

Howard story appears in book about change

By ELISA SAND
Staff Reporter

Howard's Rural Learning Center and the grassroots effort on how it began is one of several inspirational stories highlighted in a new book called "Switch: How to Change Things when Change is Hard" by Chip and Dan Heath.

The book, released Feb. 15, examines the topic of change and the motivation behind it. To illustrate their point, the authors look at several real-life examples of how change took place and why it was a success.

The Rural Learning Center story is featured in chapter 3. What's illustrated isn't the community revitalization efforts that are happening now, but rather the catalyst that started revitalization efforts in 1995.

That catalyst was a group of high school students, looking at how community members spent their money and discovering that local residents were in the habit of spending money outside the community. That discovery led to a public meeting where people were asked to spend more money locally. Students told community leaders at the meeting that if each person spent a little more money locally, it could make a big impact on sales tax revenue.

That meeting resulted in more local spending then which continues today.

Kathy Callies, vice president of advancement for the Rural Learning Center, said she and RLC President Randy Parry shared their story with the Heath brothers at a conference in 2008, but it wasn't until the book was released that they realized how much of Howard's story was included in the book.

Callies admits that even though she knew the story was going to be included in the book, she thought it would get a brief mention, but never dreamed it would cover six pages.

Unexpected results are showing up. Several weeks ago, Callies said, Howard's city finance officer was contacted by e-mail by a gentleman in Austria who was attempting to reach Parry.

Callies said that the story didn't mention the Rural Learning Center, which made it difficult for the man to contact them. His motivation for doing so, however, was the fact that he had received an advance copy of the book and wanted to talk to Parry about what he could do to spark some change in his community of Marzell, Austria.

"He's been there since the 1970s," Callies said.

Marzell is a small, rural community nestled in the Alps. Callies said the demographics of the community are predominantly older wealthy individuals who spend most of their money outside the community.

Now, Callies said, the Rural Learning Center will be partnering with that community to look at changes.