DAD Web site offers information to help bring young people back.

When Bethany Truginn's parents bought an acreage near Lexington where they could retire, she wanted to follow along.

"I figured after all the years they took care of me, I'd like to return the favor," she said.

Working in a coffee shop in North Platte, Truginn began researching jobs on the Internet.

"I've got three degrees that so far I've been unable to use in Nebraska," she said. "So I started looking for a grown-up job where I could meet people and get connected."

Surfing the Internet, Truginn landed on the Lexington Clipper-Herald's Web site.

Classified ads weren't too productive so Truginn clicked on a link to Dawson County careers.

She didn't immediately find a job but what she did find was a helpful person who worked

diligently to help her relocate.

John Bell is adamant about retaining and attracting young people to Dawson County.

Bell, a 1994 graduate of Gothenburg High School, had gone off to college and started his career when he realized at age 28 that he wanted to move back home.

“I really didn’t know where to turn,” he said of looking for a job and housing here.

Now the director of Dawson Area Development’s Advocating for Business Labor Education (ABLE) program, Bell has developed a Web site that can help families find their way home.

In 2006, DAD received a grant through the Creating Educational Partnerships Act that helped produce www.dawsoncountycareers.com. The site was launched in January 2008.

The Web site is what Bell calls a clearinghouse of information.

“Anything that would pertain to someone wanting to locate in Dawson County can be found there,” he said.

Not only are there 45 to 50 job opportunities posted on the site but there is also a list of Dawson County businesses, information on housing and day care services and a cost of living calculator.

“I know high school kids get fired up about going to some place like San Diego and making a ton of money,” Bell said, “and I can’t blame them. What they can’t wrap their heads around, though, is the difference in the cost of living.”

Hopefully, Bell said, giving students that kind of information before they leave for college will mean it's in the back of their minds when they are looking for a place to land later in life.

The available jobs listed tend to be employment opportunities that might entice a person to move. At the same time, Bell said the catalog of businesses in the county gives searchers a chance to see what's here.

"For instance, it could give a pharmacist living somewhere else the opportunity to talk to a pharmacist here, even though there isn't a job posted," Bell said.

Job searchers have the choice to contact companies directly or submit a resume to DAD and have Bell put out the feelers.

"I get an average of three to five resumes a week," he said. "I forward them to companies I think might fit their skills and I hold their hand throughout the process."

That's the direction Truginn took. Response was not immediate but after three or four months of working closely together, Truginn was hired as an marketing representative in Lexington.

"I was pretty impressed," Truginn said. "I figured that if someone was willing to put that much effort into helping me find a job, the community must be something special."

DAD has links to www.dawsoncountycareers.com on all three of the county's major newspapers' Web sites. Bell said that's where a majority of the site's hits come from.

The ABLE program was started by DAD because businesses in the county said they were struggling to find qualified workers, Bell said. The Web site is one way DAD can try to help.

“The Internet and word of mouth are the top two ways people receive information when they’re looking to relocate,” Bell said. “And for educated people, with an associate’s degree or higher, the Internet is their primary way of researching.”

The Web site may also be an avenue for keeping businesses open.

An example, Bell said, would be a business owner who wants to retire but has struggled to sell.

“A listing on our site isn’t like putting a for sale sign in the window,” he said. “This hits a much broader market.”

Bell hopes to eventually expand the Web site with a link to a Dawson County blog and even a Facebook page for Dawson County alumni.

“We need to take our recruiting efforts even farther,” he said, “catering toward individuals as much as we do businesses.”

Truginn said the kind of personal attention she received made a significant difference.

“The world is all about knowing somebody who knows somebody,” she said.

Through the DAD Web site, she found that advantage.