

## September 2005 - Building Better Communities Award - Alma Creamery

Building Better Communities Award - Alma Creamery

Given on the Floor of the U.S. House of Representatives

by Congressman Jerry Moran

September 6, 2005

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the community of Alma, Kansas, for the successful revitalization of the Alma Creamery.

Beginning in 1946, this town of 762 people was identified by the presence of the Alma Creamery, famous for producing delicious Alma Cheese. Bernie Hansen, a pioneer in the development of value-added foods, furthered this tradition when he purchased the company in 1986. Bernie developed the company and sold it more than a decade later. Unfortunately, the creamery then closed in 2000. This was a setback to the community of Alma. And for more than three years, the production plant lay dormant. However, during this time, Alvin Kahle and Jim Ferguson, two longtime employees, did something great. On their own initiative, they regularly cleaned up and maintained the plant with the hope that one day it would reopen.

Their hopes were fulfilled in October of 2003 when former owner Bernie Hansen purchased the plant at an auction. Bernie quickly rehired Alvin and Jim. He also asked Linda Craghead, who serves part-time as Wabaunsee County economic development director, to serve as general manager of the company. In addition, more than one million dollars was invested in equipment, facilities and personnel.

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On April 28, 2004, the hopes of Bernie, Linda, Alvin, Jim and the entire community were realized. On that day, the first

batch of hand-made Alma Cheese was produced in a completely remodeled plant. Since the plant reopened, this delicious product has been attracting more and more customers. The company's workforce has expanded from 5 to 15 employees in order to keep up with increasing demand.

According to Bernie Hansen, the company's growth is the result of an inspired team effort. "The renewed success of Alma Creamery can be attributed to a hard working staff, a supportive community and a trusted brand name widely-recognized across the state of Kansas," Hansen said.

For rural communities to survive and prosper into the future, citizens must be willing to create their own opportunities for success.

The revitalization of Alma Creamery is an example of how hard work, innovation, professional management and community support can create just such an opportunity.