

Shane Tiffany – 2

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

How far do you go to get a gallon of milk or a loaf of bread? In rural communities, accessing supplies can be a challenge. Many rural grocery stores have closed, but today we'll learn about one which has newly opened. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Last week we learned about Shane Tiffany who owns and operates the Tiffany Cattle Company with his brother Shawn. He also operates a new full-line grocery store in rural Kansas.

Shane grew up in Morris County and met a student named Morgan from nearby Alta Vista. They became high school sweethearts and ultimately were wed.

In 2007, the Tiffanys came back to take over the local feedlot. In 2010, they moved to Morgan's hometown of Alta Vista. "We love the community and love the people in the community," Shane said. In fact, Shane found himself elected mayor. But something had happened in Alta Vista as the Tiffanys were moving there: The local grocery store was closing its doors.

"There had been a store in Alta Vista since the beginning of the town," Shane said. "It had been in its current building since the 1970s."

As Mayor, Shane Tiffany recognized the importance of such a local service. It's a source of business, jobs, sales tax revenue, food, and a social hub. Without it, the nearest store was thirteen miles away. Shane approached various companies about reopening, to no avail.

Finally he said, "I think we can do this." He researched grocery store operations and ultimately bought the old store building, which had deteriorated by that time. The Tiffany family pitched in to totally redo the building. They took up the old tile, sealed the floors, and the wives painted the walls. They partnered with Affiliated Foods, the grocery supply cooperative. The Tiffanys called the store Alta Vista Market.

Meanwhile, a new neighbor moved in to the house across the street from the Tiffanys. It was Aaron Monihen, whom Shane had known as a kid growing up. Aaron had worked in retail distribution for 13 years. He became the new manager of Alta Vista Market.

As the building was being remodelled, Shane got a call from another friend who said, "I have something to show you." It was some like-new counter tops which the friend had purchased from a closed convenience store. "I wasn't quite sure what I was going to do with these," the friend said. "Could you use them?" It turned out that the counter tops fit perfectly into the newly designed space of Alta Vista Market.

The Tiffanys did buy new equipment such as a thirteen door walk-in cooler. They designed it so the refrigeration condensers were placed outside in order to conserve energy. "The investment in newer, more energy-efficient equipment was worth the cost," Shane said. On June 28, 2014, the Alta Vista Market opened for business.

Certain things are striking about this store. Number one, it is clean, bright, and welcoming. Number two, the old barnwood around the cooler creates a neat rustic atmosphere. Number three, the diversity of products available in the store is remarkable.

Of course, there are the essentials of milk and bread. But there is also everything from bird seed and dog food to propane, live bait, diapers, cleaning supplies and medicine.

As one might guess, with a cattle-feeding owner, there is locally grown beef for sale plus other meat from the local locker plant. “We want to stay as local as we can,” Shane said. There’s also a fryer and pizza oven so hot food is available daily. There are fresh sandwiches, pizza made to order, and tacos on Tuesdays.

Such a store is an important asset in a rural community like Alta Vista, population 434 people. Now, that’s rural.

“It’s been a lot of fun,” Shane said. “It’s been a blessing. I’m so proud of this community.”

How far do you go to get a gallon of milk? We commend Shane and Morgan Tiffany, Aaron Monihen and all involved for making a difference by restoring local grocery service in their rural community. Oh, and by the way: Honey, would you grab some milk down at the store?

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