By Jan Rahn
Managing Editor

Perkins County residents feel very fortunate for many reasons—great people, great facilities and great opportunities—and now a new opportunity has arisen.

A current challenge in the community has opened up the possibility for a new business venture in childcare. There is golden opportunity to step in and take over readily available clientele because of this demand.

Come June, when one of the three in-home day care providers leaves the area, the need for bringing such a service into the community becomes even greater.

According to Val Foster, community development coordinator for Southwest Nebraska Community Betterment Corporation, the need for additional childcare became apparent in 2010 when Perkins County Health Services began to look at the possibility of expansion of Hugs-N-Teddybears, the largest childcare provider in Perkins County.

The hospital's daycare facility provides an enormous service to its employees and the public, but the facility is full.

It was discovered that all licensed childcare facilities in the county were full—some even having waiting lists, said Foster, who also fills two roles as a hospital employee by being the administrative assistant for the Perkins County Health Services Foundation, and helps with grant writing in the finance office.

The childcare providers in the area support each other and continually refer families needing child care to each other if/when they are full.

Since school is ready to dismiss for the summer, there will probably be enough high schoolers and college kids to provide day care for the next three months. But come fall, there will indeed be a shortage of facilities to meet the needs of working parents.

This situation makes it very difficult from an economic development standpoint, explained Foster—the problem being that young families who are interested in relocating to the area will want to be assured there is adequate childcare available.

It could become an issue for young families wanting to move here, she said.

Foster, along with Hugs-N-Teddybears director Shari Anderson, the hospital's Chief Financial Officer Tiffany Weber, and City Superintendent Tyson McGreer have been discussing the problem and brainstorming on how to solve it.

"The red flag to me was when I heard that one of the three in-home day care providers was leaving," said Foster.

The Hugs-N-Teddybears director feels trapped in the same enigma—new hospital employees seeking and expecting day care when accepting a new position are told the hospital's daycare facility is full. That's good news—but at the same time, Anderson wishes there was a way to take on more.

When the day care facility at the hospital was first built and began accepting children, the employees who needed it were fewer than parents in other career sectors requiring day care. Thus, the hospital facility met the need.

Not so today, explained Foster, because the demographics have changed. A shift in the age group of those employed at the hospital has created more of a demand, thus leaving fewer slots for children of parents who work at jobs outside of Perkins County Health Services.

Full capacity at the hospital daycare also means there is little leeway in accepting

drop-ins—which was a service provided when one of the in-home day care providers was unable to accept children on any given day due to illness or vacation.

Currently there are five families with a total of nine children who are on the waiting list at the hospital facility.

Foster praised the quality of each of the day care facilities available in Grant.

“It’s just not enough,” she said.

A trend of young families moving into the county means good news for the schools and the economic future as a whole.

Perkins County Schools has already been proactive in serving their needs by establishing a preschool program that will begin this fall.

Foster explained how the issues surrounding day care goes hand in hand with providing working parents with facilities, programs and support for their children—services the community must provide to entice population growth.

The issue of supply and demand means there is opportunity for someone to establish a new business to meet the shortage in the area.

In an effort to be proactive and to better serve families in the area needing childcare, as well as families that may be considering a move to the area, Perkins County Health Services, the City of Grant, and Southwest Nebraska Community Betterment Corporation are working together to provide support for someone interested in pursuing an opportunity in childcare.

Anyone interested in more information about this opportunity may contact: Val Foster 308-352-4338 or Tyson McGreer at Grant City Hall 308-352-2100.