

**Panning: 2016 Grand Marshal has spent a lifetime putting service above self**

By Mike Courson

Service above self is the motto for the Rotary Club and the newly-veiled theme for the 2016 After Harvest Festival Parade. In 1992, lifetime-Ellinwood resident Larry Panning was recognized by the Ellinwood Rotary for his service above self. Rotary again recognized Panning, this time naming him the 2016 AHF Parade Grand Marshal.

"He was nominated by his granddaughter," said Rotary's Rosie Joiner. "There were probably half a dozen other nominees. What we did last week at our club meeting was each member voted on the theme and the grand marshal. The majority of them chose Larry."

"Larry's parents taught him to work hard and to have unconditional love for his family and his community," said the nomination from Elissa Moore. "Learning from his grandparents who donated the land for the St. John Lutheran church, and his parents who worked hard owning local businesses, helped lead his way into entrepreneur and leadership in the community, county, and state."

Panning has lived in Barton County his entire life. Ellinwood did not have a hospital when he was born, so he officially joined the world in Great Bend. He graduated from Ellinwood High School in 1949, attending the University of Kansas for a year, and spending another year at Kansas State University before returning home to the family farm.

**Life on the farm**

Panning was on the family farm in April 1959 when a now-notorious

sinkhole began swallowing the property. It was just around noon that day when the large hole opened.

"At the time we stepped this off, we were probably 300 feet in diameter, maybe 400," he said. "Things were happening so fast we didn't even worry about measuring. Safety was a primary concern. My family lived just a location to the west, which is 990 feet. This thing just kept growing and getting bigger and bigger."

Now retired, Panning enjoyed nearly six decades of farming in the area. With crops like corn, soybeans, wheat, alfalfa, and milo, the job never got old.

Panning is known for his community work. A lot of that work revolved around the farm. In the 1950s, Panning and his wife helped start the local 4-H. His kids remained active in the club for 14 years.

"We needed to get them into something and 4-H, to me, was a good, clean hobby that taught them something to do other than just shoot a basketball," he said. "The boys had animals, the girls did their sewing and cooking. It taught them the ways of life and how to be able to subsist on their own."

Panning was also active with various irrigation boards. He spent 17 years with the Barton County Irrigators, and was part of the Kansas Water Authority for 13 years.

"During session, I was in Topeka almost every week," he said. "We'd lobby for this bill or that bill, or get in there and tell them to wake up, this bill is no good. We were trying to protect our position as far as water users in the



**LARRY PANNING**  
**2016 AHF PARADE GRAND MARSHAL**

state of Kansas."

Panning made an unsuccessful run at the state legislature but did spend eight years on the Ellinwood City Council. He made it to the highest office in the land - sort of - when, as part of the Farm Bureau, he met President Gerald Ford in 1975.

"I was picked as one of 10 delegates from the state of Kansas who got a trip Washington," he said. "I got to sit right next to President Ford. There were two of us elected to be able to talk to him. They wouldn't let just anybody. It was going to be in a formatted manner."

Panning still remembers his question to Ford about the unfairness of the estate tax.

"I buy a piece of property and I pay taxes on that," Panning said. "And I have to pay taxes all during my life as long as I own it. When I die, my kids inherit it and they have to pay taxes on top of it again. I said that wasn't fair. He said, 'I'll take that under advisement,' but that was just a pat answer."

**The big parade**  
Panning was last in the After Harvest Festival Parade in 1992 as the Rotary Distinguished Citizen, but he's long been around, usually taking pictures of all the parade entries.

"They'd always stop in front of the stand, which is an asset," he said. "I'd be up on the wagon, which gave me some height, which was an asset. It was just natural for me to be able to take pictures."

"I would print those up on a viable postcard. On one side was their picture and on the other side was a thank you note, and we sent it to the person who was in the picture. I thought it was a thank you note for each entry in the parade, and I was pretty proud of that!"

Panning also teamed up with Joiner to help organize the parade each year before turning over the reins a couple years ago. "There's quite a bit involved in getting all the entries lined up," he said. "A hundred entries, you have a hundred people you have to get lined up and get their little write-ups so the announcer can say who it is."

Panning's love of photography does not end with the AHF Parade. He likes to take pictures everywhere.

"When they digitized photography, that changed the whole world of photography," he said. "You could go out and take 10,000 shots and it wouldn't cost you anything unless you wanted to print them. Once you bought the camera, the sky was the limit."

A notable photo opportunity came at the Albuquerque International Balloon Festival in New Mexico where the Pannings saw more than 700 hot air balloons.

**The Wheat Bowl**

Panning also took pictures at the Wheat Bowl. He was asked to be on the board for those football games that kicked off the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) season from 1995-2006. The committee met in Panning's office that was once a cold storage locker built by his father in the 1940s. Panning even escorted a governor for one of the bowls.

"I got to be the escort for him because I was on the political end of things," he said. "I got to show him around the city, and I was his host through the ball game. He sat there through the whole game. That was a highlight I thought really promoted Ellinwood."

The Wheat Bowl was eventually discontinued due to a lack of facilities. Funding was always a concern as the committee was always lucky to break even. Still, the event brought in teams from out of state and was a big event for the area.

"We brought them in, hosted them for a weekend," Panning said. "They'd come in usually on a Thursday night, practice Friday, and have the bowl game on Saturday. We'd fill the football stadium. We'd bring in 10-12 sets of bleachers from the different schools and haul them in there so we'd be able to seat them all."

**3-Coin Club**

Finally, Panning is well-known for hosting the 3-Coin Club. For years, Panning would arrive at his shop on East First around 8 a.m. and brew some coffee. Other coffee drinkers would arrive for a drink and donuts around 9 a.m.

The group had a unique way of paying for the coffee: players would gather around the table with up to three coins in their hand. Each member would try to guess with total number of coins being held. No duplicate guesses were allowed, and he with the correct answer sat out the next round. Eventually one man was stuck with the wrong answer. He ponied over \$3 to pay for the coffee.

Detailed charts were kept to see who paid for the most coffee in a sort of 3-Coin Hall of Fame. "If they paid the most for the year, they got their picture taken and posted up there," Panning said.

Among Panning's many contributions to Ellinwood, he said he was also proud of his time spent in a group selected by the Pioneer Seed Company. Panning had been a seed rep for the company and was selected alongside the likes of Bob Peter and Richard Kimple to be part of the group that traveled to cities like Chicago, St. Louis, and Denver and brought entrepreneurial and leadership skills back to Ellinwood.

Panning and his wife, Dorothy, raised five children and now have 12 grand children and 19 great-grandkids. Four of his children still live in Barton County, and three call Ellinwood their home.

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