Firm makes Corvette parts

By Ron Wilson

Director Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University London, England. On display is a gorgeous, restored 1954 Corvette. Inside this Corvette are authorized replacement parts, manufactured halfway around the globe in rural Kansas. Rev up your engine, it's the subject of today's Kansas Profile.

Ron and Rhonda LaRue are owners of LaRue Machine in Chanute. Their remarkable business produces parts for Corvettes and performs many other types of metal machining.

Ron and Rhonda have deep roots in rural southeast Kansas, where both grew up on farms. Rhonda went to Chanute High, Neosho County Community College and became a registered nurse.

Ron got a vocational degree at Pittsburg State. Even before graduating, he bought his first lathe for his dad's shop on the farm.

Ron and Rhonda got married. Ron was employed at various jobs while working in his own shop on the weekends, when he was asked to produce some parts for restoring a Corvette.

That became his business' first machine shop project. He is still

producing parts for that company ties coming together.' today.

When Ron and Rhonda had children, they wanted to be available Foundation, Southeast Kansas RC for them, so they built a shop in which to operate their business next door to their house located between Chanute and Erie.

LaRue Machine was a metal fabrication shop, doing repairs and mentor," Ron said. "He has lots subcontracting parts, tool work, and machining with both CNC and manual equipment. The business grew with time, but then was hit by the recession.

Meanwhile, Ron had been in touch with Bernard Dick in Chanute. Bernard had been CEO of Churchill Machine before it was purchased and moved to Texas, at grew his own machine shop called Econo Machine. But Bernard was turning 65. He approached Ron LaRue about taking over the business

"It was kind of a miracle," Ron said. "You don't buy a business in up after the first of the year," Ron the middle of a recession." But they worked with Tom Byler and Kathryn Richard at the Small Business Development Center at Pittsburg State University.

said. "Tom facilitated all these enti-

Eight months later, with help from the city of Chanute, Prosperity & D, Start-Up Kansas, and local banks, the LaRues bought Econo Machine. Bernard Dick, the retiring CEO, is staying on as a salesman.

"Bernard has been a wonderful of experience and has been a great advisor."

While Econo did large scale machining, LaRue Machine had smaller specialized equipment, so the two businesses complement each other well in production capabilities and target markets.

Today the company performs a mix of metal machining, stampwhich point Bernard started and ing, custom and repair operations, including CNC lathe and mill work, tool and die making, and all types of welding. Ron is president of the company. Rhonda is vice president, secretary and office manager.

"Business has really opened said. "We've already hired on more than was projected in our business plan."

"We're a large, diversified job shop," Ron said. "We're doing alu-"I can't say enough good things minum castings which open up the about Tom and those people," Ron refinery business and airlock valves for plastic manufacturing. We do

repairs for the cement industry and parts for Cobalt Boats, for example." Meanwhile, the company still stamps parts for Corvette body mount kits for cars which are going worldwide.

That's remarkable for a family business based in rural Kansas. Ron and Rhonda's son Garrett is studying management information systems at K-State and helping with the business's computers, while daughter MaKayla is in high school at Erie and helps run the family cattle operation. They went to grade school in the nearby rural community of Galesburg, Kansas, population 149 people. Now, that's rural

From these rural roots, this Kansas family is building a remarkable Kansas business.

It's time to leave London, where we found a beautiful 1954 Corvette which includes parts made all the way over in rural Kansas.

We commend Ron and Rhonda LaRue, Bernard Dick, and all those involved with LaRue Machine for making a difference with entrepreneurship and hard work. Such entrepreneurship can help restore Corvettes, and it can help restore the economy of rural Kansas as well.





Mel Pfau accepted around 200 pounds of food from the Grant Junior High Family, Career and Community Leaders of America group last Tuesday for the Genesis Food Bank of Goodland. The group put collection boxes in each TA room and had a contest between them. The winner got a pizza party. President Aaron Avelar hands a box of food to Pfau. Other members of the group pictured are Jordan Hopkins, Selena Acosta and Taylor Thomas. This is the second year for the group.

Photo by Pat Schiefen/The Goodland Star-News



Hotline has victim information

Sandy Praeger, Kansas Commissioner of Insurance, said Monday, that insurance information for recent tornado and severe weather victims in Kansas is available from the Kansas Insurance Department's Consumer Assistance Hotline, (800) 432 - 2484.

"The department's consumer assistance division is prepared to answer consumer questions and concerns regarding insurance in the areas hit by tornados and severe thunderstorms," Commissioner Praeger said. "We are in touch with insurance companies who have insured customers in those areas and many companies' disaster teams have on-the-ground operations."

News reports said one person in Reading, the hardest hit community, was killed as a tornado rolled through northern Lyon County and damaged or destroyed approximately 200 homes and businesses there.

Tornados were sighted in Shawnee and Jefferson Counties and reports showed hail and wind damage

of the state.

Sunday storms in southeast Kansas caused hail damage in several counties. The same storm system caused catastrophic tornado damage in Joplin, Mo.

'The department is ready to act as a liaison between consumers and their insurance carriers, if needed," Commissioner Praeger said. "We have current carrier contact information available through our hotline representatives. We can also help is a consumer doesn't remember the insurance company name or policy number but does remember the agent or agency name."

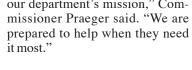
Claims adjusters for insurance companies will be working in the affected areas. If a person can't locate an adjuster, contact the consumer assistance hotline and the request will be relayed to the insurance company, agent or adjuster, Commissioner Praeger said.

The Commissioner also said consumers should deal directly with the claims adjuster from their insurance

throughout the northeastern corner company and not public adjusters. Public adjusters are not licensed to provide personal insurance services in Kansas.

> More information about insurance claims and storm damage is on the Kansas Insurance Department

website, www.ksinsurance.org. "Protecting Kansas consumers is our responsibility and part of our department's mission," Commissioner Praeger said. "We are







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