

## Quality housing is key to Hutch's success

By Jessica Miller - Community columnist

**It's no secret that I love this community. Reno County has a lot to offer ... but we also have a lot of room for improvement. Of course, we don't have to evolve, but not doing so means we lose our opportunity to tout living here as an advantage and we don't attract new people or keep our existing residents.**

**For some people, this is perfectly acceptable. The majority, from my perspective, are excited about our prospects for growth and development. The Siemens announcement has sparked a new energy, yet also puts more immediate pressure on the community to address some areas of weakness that we've perhaps ignored too long.**

**An obvious area of concern is housing. Thankfully, the city of Hutchinson recently commissioned a housing assessment and the results have been presented. I suspect we'll soon hear about the tactics they'll employ to improve our housing conditions, but the city alone cannot reverse the problems.**

**In the past month, I've fielded several phone calls or e-mails from people outside of Reno County who were planning to move here but had no idea how to find information about rental properties. "Do any of your apartment complexes have Web sites? What areas of town are safe to live in? Where can I find information about properties available to rent?" are among the questions I've been asked.**

**On one hand, I'm so excited when people call and tell me they're moving here. Hurray!! And then I cringe when I have to say, "No, we don't have any apartment complexes that feature their property online. I'm sorry you're moving here from (different state) and you can't get a better feel for your prospective living arrangements." Meanwhile, I'm thinking to myself, "I'm not even sure where I would suggest you live, especially since you're coming from (college town) where apartments tend to have the modern-day amenities that many here do not."**

**Just last week, I spoke with four young professionals, all of whom have moved here within the last six months, and each said finding a place to live was a nightmare. None had the giddy excitement about their first apartment or house; instead, they were just breathing a sigh of relief that after much searching they'd found a place that was clean and somewhat up to date.**

**It's not a good first image when a young professional moves to the community, is excited for his or her new opportunity, has heard the community has a lot to offer, and yet, can't find a livable place to live. Certainly makes living in Wichita, or Kansas City, or any of several places they have opportunities look a lot more appealing.**

**I don't want to confuse the issue about the living conditions. We have two problems. Most frequently referenced are the deplorable conditions like the ceiling falling in, broken porches, missing sections of the floor, fire hazards, etc. ... often these are lower income properties and we hear about these conditions when the landlord refuses to repair them. By no means is this acceptable to me, and I'm hopeful the city takes a stronger approach to enforce codes and demand landlords improve the conditions of their properties.**

**The properties that I'm referencing - the ones that young professionals are looking at to make their home - are apartments that meet the standard for living in terms of not being decrepit, but they don't offer much beyond that.**

**I can hear some of you saying, "These young professionals don't need everything to be brand new," or something of that sort. You're right. It doesn't have to be brand new or luxurious. But if we want young professionals to move here and stay here, we better have rental properties that are modern and nice.**

**Things like clean carpet, well-lit rooms, working appliances, deadbolt locks, water pressure, frost-free refrigerators, cable jacks and window screens are living essentials for most all of us. But if you rent in Hutchinson, these aren't guarantees. And that has to change ... soon. Or people will choose a different community to live.**

**Jessica Miller is a Hutchinson transplant and coordinator for the Reno County Growth Coalition.**

**E-mail: [jessica@renocountygrowth.com](mailto:jessica@renocountygrowth.com).**