would not have. Kansas Rural Water Association is pleased to work in conjunction with the Kansas Department of Commerce and as partners with the agency and local community members in their efforts to improve water systems and install new local facilities.

I've spent many hours working with the volunteers in Morrill on many different phases of the project. I enjoy listening to the townspeople discuss the history and their goals for the future. The project at Morrill is presently the largest KAN STEP project to date. The volunteers have done a wonderful job so far – and there's a long ways to go. The building will be a tremendous addition to the community; it will see almost



Above: Volunteers Marty Herbster and David Simpson check placement of this end truss before nailing into place.

Right: The magnitude of the Morrill Fire Station/Community Building is evident in this photo as workers lift trusses on the Fire Station section.

daily use. Senior citizens plan to continue their daily coffee hour. Photos of Morrill High School graduates will be displayed in the new building.

Morrill's present fire station has limited space and is unable to



house the city's fire equipment. As mentioned earlier, trucks are stored in two different buildings in different parts of town. In the one building, there's only three inches of clearance on the side mirrors. The fire department has five different trucks: a 54' Chevy with a 750 gallon tank and a 250 gallon per minute pump; a 65' Chevy city pump truck with a 500 gallon tank and a 500 gallon per minute pump; a 70' International with a 750 gallon per minute pump; a 76' Chevy with a 2600 gallon tank; and a 78 Chevy with a 1200 gallon tank and a 250 gallon per minute pump. These trucks will fit nicely into one building that has four doors and they will still have room for expansion. Fire Chief Charles Gruber says that the department would like to get a four-wheel drive brush truck for field fires. The section housing fire equipment will be 64 feet x 71 feet. Incidentally, while Charles Gruber is experienced on the fire department, readers might also appreciate that he is a long



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Morrill community . . .

time member of the board of directors of Brown County RWD 1 and served as Chairman when the District purchased its loan from the Farmers Home Administration in 1988. "Charlie"

Equally important to the new fire station, the Morrill KAN STEP project includes a new community center measuring 50 x 90 feet. It will have a nice kitchen, restrooms and separate small

would have an estimated retail cost of \$765,046. This includes volunteer labor worth \$362,381, a land donation by the city in the amount of \$3,000 and the KAN STEP grant of \$399,665.



is a local farmer who has many neighbors helping construct the new facility.

meeting room that will allow the two organizations to use the facility at the same time. Overall, the project is 9,044 sq. feet and

Above: Morrill volunteers work in the early morning hours on July 9 to finish a pour on the floor of the fire station section.

Above Left: A crew of Morrill volunteers raises the building north wall section on August 6.

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Dan Hall with BG Consultants in Manhattan is the architect. Donna Crawford of Governmental Assistance Services, Lawrence, is providing Grant administration. The volunteer "sparkplugs" for the project are Charlie Gruber, KRWA's staff member Greg Duryea, Bob Baumgartner, Dan Gruber, Bob Herbster and Andrew Baumgartner. Kansas Rural Water Association provides inspection services and technical assistance to the volunteers on KAN STEP projects.

The footings were started in May with walls following in April. This job site took on quite a bit of rain this year and proved to be a challenge at times. The concrete walls for the community center building were finished in April and then volunteers moved right on to the fire station walls. With the

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community center walls finished, the plumbing could begin. Lots of work had to be done before floors could be poured. They were poured and finished in July and framing on the community center began on July 30. The trusses for

“Not only will this be a great asset to the community but it has unified the community towards a common goal.”

KAN STEP is a self-help program that enables small communities to make major

With fall harvest around the corner it should prove to be yet another challenge for Morrill volunteers to get this project tinned and weathered in for winter.

the community center and fire station are up and ready for tin. With fall harvest around the corner it should prove to be yet another challenge for Morrill volunteers to get this project tinned and weathered in for winter.

Ladies who volunteer prepare and serve meals at the old community center to those working on the building. Food is donated by volunteers and the Chamber. Charles Gruber seemed to sum it up well when he said,

infrastructure improvements. Local people volunteer labor and services or “sweat equity,” while the Kansas Department of Commerce provides funding for materials and technical services. An acronym for “Kansas Small Towns Environment Program”, KAN STEP gives small Kansas communities an opportunity to do projects they couldn’t otherwise afford. The funding is provided through the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program.



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