

Criswell seeks to build affordable housing for seniors

by Alan Rusch

If Salina businessman David Criswell is successful in his efforts, the new year of 2001 will hopefully see the building of seven to eight new and affordable apartments for senior citizens right here in Wilson. These two bedroom apartments will utilize a new and unique building product quite familiar to Kansans - wheat straw bales.

According to Criswell, wheat straw bale construction is an accepted construction method in much of Europe as well as in some parts of Canada and the United States. He hopes that this technology will grow in popularity throughout the United States as more people become aware of its benefits for energy efficiency and safety.

During the most recent meetings of both the Wilson Chamber of Commerce and the Wilson City Council this month, Criswell requested support for his project from both groups. He is currently in the process of applying for tax credits from the Housing Division of the Kansas Department of Commerce and Housing. The application is due in Topeka by Feb. 9.

"Community support is an essential requirement of the Housing Tax Credit Program," wrote Criswell in his letter of request. "I am attempting to speak with many citizens of Wilson in an effort to develop understanding and build support for my project, including the use of straw bales for insulation."

With this in mind, Criswell plans on donating a 37

minute video detailing straw bale building technology to the Lang Memorial Library in Wilson.

According to Criswell, if he is successful in his efforts, the apartments, known as "Czech Cottages," will demonstrate the safety and energy efficiency of straw bale construction as well as the potential for straw bale construction to generate income for rural farming communities.

"Kansas is famous as the Wheat State," Criswell wrote in his letter. "The wheat straw produced in Kansas is primarily regarded as an agricultural waste product. Use of wheat straw for construction of homes and other buildings could provide a value-added product and additional income for farmers and farm communities."

Also in his letter, Criswell explained that the affordable apartments he wishes to build in Wilson will include an exceptional location, since they will be located directly across from the Wilson Senior Center and in between the Lang Memorial Library and the Wilson Post Office. This will allow the Czech Cottage residents to have easy access to the downtown Wilson businesses. The apartments will feature senior-friendly designs and have walk-in showers and raised outlets. They will also be fully ADA accessible.

The apartments will be built with safety in mind. They will have a steel frame and a safe room in each



A Prime Location - A view of the area east of the Lang Memorial Library in Wilson where Criswell's "Czech Cottages" are planned to be built.

--photo by Alan Rusch

apartment designed according to FEMA specifications. This is important since Kansas is well known as being in "Tornado Alley."

Finally, the apartments will be energy efficient. Features will include radiant floor heat, (which is 10-15 percent more economical than forced-air heat) and super insulation using straw bales that will achieve an R-40 to R-50 rating, compared

to an R-19 rating in a common stick-built home.

This enhanced energy efficiency, according to Criswell, will reduce energy consumption and lower utility bills, which is especially useful for persons on low incomes.

"I sincerely believe the affordable apartments I hope to build in Wilson will offer not only exceptional value for the residents who live in

them, but will also provide an example of the significant economic potential that straw bales could have for Kansas agriculture and Kansas communities," Criswell wrote in his letter.

During the next two weeks, Criswell hopes to have a design proposal of his apartments finalized, as well as cost estimates per square foot figured.

Learn how to straw bale build

by Alan Rusch

Building contractors and others interested in straw bale building construction will have a good chance to learn more about this cutting-edge technology when a Straw Bale Construction Seminar is held in Wilson next March.

Joyce Kopenger, straw bale technology pioneer from Lincoln, Neb., will conduct the seminar from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday, March 10, 2001, at the Wilson Senior Center. The cost of the seminar is \$25 per person. Those interested in attending this unique building seminar are asked to contact the Wilson Chamber of Commerce, 658-2211.