

Steve Radley – Rural Road film - 2

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

Hollywood, Los Angeles, California, population 4 million. Yates Center, Kansas, population 1,417. These two contrasting towns do have something in common: They are each a site for film-making. Today we'll meet a Kansas entrepreneur who recently produced a film highlighting rural Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Last week we met Jessica Busted of Yates Center's Cornerstone Bakery, site of a recent video shoot.

Steve Radley is the writer, producer and director of this new film. He is president and CEO of NetWork Kansas.

Steve was born in Wichita, grew up in Oklahoma, and went to college at OU. His grandparents had a farm near Yates Center. That farm is still in the family. It's where Steve and his siblings gather on holidays. "I've been bird-hunting on that place since I was five," Steve said.

While in college, Steve majored in film and media studies and wrote a screenplay. He was one of 10 people selected nationally to participate in a film writer's workshop in California. After graduation, he moved to LA, got an agent, and tried to work into the movie business.

"There was no clear career path and, at heart, I'm a Midwest guy," Steve said. He moved back to Wichita, met and married his wife, and got his MBA at Wichita State. He became an entrepreneur and went into business. With that experience, he then became president and CEO of NetWork Kansas which works to support entrepreneurs across the state.

Steve's interest in film-making was put on the back burner. Then a friend in LA sent him a note about a commercial that was being shot in Wichita. Steve applied and was cast as an extra. He enjoyed it so much that he applied and was cast in a couple of movies also.

In the back of his mind was a film that he wanted to make himself, as he thought about the rural towns he was working with across the state. "The idea came visually first, as I pictured the concept of rural roads and a journey," Steve said. He wrote a screenplay for a short film about a man who is sent on a mission to reach out to dying small towns in search of hope.

Steve worked with Andrew Kivett, an award-winning KU film student and family friend, who shot and edited the film. Steve himself played the unnamed lead role. The film was shot on location at Steve's family farm and the nearby rural community of Yates Center, population 1,417 people. Now, that's rural.

The film begins with Steve clad in black, waking up atop a grassy hill near a single tombstone. He meets a mysterious gentleman who instructs him to "Save the town." Steve asks "How?" and the answer is, "Find hope."

Steve's character starts walking along gravel country roads. He comes to a virtually abandoned town and goes into what appears to be a café, where he engages in unscripted dialogue with the local folks and others about whether their town is dying. He again encounters the mysterious man who tells him to go

on to the next town. The final image is Steve's character walking down another road toward the sunset.

The visual images of this movie are much more powerful than words can describe. "My character is kind of a metaphor for the community," Steve said. "I wanted to portray both the beauty and the decay in rural America," he said. The comments from the people he visits provide a message of hope.

The five minute long film is titled "The Rural Road." It's been selected to have its premiere at the White City Film Festival in Nebraska. It's also been submitted to independent film festivals in Kansas and as far away as LA and Austin, Texas.

Hollywood and Yates Center may be markedly different, but both have provided a setting for film production. We salute Steve Radley, Andrew Kivett, and all those involved for making a difference with creativity and vision. To paraphrase the old saying, we'll see them in the movies.

And there's more. We'll learn about Steve's work at NetWork Kansas next week.

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