

Nancy Hines – Stanton County Hardware

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

“Hablas Espanol?” I don't speak Spanish, but today we'll meet a rural Kansas business which has achieved a remarkable level of bilingual proficiency while working to serve all of its customers. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Last week we learned about Michael Perry and Angel Guzman, owners of Aqua Shield Roofing and Construction in Hugoton. In 2014, they purchased the hardware store in nearby Stanton County. They brought in Nancy Hines as manager. She had been working for Michael and Angel at Aqua Shield before that time.

Nancy grew up along the Seward-Meade County line near the rural communities of Kismet and Plains. Plains is a town of 1,171 people and Kismet is a town of 487 people. Now, that's rural.

Nancy graduated from Southwestern Heights and got a business management degree from Seward County. She moved away for a time to teach math and science, but after school cutbacks she moved to Hugoton to be closer to family. Then she went to work for her brother-in-law, Michael Perry, and Angel at Aqua Shield. In 2014, she became manager at Stanton County True Value.

The store is located in Stanton County's county seat which is Johnson City – not to be confused with Johnson County. Johnson County and Johnson City are opposites – both literally and figuratively. They are at opposite ends of the state and opposite ends of the rural-urban continuum. Johnson County has nearly a half-million in population, while Johnson City is at 1,524 people.

For decades there had been a hardware store and lumber yard in Johnson City, but it closed in 2003. That meant residents had to travel more than 20 miles to the nearest store to get hardware and building materials.

Local investors got together, purchased the building, remodelled and reopened as Stanton County True Value. Contractor Gary Adams was the lead investor and president of the company. In 2005, Stanton County True Value was named the Emerging Business of the Year by the Kansas Small Business Development Center. In 2008, Gary Adams was named Kansas Small Business Person of the Year.

By 2013, Gary was ready for a transition. He approached Michael Perry and Angel Guzman about purchasing the business, which they did. Nancy Hines became manager shortly thereafter.

The store is fittingly named Stanton County because it is the only hardware store or lumberyard in the county. It is a multi-purpose store serving the community's needs.

“We are almost a one-stop shop,” Nancy said. The store offers products and services from A to Z, or at least from appliances to work wear. Customers can purchase the tools and supplies one might expect from a typical hardware store, but they go far beyond that. There are gifts, garden supplies, holiday decorations, basic electrician services and more.

In addition to selling appliances, the store offers appliance service and repair. The store has two heating, ventilation, and air conditioning technicians. Since it is located in farm country, Stanton County True Value offers livestock feed, pet food, work boots and more. There's no milk and bread, but the store does have drinks and snacks.

With the changing demographics of western Kansas, the Hispanic population has grown rapidly. Stanton County True Value has kept the pace. Nancy Hines is Hispanic and speaks Spanish as do two other of the store employees, plus the two HVAC specialists who are also Hispanic. That means five of the ten company employees speak both English and Spanish. How many non-restaurant retail businesses can claim that 50 percent of their employees are bilingual?

In the end, it is about serving customers, said Nancy. “This is a tight-knit community, and they like supporting a hometown store,” she said.

“Customers come first,” said long-time employee Tom Spencer. “In a big box store, you have to fend for yourself,” he said. “In our small town stores, we take pride in being knowledgeable and meeting and greeting every customer.”

For more information, go to www.truevalue.com/stantoncounty.

“Hablas Espanol?” I don’t speak Spanish, but I am proud of Nancy Hines and all those involved with Stanton County True Value for making a difference with good customer service in any language.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.