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Once having had to make long trips to get groceries, residents of Cody again have the convenience of their own grocery store.

Coming full circle in Cody Town 'too tough to die' is thriving

WHAT GOES AROUND comes around. After more than a decade of living without the convenience of a grocery store, a new market was often food for thought for Cody residents. The Cherry County community claims the motto "a town too tough to die."

After peaking with a population of more than 400 in 1930, like many other rural American communities, Cody experienced a slow decline in business and population. About 150 people call Cody home today.

In 2009, faculty and students from Cody-Kilgore High School began working with the Center for Rural Affairs, the Cody village board and the Cody-Kilgore school board to create a student-run business. Residents starving for a grocery store began saying "what if?"

Even as a USDA Rural Development Grant was won, some thought since previous markets had faded away that no one else should try it. As the foundation was poured and walls erected,

skepticism evaporated. Inspired by the straw-bale facility at George Paul Vinegar, also in Cody, ("Nectar of the Sandhills," March/April 2014) students tore apart 1,300-pound round bales of straw and then square-baled them to build the state's only straw-bale grocery store. It opened last May.

The community-owned store not only was built by the students at Cody-Kilgore, they run it, too.

There's a building boom going on in the Cody area. In addition to the new grocery store and the vinegar maker, Niobrara Valley Vineyards is making wine here. There's also a new consignment store and a new taxidermy business. And, the most recent census shows population growth of more than 3 percent.

Cody resident Isla Drinkwalter is 80 years old and says she has "no business" driving nearly 40 miles for groceries. "The market is really handy," she said. "The kids that work here are professional, know how to run the cash register and know where

everything is. Cody is a small town, and visitors are impressed that we have this."

"It's more than just a grocery store," said area resident, parent and middle school teacher Stacey Adamson. While working at the market, students have the opportunity to learn how to run a successful business as part of their studies. Adamson is proud of the cooperative effort that helped make the store a reality and the ownership students have taken in the store.

"I had a girl walk up to me and say, 'Oh my goodness, we built a grocery store and now we are running it. We can do anything,'" Adamson said. The Cody-Kilgore students are already planning their next project – a community library.

Yep, Cody is too tough to die, and as for opportunity, it's coming around again in Cody.

– Alan J. Bartels

The Circle C Market is on Highway 20 in Cody at
101 Cherry St. www.cirdecmarket.com.