

(Neb.)-Nebraska Celebrates Its 147th Birthday

By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 03/05/2014 09:07 AM

(NEBRASKA)-Last weekend marked the 147th anniversary of Nebraska's statehood. While much has changed since the place we call home became the 37th state, a look back at Nebraska's history shows that many of the ideals present in her early days still illustrate her character today.

Nebraska was born out of a mentality of hard work, independence and creativity. The early pioneers ventured to Nebraska and turned what was once viewed as a vast barren desert into a fertile breadbasket that feeds and fuels the world. Nebraska is home to the first homestead, the product of an American experiment to expand westward. These settlers tamed and tilled the land, helping their neighbors in tough times. In the absence of comforts like municipal infrastructure or even a general store, they relied on community and often developed practical, if sometimes unconventional, ways to thrive. The Homestead National Monument near Beatrice serves as a tribute to those resourceful settlers who pioneered our sense of prairie pragmatism.

These characteristics remain central to our Nebraska way of life. We continue to be great stewards of our environment, finding ways to harness the power of our natural resources to improve the quality of our lives. In 1872, just a few years after Nebraska joined the union, J. Sterling Morton led a grassroots movement to plant one million trees across the state on what became the state's first Arbor Day. The tradition caught on, and the day dedicated to planting and caring for trees is now recognized across the country and in many nations around the world.

Much of our success in Nebraska is derived from the land, and we are constantly seeking new ways to care for our natural resources—especially in the wake of Mother Nature's devastation. We are home to important programs like the National Drought Mitigation Center where experts develop resourceful strategies to care for and cultivate land in the face of extreme drought. These techniques help ag producers around the world cope with challenges that would otherwise lead to higher food prices and even extreme hunger.

The sense of community in Nebraska extends far beyond her fields and pastures. It is the foundation of our identity as citizens. Just as our ancestors understood that success in the face of adversity often depended on community, we continue to rely on our neighbors in times of need, and lend a hand whenever we can. This was seen across the state in recent years when volunteers traveled hours to help extinguish grass fires that threatened many Nebraskans' livelihoods. It is also exemplified in the mission of BoysTown. Now nearly a century old, the Nebraska-based organization helps provide a safe and stable community for more than two million children and families across the country each year.

The list of Nebraska's contributions to society these past 147 years goes on, and we as Nebraskans can be very proud of our unique heritage. After all, it is the people of our state who keep these great traditions alive today.

Happy birthday, Nebraska!

--Office of U.S. Senator Mike Johanns