

A Fresh Look At Nebraska

-Isms

By LuAnn Schindler

Have you ever wondered how people who don't reside in "The Good Life" state view the landscape and residents of Nebraska?

Just over a decade ago, during a summer fellowship at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL, a classmate from Boston asked me – seriously – if cowboys and Indians still roamed the Nebraska plains.

Technically, I could have replied yes, although my view of the response wouldn't have matched his vision.

Before I could utter a reply, the misinformed man queried if we had indoor plumbing on our farm. Yes, again. The outhouse in the back yard is just a conversation piece and hasn't been used for 50-some years, long before my family moved here.

I asked if he had ever ventured farther west than Chicago – he hadn't – and questioned why he had such silly, outdated notions about Nebraska.

He'd read Cather, seen westerns on TV, and figured this area hadn't advanced as quickly as our coastal counterparts.

I pulled my cell phone from my backpack and assured him that Nebraskans were privy to technological advances, that we don't travel by horseback or covered wagon, and that myriad cultures are represented here.

Even now, his questions make me wonder about the symbolism of a state's culture and how we're presented to the rest of the world.

Since the holiday season kicked off, I've read multiple blog posts from travelers who crossed our state the past few weeks. Quite a few complained about the lack of beauty and the mounds of snow along the interstate. A few even compared their journeys to those of the pioneers who play an important role in our state's history.

I want them to realize that our state has been hit twice in the month of December by winter's fury so they may experience winter driving conditions.

I want them to realize that speeding across Nebraska at 75 mph in a gas-guzzling SUV doesn't even come close to the travails experienced by the trailblazers who crossed the rugged terrain in a covered wagon.

I want to tell them to exit I-80, find a back road, and see the real Nebraska.

And then, I want to ask them how they would market Nebraska. We may be surprised by the images conjured by others when the word "Nebraska" is spoken.

This year, the U.S. Postal Service releases the next set in the "Flags of our Nation" series, including Nebraska's postage stamp. Each stamp features the state flag and a depiction of life in that particular state.

Nebraska's stamp contains a center pivot.

It may not be a sexy, sleek image, but it does represent a large portion of Nebraska. The Census Bureau reports that 7,516,000 acres, or one-third of the state's cropland, is irrigated, mostly by pivot systems.

One image doesn't capture the heart of Nebraska. We're a diverse state population with the best of urban and rural lifestyles.

We're the quintessential symbol of determination and effort.

And that, in itself, is a sleek and sexy marketing tool.