

Small Towns Come Alive
Dallas Morning News
June 27, 1971

Oct 2015

Superhighways Giving Town Squares Shot In Arm
By Marilyn Schwartz

It was the automobile that was credited with almost killing the small town. But it looks like it's the superhighway that's going to bring it back to life.

Just 45 minutes from Dallas there are towns with no banks, no doctors, no laundromats, no hamburgers, and no houses for the long list of people who are more than eager to move in.

There was a time when these places were in trouble.

The old-timers like to remember when Venus in Johnson County had two banks and a weekly cattle auction that brought in hundreds of people from surrounding counties.

What they'd like to forget is what came next.

The automobile made it easier for the farmers and tradesman to go on through to Dallas or Fort Worth. They were bigger cities and Venus was bypassed and forgotten.

FIRST THE BANKS WENT, then the restaurants and then most of the people.

The same thing was repeated in towns like Krum and Ponder in Denton County.

Store fronts were boarded up, and some of the luckier merchants were able to rent them as warehouses. The town squares and downtown areas that once attracted people almost elbow to elbow on a Saturday night were mainly being used as a playground for the kids.

"See that," a farmer once told Francis W. (Pin) Fowler whose family has run the hardware business in Krum for the past 100 years.

"See that automobile? That's what killed us all," Fowler recalled recently.

But Fowler wasn't as pessimistic. He agreed with the farmer to a point. But he felt it might be the thing that saved the town as well.

He's being proved more right every day.

"SURE PEOPLE MOVED OUT," said Fowler. "They had to. There were no jobs here and the bigger cities were offering all kinds of glittering things. It offers a lot of other things, not so good, they didn't know about. But even when they discovered it, what could they do? They had to be where there were jobs. Then they started putting in those big, good highways. People found out those cars could bring them back to peace and quiet they once tried so hard to get away from."

Krum is feeling the new boom and so are Venus and Ponder. The townspeople like to think that what they're offering is the best of two worlds.

Commuters can have all the jobs and entertainment that Dallas, Denton and Fort Worth have to offer. But "home" still has the small town feeling it offered 50 years ago.

The 414 residents of Venus point with pride to the fact that they're all so "close."

IT'S A FACT THAT'S reconfirmed every year during the town's homecoming celebration.

"People from all over the country come home for this. Last year we had some that came all the way from Great Britain and Alaska," said Mrs. Leroy Sims, principal of the Venus elementary and high school. "It's funny, Venus is really a small place, but we all find wherever else we may go, no matter how far away—we're always running into people from Venus."

The town's population has increased by only 90 during the last 10 years. But the problem isn't so much that no one wants to move in. It's mainly that no one now wants to move out.

Residents say one of their biggest "occasions" was when a portion of the movie "Bonnie and Clyde" was filmed in the area. But when it came time to view the finished product, they had to travel to Dallas or Fort Worth. There are no motion picture theaters in Venus.

“BUT THINGS ARE going to be OK now,” said Bob Frederick, one-time mayor of Venus. “I get all kinds of inquiries every day from people coming into my service station about the availability of buying house sand land here. The problem of course, is that of availability. But new property is beginning to open up and we’re even going to get a housing project that will give us about 12 houses for new families.”

The people are very anxious for this new progress.

“Every senior girl that graduated high school last year got married right after graduation. We want to be able to keep them all here,” Explained one resident. “We also need a bank and a barbershop, and even a restaurant. You can’t even buy a hamburger in Venus. Most of our town we like just the way it is-but if we have to concede a few things for progress, I guess we’re going to have to do it.”

Fowler said he can already see the difference in Krum, which has a population of 550.

“THERE WAS A TIME when I knew everyone around here well enough to have dinner with them,” he explained. “Now I see all kinds of new faces. But it’s saving us. I’m in the real estate business too. I get about 50 inquiries every time I put up a piece of property for sale. But like other areas like us, property is scarce.

Residents of Ponder, a neighboring town, are also excited about the sudden exodus to small towns. A few are also concerned.

“People who live around here know each other and mind their own business at the same time,” said a farmer who has lived in the area for all of his 67 years, and asked not to be identified.

“Everybody here works hard for a living and bot many have enough time to really get in trouble with. You start building things up and you get in trouble. All that credit is the thing that drives people to ruin in Dallas and Fort Worth.

“Even some of the stores around here had had to stop giving credit because too many people are starting to abuse it. The people here have always trusted each other. I’d hate to see it go away.”

IN VENUS, A MAN from Arlington has already approached some of the city officials about the feasibility of rebuilding the town square the way it was at the turn of the century. Including a gazebo-and by holding band concerts, as a tourist attraction.

Residents say it would certainly be a boom to the city but it would also commercialize things many have always enjoyed taking for granted.

The people of Krum are more or less looking at progress as survival, and don’t feel they can let any other thoughts interfere.

“Sometimes it can be like the first time you lost that hour in Daylight Savings Time,” explained Fowler. “We all know what a good thing it is. But is seems as if things are going so fast, we’ll never make up that extra hour.”