

Win-Win-Win!

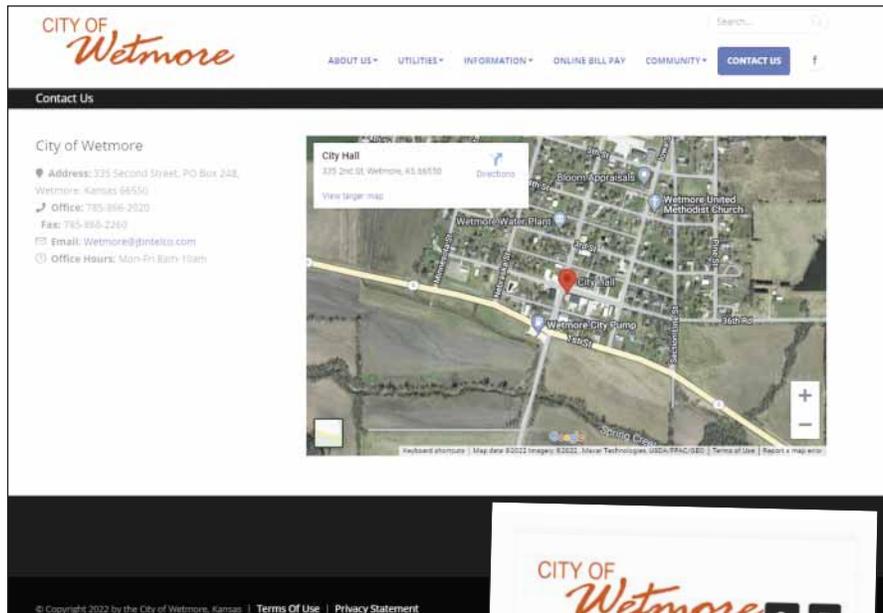
How a high school teacher and her two students helped the city of Wetmore while learning about technology.

T rue story: you are busy and have more and more demands on your time, more and more job responsibilities than ever before. You know that a good website can provide 24/7 information to customers, save you time on the phone, save you time emailing customers back, and contribute to a positive public image. But you ask yourself, when will you find time to build and maintain this site?

For people like you, KRWA introduced its Web Services program in June 2010. Elmer Ronnebaum's vision for this program was to provide an easy, inexpensive way for small cities and rural water districts to build a custom web presence without requiring experience or skills in web design. (Incidentally, there has been zero price increase in the program's twelve-year existence.) I have been the contracted web developer for Kansas Rural Water Association for more than 20 years, and this is one of the programs under my duties. After setting up the site, I provide training for making edits, tech support when needed, and suggestions for content and design. The service gives you the ability to hand off technical pieces to me so you can focus on what you know best: compiling content, images, and documents your customers need for your particular system.

Even still, this task can be daunting for busy people. One such KRWA Web Services customer, Mike Clowe, from the city of Wetmore, realized that he needed more than just tech support and suggestions from me. He emailed me and admitted, "Jen, we are not doing very well with our website."

True to many in the water industry, Mike not only understood the problem, but he also had a suggestion for a solution: involve local high school students in a business class under the



direction of a teacher... and me, of course. He contacted Phyllis Slipke, Business and Technology Teacher at Wetmore Academic Center, who had two interested high students in her class, Carter Montgomery and Marshall Rice.

"My wife is a teacher at Wetmore Academic Center, and we have known her and her family from church and other events," Mike says as he recalls how he came up with the idea. "I heard that she had a class working on websites, so I asked her."

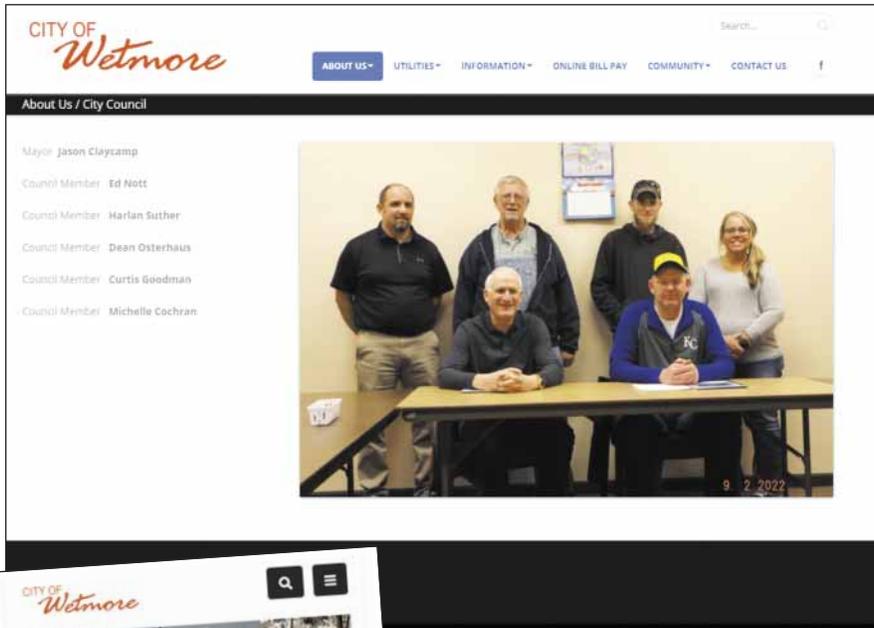
Mike also had to gain permission from the school, of course, and although the city council allows him to make these kinds of decisions, he asked for their approval as well. His hope was for "a good website that the city would be able to keep updated."

After the setup was approved, in October 2021, a high school teacher, two students, and a web developer (that's me) embarked on a plan to furnish the City with an improved website. In years of training Web Services users on their site and presenting at KRWA Conferences, I

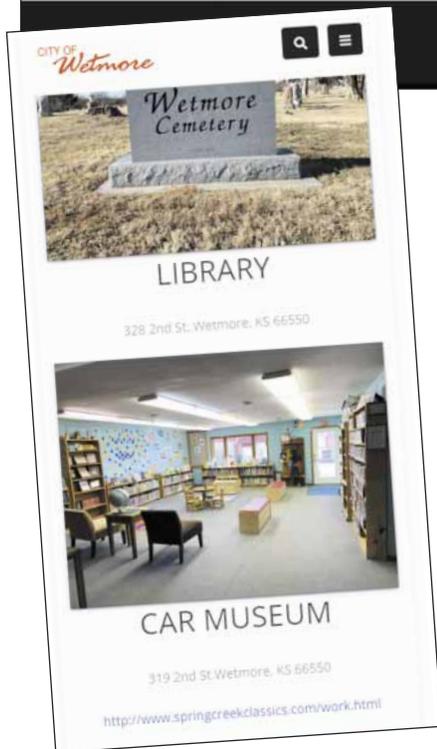


have compiled a list of things a website should do for a city or RWD:

1. create a good presence and add to positive public relations; (e.g. their "image")



After learning of this success, perhaps your system might be able to find willing participants to forge similar apprenticeship-type arrangements for the youth in your area, whether it be helping with a website or taking part in the KRWA Apprenticeship Program. Passing the torch to future generations is part of leaving your legacy.



management system Wix, but the Web Services platform is in DNN, a more feature-rich application but more complex as well. They began by identifying where the current site was missing content to try to fill in the gaps. They could not necessarily know intuitively what the city found essential or necessary, so they met with Mike and others to help provide this basis.

Mike found that the biggest challenge in the project was “getting them correct information and where it would go. We tried to meet often, which was difficult with Covid restrictions.

The students also had their own ideas for what the website should be, and in a sandbox, non-live area of the website, I set up permissions for them to edit content to their liking. They proceeded to organize it, consolidate, and present it in a professional way, even changing the navigation and page structure. Phyllis spent their class time assisting them and running questions back to me, and I had spent several hours over the course of the following months answering their questions and helping them via Zoom.

Phyllis remarked, “These two students have had all kinds of challenges thrown at them, in and out of school.”

The work itself was challenging as well, but the students persevered, through sicknesses, other school activities, missing scheduled breaks, and just life in general for high school students.

“It’s the lessons they are learning along the way that will help them the most,” Phyllis observed.

The finishing touches and final approval for taking their work live came in April 2022, just in time for the school year to draw to a close. Mike expressed his satisfaction with the outcome, noting, “I will still need a little more help with how it works!” He added that the most surprising experience he had not anticipated was the amount of work that the students put into it. Overall, the venture was a win-win-win... for the city, the students, and tech education.

After learning of this success, perhaps your system might be able to find willing participants to forge similar apprenticeship-type arrangements for the youth in your area, whether it be helping with a website or taking part in the KRWA Apprenticeship Program. Passing the torch to future generations is part of leaving your legacy.

When asked if he would do it again in the future, Mike simply replied, “Yes.”

Since 1997, Jen Sharp (JenSharp.com) has served business and government across Kansas and the US and even internationally, specializing in Web development, design & programming including e-Learning, ecommerce, content management systems, and other small business solutions.



2. answer commonly asked questions for the public and communicate; (e.g. water boil advisory)
3. reduce repetitive staff tasks; (e.g. downloadable forms, FAQs, rate charts)
4. provide functionality that customers need; (e.g. linking to bill payments)
5. assist with regulation compliance; (e.g. CCRs and notice of meetings)
6. support the community and businesses; (e.g. publicizing and promoting)

We started the project with this list in mind. The students had a little previous experience editing with the content