



BRING THEM BACK HOME

A Bountiful Harvest: Bringing Them Back Home!

Kandiyohi County's economy has been steadily expanding in recent years and has become more diversified with employment spread across the **health care, manufacturing, educational services, financial services, and retail trade** industries. But often overlooked is the vital role that **agriculture** still plays in the county's economy, growing not just crops and livestock, but **wealth and job opportunities**. This issue of the **Closer to Home** newsletter features three Kandiyohi County residents who decided to move back to the area for **great careers** in the agriculture field – which includes a lot of work beyond the field – and the **better quality of life!**

Joel Gratz

CPA, Partner
Christianson & Associates, PLLP

Joel Gratz grew up on a **dairy farm** near Atwater and graduated from Atwater-Grove City high school in 1990. He went on to **Minnesota State University-Moorhead** and graduated with a B.S. degree in Accounting in 1994. He worked at Eide Bailly in Fargo, but just two years later, an opportunity at **Christianson & Associates, PLLP (C&A)** in Willmar became available.



Joel, Patty, Andrew, Anthony, Jacob and Joseph Gratz enjoy playing outdoors.

“Besides being in my home area, C&A was an excellent fit for my background since one of the firm's core client bases centered on agriculture. In addition, C&A's devotion to the **renewable fuels** industry was just beginning and my auditor experience helped support the firm's growth in this area,” said Gratz. “Through the years I received various promotions and am currently one of four partners at C&A.”

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Chris Petersen

Vice President, Wholesale Lending
Farm Credit Services of Minnesota Valley

Future Farmers of America (FFA) and 4-H played an important role in **Chris Petersen's** life while he attended school in **Clara City**. Raised on a diversified grain and livestock farm, he was active in both before graduating in 1976, earning opportunities to serve as a State 4-H Ambassador, travel to Norway, and show livestock at the Minnesota State Fair.

Chris met Nancy, his wife of 29 years, while attending **Pipestone Area Vo-Tech** for Ag Finance. His first “real” job was in Central South Dakota, and they eventually ended up in Denver, Colorado. “We loved the mountains and the climate, but the 5 million plus people, and all the traffic, etc., convinced us to look back toward the simpler, less complicated life of central Minnesota,” said Petersen.

They moved back in August of 2000, when their daughter Angela was between 8th and 9th grade. “A high school the size and quality of **New London-Spicer** appealed to all of us much more than a school in the Denver metro area,” said Petersen.

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Chris & Nancy Petersen pose for a picture with their family.

Nate Hultgren

CEO, Hultgren Farms
CFO, Bird Island Bean Co.

Nate Hultgren and his wife Jaime enjoy traveling together – “It helps give a more objective view of our place in the world, and yet it makes us appreciate living where we do,” said Hultgren.

Nate attended college in Duluth to get away from “farm country” for a while and get a different perspective to decide if farming was the right career for him. He moved back to **Raymond** in 1999 to continue his family's farm business and be close to his family. Luckily, Jaime is from Grove City and they both wanted to raise their family in the safe, friendly atmosphere of Kandiyohi County.



Nate, Jaime, and Lily Hultgren cruise on the lake.

Armed with a Finance degree from the **University of Minnesota, Duluth**; Nate has taken over as Chief Executive Officer of **Hultgren Farms**, and is also the Chief Financial Officer of **Bird Island Bean Co.**, an edible bean processing company in which the farm has invested.

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Closer to Home

"It really says something about our quality of life in Kandiyohi County when people who have their choice of where to live decide they want to come back home to work, live, and play."

Central Lakes Cooperative is moving right along

With over **\$30 million** in sales, Central Lakes Cooperative is a company on the move, both literally and figuratively. The producer/farmer owned co-op is completing construction of a new **\$5 million** facility in eastern Kandiyohi County that consolidates operations for five different locations. The new buildings include a spacious office, an 11,000 dry ton plant, a 240' x 90' machine shed, a 150' x 90' seed warehouse, and a 60' x 90' shop, as well as anhydrous and propane fill stations.

The co-op's CEO, **Conrad Bostron**, is proud of the project because of the employee input, board support, and the opportunity to create efficiencies for the company's owners and customers. Central Lakes Co-op has **26 full-time** and **8 part-time** employees, with an **average employee tenure of 16 years!** The management team is constantly evaluating the business and looking for non-traditional ways to encourage the cooperative's growth and success. The co-op's agronomy and petroleum divisions are thriving and are poised to grow along with **agriculture** in the region.



Central Lakes Cooperative CEO Conrad Bostron stands in front of one of the new buildings at the consolidated facility in eastern Kandiyohi County.

Joel Gratz sees more growth on the horizon

"In the years since I've moved back I've seen **business growth and expansion** in a number of areas including agriculture," said Gratz. He noted that he sees openings ranging from production to technical to managerial positions, and all are in high demand. In fact, **Christianson & Associates** has added over **40 new accounting and tax positions** since Gratz joined the firm in 1996, and he has seen other area companies with similar needs in the accounting and finance areas.

"Kandiyohi County has a wealth of value-added ag processing and manufacturing companies enjoying successes and expansion. As these companies become more sophisticated, their needs and requirements become more technical as well. C&A has and always will have agriculture as one of its core focus and development areas," added Gratz.

In closing, Gratz said that "Kandiyohi County provides a **great place to raise a family with top notch education**. The county's location provides its residents with easy access to metropolitan areas if needed; and the county's economic growth provides career opportunities in many fields."

Chris Petersen found multiple opportunities at home

When they made the decision to move back to Minnesota, the Petersens were without any employment offers, but they were confident that one would come up in the area. Chris actually ended up with **more than one offer**, and became V.P. of Ag & Commercial Loans at Lake Region Bank in Willmar. In 2001, he moved down 1st Street to **Farm Credit Services of Minnesota Valley**.

"Willmar plays host to a number of **growing industries and businesses**, and a high percentage have direct ties back to agriculture. I think for a person that is looking to enter the field of Ag Finance or to relocate to this part of the country, there are many opportunities," said Petersen.

With fond memories of spending summer vacations at the family cabin, they have always loved Green Lake and were thrilled to move back to what will likely become their retirement home. "Perhaps it is the **'best of both worlds'** – small enough to know your neighbor, yet large enough to provide the increased opportunities without the hassles of a BIG city," noted Petersen.

Nate Hultgren is optimistic for the future of the industry

"With the **growth of high-tech and value-added products** in agriculture, **young professionals** can be involved in ag even if they don't have a farming background," stated Hultgren. He sees opportunities coming in **renewable energy**, as well as on-going consolidation in crop and livestock farms. "The types of employees farms will be seeking will not be limited to those who operate machinery, but will include **scientists, engineers, lawyers, top-shelf managers and consultants**. Workforce quality and salaries will have to grow with these **higher profit expectations**," he added.

But at the end of the day, it's about more than growing crops. "The most important reason for coming back is the **quality of life**. You can see different career opportunities anywhere in the U.S., but not all of these places can offer a safe place to raise a family. **Kandiyohi County is a fantastic place to raise children**. That's why we came back and we'd encourage others to do so."

LOCAL JOB OPENINGS TO COME HOME FOR:

Deputy Sheriff – Kandiyohi County

- * **\$37,793 min. salary + benefits**
- * Must be licensed by the Post Board, Assoc. degree in Criminal Justice;
- Class D driver's license & First Aid cert.
- * Kandiyohi Co. Human Resources

Accountant – Heartland Community

- * **\$30,500 - \$39,100 salary + benefits**
- * BA/BS in Accounting; CPA preferred;
- financial reporting & audit preparation
- * Deb Mortenson, 320-235-0850;
- maribel@heartlandcaa.org

Staff Respiratory Therapist – Rice Memorial Hospital

- * 2-year grad. of A.M.A. accredited R.C. school; NBRC cert. or registry, Minnesota RCP; full benefits
- * Nancy Skindelien, 320-231-4499;
- nski@rice.willmar.mn.us

Pharmacist – TruCare Pharmacy

- * **\$52 - \$56 per hour (\$108,160)**
- * MN Licensed Pharmacist needed for PIC position at Willmar's newest pharmacy; No holidays; full benefits
- * TruCare Pharmacy, 320-231-3655;
- pharmacist@divinehouse.org

Audit Manager – Westberg Eischens

- * **Excellent salary & benefits, 401k**
- * Supervision & management of audits incl. governmental & HUD audits; Bachelor's degree & 3 years of exp.
- * Scott Van Buren, 320-235-3727;
- svanburen@wevcpas.com

**WANT TO MOVE HOME TOO?
SEND US YOUR RESUME AND
WE'LL SHARE IT WITH LOCAL
BUSINESSES THAT NEED YOUR
SKILLS! edp@kandiyohi.com**