

## Life in Small Towns

By Joe Krause, Terry School Superintendent

I never expected to become so experienced at small-town living. Since growing up in the Detroit area and spending ten years teaching in Flint, Michigan, I've lived and worked in seven towns very similar in size to Terry, Montana. However, one difference that I've noticed is that Terry has developed more supportive community relationships than some other small towns in which I have lived.

**Hearsay** is information received from other people that can't be adequately proven as reliable. During my first principal position the district's superintendent told me, "*Joe, people are too quick to believe bad things about good people. Be cautious about believing anything you don't hear directly from the source. Hearsay can destroy a person, a career, and a school district.*" That was back in 2002 and 17 years later I'm tremendously grateful he shared those words of wisdom with me.

In many small towns the tendency of people is to just put their head down and hope they don't become the target of the folks who like to spread rumors and gossip. I've seen good people get bullied and attacked without any local folks stepping up and being decent. *However, in Terry I've witnessed just the opposite.* I've overheard some of our old timers coming to the defense of people in our community. Rather than sit by and not speak up, they jumped in and made sure that facts...rather than hearsay...were known. They were willing to give the benefit of the doubt to someone.

I seem to recall that the Bible says something about being careful to not criticize and attack one another or else we can destroy one another. One small town I lived in has done just that. It's considered to be a mean town by many people who've been there. The school actually shut down because people don't want to live there anymore. There's too much gossip, rumors, and self-centered behavior. The smaller a town is the more influence each person who lives in it has.

Prairie County and the town of Terry is a great place to live! I recognize that Terry has all the similar challenges of other small towns where I've lived, but Terry has so many good and decent people that I see nothing but positive for the future of Prairie County and Terry Schools. Dr. Meadows, my old professor at Saginaw Valley State University, referred to what I see in Terry as "Practiced Decency". When we practice decency we are supportive of one another. We don't listen to hearsay. We apologize when we're wrong. We help out our neighbor. I've seen all those and more in my three months in Terry and I'm glad to be here!