

November 2005 - Building Better Communities Award - Ramona

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by Congressman Jerry Moran

November 3, 2005

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Ramona, Kansas, for successful community revitalization efforts.

Pat Wick and Jessica Gilbert have always considered this town of 100 people to be home. It is where their parents were born and raised. As children, these sisters would accompany their parents on annual visits from their home in California to help their grandparents with summer harvest. As adults, Pat worked as a clinical psychologist and Jessica was a philanthropic organization consultant.

When they returned to Ramona in 1989 for a family reunion, the sisters felt a strong pull to come home. They reestablished their roots building by building. In 1990, Pat purchased and the sisters renovated a home they now call "The Ramona House," in honor of their ancestors. Pat and Jessica purchased a second house in 1995 and remade it into "Cousin's Corner" bed and breakfast. The sisters purchased a third home that is now a lodge called "Jake's Place." All of this was accomplished through frequent visits to Ramona, even while Pat and Jessica continued their careers in California.

By the year 2000, Pat and Jessica decided to take the final step and moved home. The sisters now live in the Ramona House and operate Jake's Place and Cousin's Corner. More recently, they purchased the old bank building and turned it into "The Dirt Gamblers Museum," which is home to photographs and other items honoring Ramona's pioneer history. The sisters have also contributed to the revitalization of Ramona through extensive community involvement. They have helped organize several civic and community events, including a spring tea party, a citywide Memorial Day service, a Main Street Fourth of July parade and an outdoor Nativity in the city park complete with live animals and singing angels.

In an effort to celebrate Halloween and promote regional tourism, Pat and Jessica are currently helping promote a Scarecrow parade in Ramona and several other area communities. If all of that isn't enough, Pat is the town's mayor and Jessica is the city clerk.

At age 93, Tony Meyer is Ramona's oldest citizen. He believes Pat and Jessica are doing great things for the community. "The sisters have awakened this town again," Meyer said. Warren Fike, a lifetime resident, also notices a positive change. "Having the sisters come in has helped keep Ramona alive," Fike said. "The steps they've taken to improve the town have motivated more people here to help, too."

The sisters believe Ramona's revitalization is beginning to take hold. "We're romantics, and we have a passion for this place," Jessica said. "We want people to be proud they're connected to the town and want them to invest in it again." "It's a special place," Pat noted. "It's Mayberry R.F.D. come to life."

For rural communities to survive and prosper into the future, citizens must be willing to create their own opportunities for success. Ongoing efforts to revitalize Ramona are an example of how hard work, vision and community support can create just such an opportunity. Citizens throughout Kansas are working together to enhance the quality of life in their communities. Ramona is a success story that demonstrates how teamwork and creative thinking can make a positive difference in rural America.