

## High School - & Your Community

By Ken Sommerfeldt

*Once a week, the Lethbridge Herald publishes a column written by a superintendent of one of five school jurisdictions in the Lethbridge area. This week's column is authored by Ken Sommerfeldt, Superintendent for Westwind School Division and was published on March 15, 2017. CASS thanks the Lethbridge Herald for permission to post this article on our website.*

In the current context of Alberta and across North America, rural communities are struggling to maintain their place in an increasingly urbanized society. Yet for many, the value of the rural experience is of great importance. Recently Doug Griffiths, a former Alberta MLA and cabinet minister, reflected on the excellent footing he received from his own background as a youth and a teacher in rural Alberta at the Rural Education Symposium in Edmonton. In his book, "13 Ways To Kill Your Community," he identifies the following as some of the ways to grow our communities... Ensuring that you are attracting business, engaging youth, shopping at home, collaborating with partners, and welcoming our Sr. citizens, are among Griffiths' key messages.

In southern Alberta, many of our rural communities are thriving and growing even against some of the struggles that urbanization presents. Of particular note, *engaging youth* is a critical piece for rural communities. I was pleased to attend a number of games in the Southern Alberta 4A Boys and Girls zone basketball tournament this past weekend. In this event, schools of all sizes in the south were competing for a zone title as well as the right to contend for a provincial crown. School by school, and game after game, I observed students, parents and communities come out to support their teams. The student sections at courtside in the University of Lethbridge gym became the scene of significant emotion and energy.

What a great event! It is perhaps the finest basketball tournament in the province. A capacity crowd was on hand on Saturday night to witness the championship game between Raymond and Magrath. These are the two smallest schools in the 4A league, and some disappointed fans had to be turned away... SOLD OUT... If attendance at a high school basketball game is any indication of the strength of a rural community, then it would appear that they are alive and well. Magrath High School, the smallest school in the tournament emerged victorious.

Whether a champion, a participant, a runner up, or a fan, these experiences will remain with these young men and women as a part of their identity for the rest of their lives. We are most fortunate to be part of the greater southern Alberta community and to share in the heritage that is common to us all.