

The News~Sentinel

Thursday, July 26, 2007

Our home is in a small town, and that's good enough for us



A column by
DAVID AND STACY HEFTY

I (DAVID) WAS born in Auburn, population 12,000. And I (Stacy) was born in a really small town, Wolcott, population 500.

When you hear something like that, you might think of crickets chirping in cornfields, entrepreneurial kindergartners selling lemon-

ade for 5 cents a glass in the driveway, teenagers swinging on roped tires and into scenic summer ponds and, depending on your generation, John Cougar Mellencamp swooning about his "Small Town." You know, not exactly Mayberry, but close enough, and to some extent, that is, in fact, part of the authentic greatness of living in the rural Midwest.

Every small town we've ever known has its own collection of common country wisdom that we call "country proverbs," like: Every path has a few puddles; don't sell your only mule to buy a plow; always drink upstream from the herd, that kind of thing. Growing up in small towns, we remember hearing the expression "experts come from out of town." Of course, this didn't mean much to us because we were too busy with the concerns of most kids - working on grades, competing in school activities and FFA conventions and things like that. We wanted to achieve great things, and we assumed that meant being in a big city where we both could pursue careers with large companies.

We've heard about politicians complaining about Indiana's "Brain Drain" in which young people take their higher education to go work in faraway cities to escape the perceived lack of jobs and opportunities in the Hoosier state. Some of our friends are, in fact, finding their fortunes far away in bigger cities, but there are others like us who sensed - sometimes even subconsciously - that our journeys away from home would ultimately culminate in our return. Upon graduation from college and marriage three weeks later, our first job assignment took us to Indianapolis, where we would apply all our energy and talent toward our new "big city" careers.

We took jobs with a major financial-services firm and set up shop just outside of Indy, where we found commuter towns full of folks who worked in the city by day and mostly kept to themselves by night. For a couple of small-town kids with a keen sense of family and community, that place seemed as alien as Mars. Nobody was

from there, and nobody wanted to stay there. It was like living in a town of people who were like potted plants on wheels. More importantly for us, while trying to accomplish our expert status outside of our small towns, we were suddenly disconnected from our dream and, for the first time, we were forced to reflect on what was really important in our lives.

Then one day, on a visit to Auburn, we were leafing through a copy of a farming magazine. After all, we were raised on farms and there were always copies around. Here we were at 23 feeling nostalgic about a lifestyle that was near and dear to our hearts, and as we perused this magazine, a phrase just seemed to leap off the page. It was an old country expression - "Grow where you're planted." In retrospect, it really hit home with these potted plants on wheels.

We gradually began to see things in a different light. Maybe we could be experts in the town where David grew up and realize the dreams for our family to have the same nostalgic feelings we have today. In Indy there were many successful people living in one place, but that place wasn't much of a success as a community. In fact, it seemed like a place without an identity. It didn't have a great county fair. It didn't have rabid supporters of the local high school sports teams. It didn't have generations of families that lived and worked for the next generation of families. It was a new and shiny place without a heart and soul.

We're not demographers, and we don't really know if there are a lot of other young professionals like us saying "no" to big cities and "yes" to small towns like Auburn. But as Indiana positions for the next generation's economic development and for all the hype surrounding Indiana's "Brain Drain," we're keenly aware of at least two people who had a choice to live and work pretty much anywhere, and we chose to grow where we were planted.

After our fair share of domestic and international travel, wisdom from the heartland has wooed us home, and after having rediscovered one of Indiana's best-kept secrets, we've plunked down our marker. We thoroughly enjoy taking the family for a leisurely walk along a gravel road and watching the sun set over an open field. Two lawn chairs, two lemonades, watching the kids on the swing set, cornfields ("knee high by the Fourth of July") and the anticipation of the "beautiful colors of the evening sky."

Indeed: "Our home is in a small town, and that's good enough for us."

David and Stacy Hefty are the founders of Cornerstone Wealth Management in Auburn.

THE NEWS-SENTINEL • WWW.NEWS-SENTINEL.COM

For reprint permission contact 260.469.3090 or permissions@floydandpartners.com

© 2007 Cornerstone Wealth Management

NS_2007oe1