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### PASTOR'S MESSAGE

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Dear Open Prairie Family,  
Do you ever wonder about God's timing? Do you ever think gosh, I wonder why I felt moved to do this or that one way and not another? That was true for me as I made preparations for a recent trip to New Orleans to lead a healing retreat for women, who survived Hurricane Katrina and are in the midst of putting their lives back together. The invitation to go caught me off guard in the first place, and I felt somewhat removed from my body when I heard myself saying "yes". I had no doubt that God was in the drivers' seat on this one. That being true, it was easier to follow the little inspirations that crept up in the middle of the night, like go ask all the local merchants in Princeton to donate goodies for a sweet dream bag to be given to the women at registration, or write to all the women you can think of and ask them to contribute a prayer to leave with the women when the retreat is over-gather enough prayers for three years. It all happened so quickly, with less than a month to plan the retreat, there wasn't the usual time for second guessing the Holy Spirit and surprise, surprise that turned out to be a really good thing. Just as I had said yes, so did other people, much to my astonishment and delight they said yes in spades! The result was an utterly beautiful twenty-four hour retreat with fifty-four women from New Orleans and nearby towns and six leaders.

Their arrival at the Five Star Hotel, the Chateau Sonesta, in the heart of the French Quarter was a sight to behold. Registering and receiving their goody bags (canvas tote bags filled with gifts, prayers, registration packets, stationary and journals) they were like kids on Christmas morning. That was when I knew for certain that God was planning to stir things up...that first hour started a tingling in my spirit that has not subsided in the week that has passed since the event.

The experience as a whole divides evenly into two parts: New Orleans itself and the

HeartSongs Retreat with the women. We arrived on a Wednesday evening and were met by our host Debra Joseph. Driving into the city from the airport the storm damage was not as prevalent as one might expect. I thought to myself well, it is a year after the fact and I guess things are starting to get back to normal. This perception would change dramatically during our tour of the devastated regions within New Orleans the following day. But that night Debra took us to a wonderful little local establishment called the Praline Connection. I thought I had died and gone to heaven, catfish, shrimp, okra, hush puppies and peach cobbler-my Texas roots were happily exposed. We ate well, we walked around the French Quarter, (an area that sustained surprisingly little damage) and then we climbed into our four-poster beds at the fancy hotel. What had I been worried about, it did not appear that this was going to be as hard as I had originally thought.

Then Thursday came, it brought with it a series of eye opening events that converted me from sightseer to activist. What I saw was neighborhood after neighborhood riddled with destruction. The closer we got to the levees the worse the carnage. It was a sea of despair-gutted house, after gutted house, no banks, no restaurants, no grocery stores, and no schools. The poorer the community, the less attempts had been made to restore any sense of order. How can order be restored when houses were virtually lifted from their foundations and swept away leaving people to prove to insurance companies that a house and all that was within it ever existed in the first place? We listened to the stories of the people who stayed as long as they could, only to be displaced and separated from their families once the storm had passed. How can they be expected to return and rebuild with no resources to do so? We listened to the very disturbing plight of the migrant day laborers who in most cases are the only people willing to trudge through the toxic sludge to empty out the corpse-like remains of people's houses. They are being underpaid, abused, and rounded up by

deportation agents once a month. We listened, and we listened, and street after street told the silent stories of unfathomable loss.

On the church bulletin board I share with you some reflections from John Pecoul of St. Matthew United Church of Christ New Orleans, his words about what happened and what continues to happen are more cohesive and insightful than any I could possibly offer. He has written a piece entitled "Beyond Katrina," it is a call to arms for all Americans to attempt to understand the peril experienced by the people of the Gulf Coast Region, and then respond by becoming advocates. I hope you will take a moment to read it thoroughly.

We returned back to the hotel with a renewed commitment to providing a retreat space for the women who had endured such travesty. On Friday they arrived. They began to talk, to share stories, to weep and to mourn their losses. For many of them this was the first time they had spoken of their experiences since Rita and Katrina struck. After all what was the point of sharing your story when everyone else was living through the same, if not worse? They were safe for a moment in time, to let down their guard. It was as holy a time as any I have been privilege to experience. The thing that astounded me, the thing I cannot get out of my head is this...Despite all that they have lived through in the past year, I have never met a more hope filled, generous and God centered group of people. I suppose it should come as no surprise-they say, "When you have lost everything, the only thing left is hope." What matters most is God and relationships with others, this was the under girding truth behind the hope. And as much as we are undeniably called to action on behalf of our brothers and sisters in Louisiana and Mississippi, we are also called to recommit ourselves, our ministries, and indeed our very lives to these truths. What matters most is God and relationships with others, all else is falsehood that creeps in to distract us from the real work to be done within our own churches and communities. The veil between heaven and earth, between God and people, was thin in New Orleans and I pray that what I saw and

experienced there will compel me to live the truth of hope again and inspire others to do the same.

Together we serve,  
Curran

silent August night  
the words I'd long held  
surged out in whisper;  
almost as though rustle  
of the forests' oak leaves  
bid the truth be told;  
"I am so afraid."

words of truth, air-suspended,  
softened by tender-rounded moon,  
sparkled on by a million stars.  
suddenly night seemed so bright.

the wind that rustled oak leaves  
was wind moving through me.  
the tiny trickling stream  
was bidding me to kneel,  
to be humble-poor before Holy,  
to lay my overwhelming fear  
in gentle, outstretched arms.

oh, for a moment, swept up in God,  
stilled, awed, and quieted.

this Presence is Holy, Holy, Holy.

God has taken my fearful heart  
and wrapped it in deep Love.

*Excerpted from Fresh Bread by Joyce Rupp.*

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## SENIOR YOUTH GROUP

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### SAVE THESE DATES:

September 17 – Bonfire at Hornbaker's  
October 18 – Round Table Talk  
October 22 – Tanner's Orchard Trip  
October 29 – Jubilee Sunday, work project  
November 12 – Round Table Talk

More information coming!

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## 2006 YOUTH MISSION TRIP

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*Youth:* Jason Behrends, Abby Beneke, Carl Carman, Evan Hale, Jared Jagers, Tara Jagers, Tyler Taylor, Creal Zearing, Sallee Zearing

*Adults:* Wendy Croisant, Susan Hale, Kathy Hornbaker

*College-Age Support:* Brian Taylor

Our group of 13 (9 youth, 3 adults, and 1 college-age) people left Princeton on Friday, July 7<sup>th</sup> and returned on Saturday, July 15<sup>th</sup>. Chris and Ann Mosby, former Princeton residents and friends of Open Prairie, generously opened their home for overnight housing for our group near Cincinnati, Ohio. We stayed at the Mosby's on Friday and Saturday night on our way to West Virginia and on Friday night as we headed back to Illinois.

In Pipestem, West Virginia we stayed at the Appalachian South Folklife Center. We slept in bunk beds and prepared our own meals in the kitchen. Monday through Friday we packed our lunch and headed to work together on the home of Carlos and Imogene Bonds. Dale, our carpenter, worked with us every day. Projects included: exterior painting, interior painting, replacing gutters, replacing fascia, lawn and garden work, drywall ceiling work, moving a piano, and more. Two days the Bonds prepared a home-cooked lunch for us! Our free time in the evenings included: ultimate Frisbee in the rain, intense bags, lots of cards, hilarious bluegrass flat foot dancing, a local storyteller/singer, a wonderful trip to a huge fire pit with a full moon overhead, 'images of the day', a tram ride down into a gorge at the Pipestem State Park, a wonderful trip to the magnificent waterfall.

Thanks to our OPUCC Family for supporting our youth. We are truly blessed!

- Kathy Hornbaker

On Sunday, July 23, the youth group and adults that were part of the West Virginia Mission Trip lead our worship service and shared their reflections of the trip.

The following is a reflection shared by Creal Zearing:

*Every evening, from our very first night at the Mosby's to our last night at the Mosby's, we ended or closed with our tradition of "Images of the Day". For me, this is a wonderful way to reflect and really think through the day. It allows me to be reminded of many smaller things that happened during the day that I might have forgotten about. The way that "Images" works is we find a quiet place for our group to be, going around in a circle, each person gets a turn to share his or her 'image'. 'Images' are special events that happened during the day or often beautiful views of scenery, etc that sticks out in each person's mind. This 'image' time also served as a time for us to share thoughts concerning issues about God and our purpose on this trip. We always closed our 'images' with singing 'Help me do the Justice...'. Our last night of the trip is traditionally a foot-washing which we did this year at the Mosby's home. Each person washes the feet of the person next to him or her. The remaining people in the group freely offer words of kindness about the person whose feet are being washed. It is a time to reflect on the strengths of each person and a time to be truly grateful for the special gifts that each person brought to the trip.*

*My personal reflections about the trip: Personally, I learned many, many things about carpentry. I'm sure that the things I learned about carpentry will serve me well in the future. On a broader sense, I learned about what it means to make a difference. I have always had this image of making a difference as something that is easily evident and that affects a large group of people. Because we worked with only one family and on only one house, I learned that making a huge difference is possible even when you're only helping one family. I know that what we did to help the Bonds' changed their lives and that we have made a lasting mark in that area and in the world even if we only worked on one house.*

*I have been changed because now I will not underestimate the power of what seems to be a small difference. I also have changed in that I now have personal knowledge of a way of life that is different from my own. I have broadened my ability to understand and empathize with another group of people, further expanding my belief that every person is the same in the eyes of God.*

- Creal

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## CORRESPONDENCE

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Dear Friends of the Church,

My family and I want to thank you for the delicious sandwiches and other goodies you sent down to the house at the time of mother's funeral. You were so thoughtful to know we would not have the time or the desire to think about preparing lunch.

We also wish to thank all of those who have been so kind to my mother in her last years. Your phone calls, visits and gifts of love brightened her days.

God bless all of you –

Sincerely,

Anne Russell (daughter of Stella Earnest )

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Dear Open Prairie Family,

Thank you very much for the clothing bag and cross that you gave me for my graduation. I have had a lot of fun in the past few years being involved in your church's various activities, especially the potato bar and the mission trips. I'm sure I will see many of you around this year when on breaks from school. Thank you again for thinking of me on my graduation day.

Jared Bartman

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### **Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!**

On the very hot last Sunday of July, a work group from Open Prairie came to Pilgrim Park to undertake a planting project outside of the Conference Center. The Hornbakers had created a new planting design, delivered an impressive number of plants, and arranged for us to pick up a load of mulch. By the time the group had left, the plants were in the ground and the mulch was spread. Thanks to Open Prairie, the northeast side of the Conference Center is now beautiful again. Thanks for all of the hard work on a hot day and thanks to Kelly Autrey-Webber for organizing this Jubilee Sunday!!

Jim Jarvis Co-Manager

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Dear Friends,

As some of you likely know I serve on the Board of Directors for PADS, which is the local homeless shelter with shelters in both Ottawa and Peru. PADS has recently opened up a resale boutique in Peru ("Lily Pads") and is in need of donations of like-new or gently used clothing and household items. All proceeds from the shop go to support the shelter operations. We run on grant monies and donations, both of which are harder to come by these days. The shop provides us with a means by which we can create our own revenue to support our mission. We are a tax-exempt organization and therefore any donation, is of course, tax-deductible. If you have any items you would like to donate please contact me and I'd be happy to help facilitate a collection / drop-off.

Further, we are always in need of volunteers to staff the shelters sites (OCT-APRIL) and now we will need volunteers to work in the resale shop. If you, or your students (if you have a service-learning component or extra credit assignments for community service) would like to volunteer please feel free to either contact Sue Caley-Opsal, Mary-Jo Freeman, or me. Last shelter season, Yelena, Sue and I worked as a volunteer team covering one shift a month. It would be wonderful if we could get two or three more people to join us so that we could have two or more teams covering several shifts a month.

The shelter opens in October and runs from 7pm to 7am and the volunteer shifts are:

7-11pm, 11pm-3am and 3-7am. Last year we worked the 3-7am shift, as it is a good time to get some grading or reading done. The resale shop is open W-F 10-4 and Sat. 9-2. If you would like to join us or have students that could volunteer please let me know.

Thanks in advance for your generosity and assistance,  
Merri Mattison

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Dear OPUCC Family,

This has been a very difficult year for me and I am still a "work in progress". How much I appreciate the support of my church family! Your cards, visits, calls and especially your prayers have made such a difference.

Thank you, thank you, thank you,  
Hazel

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## GREETINGS from the MISSION TEAM

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Greetings from the Mission Team,

What a wonderful summer it has been!

The Harry Potter Festival held in July was a tremendous success in spite of the rain. Three thousand people showed up armed with umbrellas and wands ready for fun and chocolate frogs. Open Prairie transformed the Prouty Building once again into Honeydukes Sweet Shop. We were mobbed all night with enthusiastic witches and wizards clamoring for butterbeer and dragon snot. Thank you to everyone who worked so hard to make this a very successful fund raiser for the Mission Team. The festival is a great way for Open Prairie to be a positive presence in the community.

Also in July was our Jubilee Sunday. Open Prairie headed out to Pilgrim Park to plant and mulch LOTS of plants around the Conference Center. Thanks to the Hornbakers and Jim and Debbie Jarvis and to everyone who helped make this project a success.

In September the Mission Team will welcome Susan Hale as co-chair with Kelly. We look forward with great excitement to working with Susan's luminous energy in the projects to come.

We are very happy to announce that Open Prairie will be hosting a screening of Al Gore's documentary film "An Inconvenient Truth" on October 1st at 6:30. The film, which deals with global climate change, has been getting rave reviews all summer and is being made available to churches through the Eco-Justice Ministries. I hope everyone will take advantage of this chance to see this important film. Yes, there will be popcorn! Following the film there will be an opportunity for discussion.

The food pantry has requested cereal for the month of September. Thanks for keeping the donations coming.

It's great to be back!  
Peace,  
Kelly

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## STEWARDSHIP AND FINANCE

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### "Neighbors in Need" Special Offering September 24<sup>th</sup>

Open Prairie's vision of being a church that is open to all also includes a commitment to justice and compassion. We have an opportunity to expand on this priority through a special offering called Neighbors in Need.

This offering supports a wide range of justice advocacy and direct service projects throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. Essential grants are made throughout the year by the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries. The funds directly support grassroots advocacy and outreach efforts of the local church and conferences including issues of hunger and poverty.

The Just-Peace Appeal is now a part of Neighbors in Need. The UCC remains strongly committed to ministries of peacemaking, violence reduction, and conflict resolution. When you support Neighbors in Need, you support this vital ministry.

The offering also impacts the ability of the Council for American Indian Ministry to offer grants to 20 American Indian UCC congregations for their ministries affecting American Indian life including programs for youth and young adults and persons preparing for Christian Ministry.

If you would like more information, I have a list of recent grants offered through Neighbors in Need funds, or you can contact Diane Ford Jones in Justice and Witness Ministries at [fordjond@ucc.org](mailto:fordjond@ucc.org) or 216-736-3704.

Our generous gifts to Neighbors in Need on September 24<sup>th</sup> will under gird our ministries of justice and compassion. Please give this offering serious consideration.

See you in church,  
Patricia Wilson

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## CHRISTIAN ED

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### Confirmation!!

We are excited to be able to offer the Confirmation experience to two of our young people this year. Susan Fiegenbaum and Michael Zearing will begin the 2 year confirmation process on October 1<sup>st</sup> at 9:30 a.m. If there is anyone else who is interested in participating in becoming confirmed in the OPUCC Faith Community please contact Wendy as soon as possible so that can be arranged. Confirmation will meet on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday's of each month October – April for 2 years with confirmation set for Pentecost Sunday in 2008. There will be an informational meeting at 9:30 a.m. for parents, confirmands, and mentors on September 17<sup>th</sup>. Please plan to attend.

### Other News:

Special thanks to everyone who helped provide food and the van for our young people to go to Magic Waters on August 26<sup>th</sup>. We took 16 people from the congregation and the trip was a blast.

We are planning a church wide trip to Tanner's Orchard on October 22<sup>nd</sup> after worship. We will worship together at normal time and then gather for lunch followed by a caravan of folks to go to Tanner's Orchard and pick apples, get a pumpkin to decorate, feed the animals, play in the corn maze and many other activities. Mark your calendars now it will be fun for the family!

Sunday school teachers for the month of September are as follows:

September 3: Becky Perkins

September 10: Patricia Wilson

September 17: Wendy Croisant

September 24: Kathy Hornbaker

Next Christian Ed meeting is scheduled for October 23<sup>rd</sup> at 6:30 p.m.

### Intergenerational Work Trip:

Calling all folks who are interested in helping make a difference in people's lives! November 5 – 11, OPUCC will be sending 14 people aged 16 and older to Biloxi, Mississippi. We will be participating in a housing blitz working with up to 75 other people from across the country to help rebuild the Hurricane Katrina devastated area. We will be working together to hang drywall, and re-roof houses as well as other

basic carpentry skills. Sign-up sheets are available for people to begin making their commitment. We need to get our group of volunteers selected now so that travel arrangements can be made. For those who are not able to make the journey but want to help anyway, we will need people to donate tools and perhaps help some people with funding for travel and food expenses. The cost of the trip is \$50 per person plus travel expenses. We will be doing our own cooking once we arrive so their will be a minimal cost added on for food. Lodging is set-up for us in a trailer with a second trailer next door for cooking and lounging. Specific tools that are needed are listed at the top of the tool donation sign-up sheet. Talk to your friends and area contractors and see if you can get their support with these items. Again we can only take 14 people so don't miss out on your opportunity to go and experience firsthand what people in our own country have been experiencing for over a year now.

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## HAPPY BIRTHDAYS

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### SEPTEMBER

|    |                                   |
|----|-----------------------------------|
| 1  | Michelle Feigenbaum               |
| 3  | David Johnson<br>Olivia Bettasso  |
| 4  | Dawn Nissen                       |
| 5  | Ray Kuhnert                       |
| 6  | Sara Hornbaker                    |
| 8  | Fox Webber                        |
| 13 | Hal Autrey                        |
| 16 | Beth Bickerman                    |
| 17 | Lark Fisher<br>Tyler McCombs      |
| 20 | Jim Heider                        |
| 24 | Molly Hornbaker<br>Sallee Zearing |
| 25 | Marilyn Calvert<br>Donna Chelin   |

*Note: if you have any additions or corrections, please let Peggy know at the church office.*

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## SEEKING LONG-TERM VOLUNTEERS

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You are needed for the recovery process from Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans!

Systems are in place for expanding and continuing the United Church of Christ's participation in the recovery and rebuilding of New Orleans. The UCC hurricane recovery office is in place, significant rebuilding work has begun, and much more work has been identified. Many volunteer work groups have already come and worked with people who have "unmet needs" in the recovery process. Groups are now scheduled well into 2007.

As the city comes back to life, long-term volunteers are needed to help facilitate the work of these groups and aid in the overall recovery and rebuilding. These volunteer positions are available in UCC National Disaster Ministries through the Volunteer Ministries "Partners in Service" program:

- Site Construction Supervisor – 2 positions
- Case manager – 1 position
- Volunteer Coordinator – 1 position
- Administrative Assistant – 1 position

For a complete list of responsibilities for each of these positions, contact the Prairie Association office.

Please contact Mary Schaller Blaufuss, Executive for Volunteer Ministries, ([blaufusm@ucc.org](mailto:blaufusm@ucc.org), 866-822-8224 ext. 3214), if you feel God is calling you to the ministry.

For specific information concerning the work and ministry in New Orleans, please contact Rev. Alan Coe, Minister for Disaster Recovery ([revacoe@yahoo.com](mailto:revacoe@yahoo.com), 830-832-2222).

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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|      |          |  |
|------|----------|--|
| 9/02 | 10:00 am | Worship Team Meeting                   |
| 9/03 | 10:30 am | Worship                                |
| 9/06 | 8:00 am  | Prayer group at Autry's                |
| 9/07 | 5:30 pm  | Organic box pick-up at Webber's        |
|      | 6:30 pm  | Choir at Webber's                      |
| 9/10 | 10:30 am | Worship                                |
| 9/13 | 8:00 am  | Prayer group at Autry's                |
| 9/14 | 5:30 pm  | Organic box pick-up at Webber's        |
|      | 6:30 pm  | Choir at Webber's                      |
| 9/17 | 10:30 am | Worship                                |
|      | 6:00 pm  | Sr. Youth Group                        |
|      |          | Bonfire at Hornbaker's                 |
| 9/20 | 8:00 am  | Prayer group at Autry's                |
| 9/21 | 5:30 pm  | Organic box pick-up at Webber's        |
|      | 6:30 pm  | Choir at Webber's                      |
| 9/24 | 10:30 am | Worship/ <i>Neighbors In Need</i>      |
| 9/27 | 8:00 am  | Prayer group at Autry's                |
|      | 7:00 pm  | Church Council Meeting                 |
| 9/28 | 5:30 pm  | Organic box pick-up at Webber's        |
|      | 6:30 pm  | Choir at Webber's                      |
| 9/29 | 5:00 pm  | Women's Retreat at Pilgrim Park begins |
| 9/30 | 3:00 pm  | Retreat ends today                     |

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## PRAYER GROUP

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A contemplative prayer group gathers every Wednesday morning at the home of Hal & Margaret Autrey from 8:00-8:45 a.m. We open our prayer time with the reading of a prayer, poem or Scripture. We then begin 25 minutes of contemplative prayer & meditation with the sound of a singing bowl. We conclude with a time for joys and concerns. We extend an invitation to anyone interested to talk to Margaret Autrey or Kathy Hornbaker, or stop by on a Wednesday morning to join us!



Open Prairie UCC  
25 E. Marion Street  
Princeton, IL 61356

**SEPTEMBER 3 – WORSHIP TIME  
RETURNS TO 10:30 am**

#### **CHURCH INFORMATION**

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Church Office:

25 E. Marion Street  
Princeton, IL 61356  
(815)872-5150

Church Administrator: Peggy Walley

Hours - Wed. 9-5, Thurs. 11-5, Fri. 9-12

[mail@openprairie.org](mailto:mail@openprairie.org)

Rev. Curran Reichert

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[www.openprairie.org](http://www.openprairie.org)