



Alma residents stand behind the town's new dentist, Dr. Jesse Neal. His wife, Seri, and children, Addison, 2, Isaiah, 4 months, and Jakin, 1, are part of his support system.

## Dentist Fills Need in SMALL TOWN

by Elizabeth Kumru

Jesse Neal, D.D.S., knew that opening a dental clinic in Alma, Neb., population 1,214, would mean a significant out-of-pocket investment.

What he didn't realize was the payoff waiting for him and the community.

In Alma, an agricultural town with a tourist appeal on the northwest shore of Harlan Lake, the average person is 46 years of age and makes around \$28,600 a year.

There are about 600 houses within the city limits, which covers less than a square mile. Unemployment is 3 percent and the cost of living is 28 percent below the national average.

The last dentist closed shop five years ago and until October 2006, Alma residents traveled at least 30 miles to Holdrege or Franklin for dental care. For people living in the town's retirement center, a dental appointment meant a group bus trip.

Dr. Neal, a 2003 UNMC College of Dentistry graduate and

North Platte native, changed that when he set his sights on Alma about a year ago.

"I heard, for a long time, that Alma needed a dentist and then I saw their information at the college's practice fair in the spring of 2006. My wife and I visited the town, and we were impressed. We thought it would be a great place to raise our young family," Dr. Neal said.

Negotiations began with the Alma Development Corporation, and a match was made.

Dr. Neal invested more than \$300,000 to create a state-of-the-art, digital office. Paper charts do not exist. He is especially proud that his is the first private dental office in the state designated as a telehealth site, which means he can consult with UNMC experts in Lincoln and Omaha through a live feed.

Likewise, the town invested in its new dentist. As an incentive to move to Alma, the development corporation renovated the



Dr. Neal and his staff, from left: Brie Hoffman, dental hygienist; Sandee Padgett, dental assistant; Kara Coetter, dental assistant; and Megan Mintzmyer, office manager.

old dental clinic, gave Dr. Neal a year holiday on his lease and an option to purchase the building.

As a further incentive, the town of Alma, with state matching funds, promised to help Dr. Neal repay his student loans to the tune of \$20,000 a year for three years.

Together, the town and development corporation blanketed the entire area with grand opening announcements, and Dr. Neal's practice was off to a solid start.

It's not all about money and building a practice, as Dr. Neal discovered. It's also about building a home.

For this one-time investment, the payback to the community is more than doubled every year, according to John Reinhardt, D.D.S., dean of UNMC's College of Dentistry.

"Research has shown that, on average, the addition of a single dentist to a community has an economic impact of more than \$1.2 million annually. This impact can be a tremendous boost to the local economy of a small town," Dr. Reinhardt said, quoting an article from the Journal of the American Dental Association.

But, it's not all about money and building a practice, as Dr. Neal discovered. It's also about building a home.

When his wife was prescribed bed rest before their third child was born, the people of Alma helped with the children, cooked meals and cleaned their house.

"The people here not only opened their pocketbooks, they opened their hearts. They are generous of spirit," he said. ☺☺

## UNMC has \$1.5 billion impact on state

The impact of one dentist in Alma is part of a larger picture of how UNMC affects the economic health of the entire state.

During fiscal year 2005-06, UNMC and its hospital partner, The Nebraska Medical Center, had a \$1.5 billion total impact on Nebraska, or about \$4.1 million a day.

That's an average of \$876.55 for every man, woman and child in the state.

The two health care organizations supported 17,100 jobs and attracted \$325 million in new dollars to the state. And, for every dollar invested by the state, UNMC and the hospital return \$14.

The combined annual economic impact of UNMC and its partner was determined by Development Research Partners, a Colorado firm with expertise in economic research impact studies. Figures in their report were calculated using appropriate Department of Commerce multipliers.

### Highlights from that report:

- ▶ Third largest employer – UNMC and The Nebraska Medical Center employ 9,500 people – making the combined enterprise the third largest public employer in the state.
- ▶ Research – UNMC's research funding climbed to nearly \$80 million during fiscal year 2005-06, an increase of nearly 10 percent over the previous year's record high of \$72.5 million. Every \$1 million of research funding creates 31 new jobs. UNMC's research enterprise supports more than 2,400 jobs.
- ▶ Education – UNMC has more than 3,000 students on its four campuses (Lincoln, Kearney, Scottsbluff and Omaha). Student spending, through housing and student living expenses, has an annual economic impact of \$86.2 million to the state.
- ▶ Patient care – Visitors to the medical center campus generate another economic return to the state through the purchase of food, retail items, entertainment and lodging. The impact of these purchases is \$8.8 million.

For the complete report, visit: [unmc.edu/impact](http://unmc.edu/impact).