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HOMETOWN POLITICS

Kansas town claims 2 GOP presidential hopefuls



REMEMBERING WHEN: Alice Mills, 94, taught math to both Dole and Specter. 'They were bright and industrious,' she says.



ARLEN SPECTER: Left town after 1947 high school graduation for college in Pennsylvania



BOB DOLE: Born in Russell, he attributes his success to the help of town's residents

Foster decries GOP attack on his candor

By Judy Keen and Mimi Hall
USA TODAY

Dr. Henry Foster says it's unfair that his nomination for surgeon general may hinge on his estimate of the number of abortions he's performed.

Foster, in an interview with USA TODAY Monday, said his "guess" that he'd done only one abortion, amended to "fewer than a dozen" before he settled on 39, shouldn't raise doubts about his honesty.

"I made a mistake," he says. GOP senators say they'll focus on Foster's candor and his 38-year career in confirmation hearings set to begin May 2.

"The issue is the divisiveness of his medical practice and his lack of candor," says Sen. Phil Gramm, R-Texas.

"I don't believe he is going to be confirmed," says Gramm, who will filibuster.

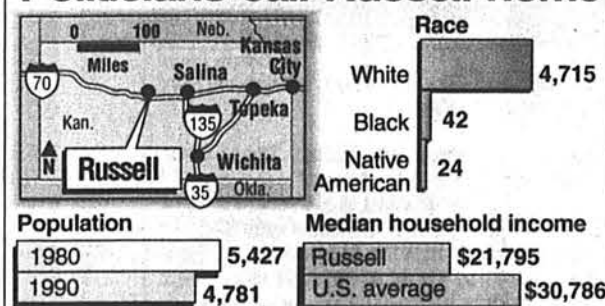
Foster has been criticized for sterilizing mentally retarded women and for possible knowledge of a government study in which poor black men were left untreated for syphilis.

Foster, who developed a teen-pregnancy prevention program hailed by President Bush, expected the scrutiny.

"Most people who do something of benefit have to encounter controversy," he says. "If you play it totally safe, you don't accomplish a lot."

► Academic, apolitical, 6A

Politicians call Russell home



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

By Suzy Parker, USA TODAY

COVER STORY

Dole, Specter look to roots in Russell

Town 'has a lot of self-reliance. It taught its kids to be self-reliant'

By Judi Hasson
USA TODAY

RUSSELL, Kan. — Bill Clinton has "a place called Hope." Jimmy Carter is "the man from Plains."

But this small prairie town in Kansas has a double claim on history: two favorite sons who grew up here, graduated from the same high school and are running for president.

In the next two weeks, Bob Dole, the Senate majority leader, and Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania both return to Russell (pop. 4,781) to help kick off their campaigns for the 1996 GOP presidential nomination.

"It's the weirdest thing that's happened to us since the oil boom," says Everett Dumler, 75, a life-long resident.

At first glance, Russell doesn't appear to be a hotbed of politics. Grain silos stand tall, the brick-paved Main Street

COVER STORY

Town's economy struggling again

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runs past three stoplights, then out into the vastness of wheat, cattle and rigs pumping oil.

Except for the wind, it's quiet here. Crime is so low that Russell rents its jail cells for \$30 a night to other towns that need the space.

Living here at the same time in the 1940s, Dole, now 71, and Specter, 65, didn't know each other. But even so, residents believe the two share something unique, coming from a town once so isolated that some didn't hear about the bombing of Pearl Harbor until the next day.

There is a special strength here, they say, a drive that comes from surviving the Great Depression, grasshopper plagues, the deaths of so many young men in war, the ups and downs of crop prices, and now the flight of so many young people to jobs in bigger cities.

"This is a town that has a lot of self-reliance," says county attorney Pete Williams. "It taught its kids to be self-reliant. That's the thing that's led to a Dole, a Specter coming out of this community."

Bob Dole was born here, left to go to college, then to war in Europe.

He came home on a stretcher, to recuperate from devastating wounds that paralyzed his right arm; later he returned to run for county attorney, the House and the Senate.

Specter moved here with his family when he was 12, leaving after high school for college in Pennsylvania and Yale Law School.

Both will be calling Russell their middle-America hometown.

"It sounds kind of cornball, but I'm a smalltown guy at heart. It is a big part of my roots," says Specter.

"If I had any success it is because of the people here," Dole has said of Russell, where people passed around a cigar box to raise money to pay for his post-war rehabilitation.

"I can think of all the times the people of Russell helped me when I needed help."

Russell's last fling with fame was in 1991 when four young women said they saw angels from a UFO visiting the town.

But people say that's not how things usually work in this stoic community settled by European immigrants in 1871.

That year, about 60 families arrived from Ripon, Wis., the birthplace of the Republican Party. First known as Fossil Station, the town was renamed for Avra Russell, a Civil War hero.

By the time the Doles arrived in the 1900s, it was a small farming community where the days were long, the work hard.

Dole's father, Doran, ran a small



DOLE HOUSE: Norma Jean Steele, left, and Gloria Nelson, sisters of Sen. Bob Dole, outside the family home in Russell, Kan.

market where farmers brought eggs, milk and cream to sell. Later, he managed a grain elevator.

Specter's family came much later — 1942. His father, Harry, was a Russian immigrant who sold cantaloupes door-to-door in Wichita, turned to the junk business to make a living and moved the family to Russell. They were the only Jewish family in a community of mostly Lutherans and Catholics.

Making ends meet wasn't easy for either family.

In the 1930s, Doran Dole moved his family, including four kids, into the basement of their home so they could rent out the first floor to stop the bank from foreclosing on them.

Bob Dole worked at Dawson's Drug Store during high school to help his family; Specter worked on a farm owned by his best friend's family when he wasn't helping his father.

"We didn't ever go hungry," Dole's older sister, Gloria Nelson, says. "We always had food — but maybe it was potatoes and beans."

In the 1920s, Russell got a lucky break: Oil was discovered.

So much oil that when other towns suffered through the Dust Bowl, Russell had a tax base that kept it alive. At its peak, the oil fields produced 9 million barrels a year. Today, it's about 4 million.

That gave Russell the income to pay its school teachers just a little better than anywhere else in Kansas.

Alice Mills, 94, was one of them. She is probably the only teacher who has taught math to two presidential candidates.

"I probably was too strict," says Mills, a life-long Democrat.

She remembers Dole as a good student, Specter as a "great" one.

"They both earned their As." But "I wouldn't say they were headed for great things. They were great kids.

They were ambitious. They were bright and industrious."

Today, Russell is a western mix of old and new: It still costs only \$2.50 to go to the movies, but people get their news by cable or satellite dish, their clothes by catalog or by driving Interstate 70 to Salina or Hays.

The economy is struggling again: The bottom has dropped out of the local oil drilling market. Fifty percent of schoolchildren in Russell County get federally subsidized lunches.

The Russell Historical Society has scrambled to put together a glass case exhibiting the early years of Dole and Specter. But people seem unfazed by the town's new prominence.

And they are good natured about the fact that come primary day, people here — two-thirds of them registered Republicans — must make a choice between two favorite sons.

"We know Arlen real well," says Nelson. "We just like Bob Dole a lot better."

Says Specter's sister-in-law, Joyce: "I like Bob. Naturally, Arlen comes first."

They aren't, after all, the only local kids who made good. There are doctors and lawyers and CEOs who grew up in Russell during that time when the best and brightest taught at Russell High School.

There is Gary Sick, a Middle East expert, and Marj Dusay, a TV soap opera star. And Steve Mills, a TV producer whose credits include the CBS miniseries, *Lonesome Dove*.

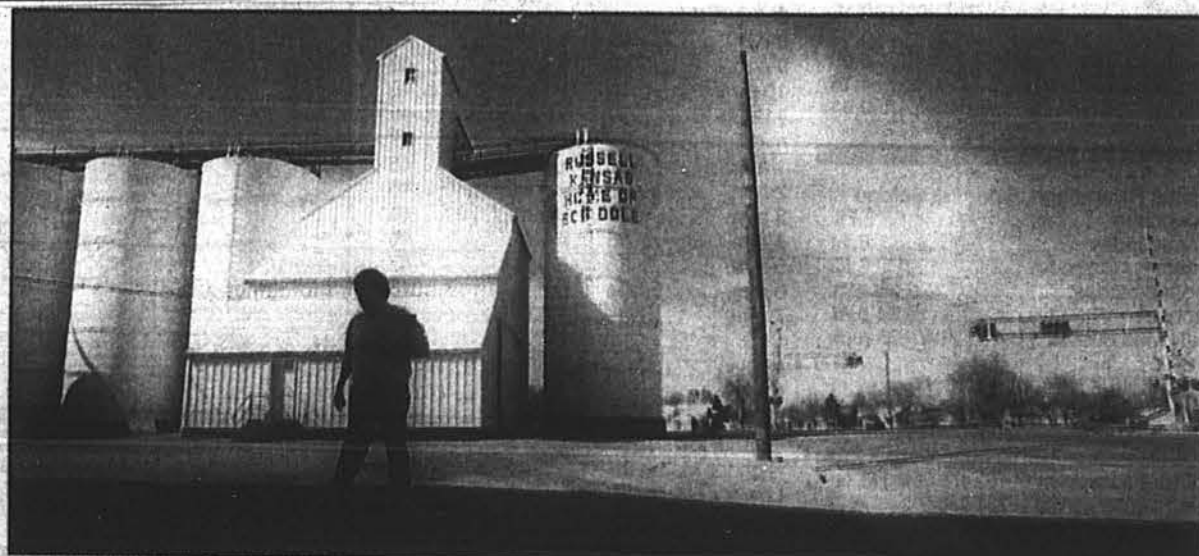
"We're not nearly in the boonies today like we were then," says Steve Mills.

Says town historian Jill Holt: "We're a small town, but Russell isn't immune from the rest of the world. It's not an Eden here. But there is a strong sense of community."

THE TOPEKA CAPITAL-JOURNAL Wednesday, March 29, 1995

Both Sen. Bob Dole and Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., claim Russell as their hometown, and will announce their presidential candidacies there. The grain elevators in Russell were once managed by Dole's father.

—Associated Press



Dole, Specter have roots in Russell

By JULIA PRODIS
The Associated Press

RUSSELL — Like the clock on the old county courthouse that has been stuck for years at 9:28, sometimes it seems as if time has stopped in this little prairie town.

Old farmers still gather over coffee early each morning to discuss politics and the weather. Pickup trucks still roll over the bricks that pave Main Street. And after 114 years in business, the Banker family still owns Banker's Department Store.

This is the town where Sens. Bob Dole of Kansas and Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania grew up more than a half-century ago. And

Western Kansas town boyhood home for two presidential candidates.

by coincidence or fate, the two Republicans who still consider Russell home are running for president.

Is there something about this windswept town of 4,800 that nurtured two boys into men who could be president? Or is it just happenstance?

"It isn't the water," said Allan D. Evans, publisher of the Russell Daily News.

Three grain elevators are still the tallest buildings in town. Except for some boarded-up storefronts, Main Street hasn't changed much over the past 50 years. It's bordered on one end by railroad tracks and the other by old US-40 highway, which used to be the main route between Kansas City, Mo., and Denver.

Modest bungalows are decorated with platter-size, painted wood butterflies nailed to the fronts. Miniature windmills planted on front lawns somehow stand up to the fierce prairie winds.

The town was settled in 1871 by Wisconsin wheat farmers who were looking

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Dole, Specter have roots in Russell

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for "persons of good character and sober, industrious habits" to join their colony — words used in the charter and also to describe Bob Dole and Arlen Specter by their eighth-grade math teacher.

Dole was the grandson of farmers and son of a hard-working, though not always successful, businessman, Doran Dole. Doran's first enterprise after his return from World War I was the White Front Cafe, down the street from Banker's Department Store.

It failed before Bob was born in 1923. By then, Doran had gotten into the egg and cream business. He later managed the grain elevator that now is painted "Bob Dole Country" in big blue letters.

As a boy, Bob helped his dad scrub milk cans, count eggs and unload grain. In high school, when he wasn't running track or playing football, he was working as a soda jerk after class at Dawson's Drug Store.

"We hired him because he had a following," said Bub Dawson, four years older than Dole. "He was very popular and good-looking. All the girls liked him, but he didn't pay much attention."

He would arrive each afternoon in a crisp white shirt, white pants pressed just so and his black hair slicked back.

"He was very particular about the way he dressed," said his younger sister, Norma Jean Steele, whom Bob

would call "Sista."

It was also the time of the Depression and dust storms that plagued the Midwest.

The Doles were so broke they moved to the basement of their little white house and rented out the upstairs to oil workers for \$100 a month. Bob's mother, Bina, sold sewing machines for extra money and made matching outfits for the girls and pants for the boys.

"There wasn't anyone who hadn't been flat broke sometime in the last 20 years," said Russ Townsley, retired publisher of the Russell Daily News. "Whenever someone put on airs about how much money they had, they'd be put right down: 'Wasn't your daddy a bootlegger?' It's a great equalizer."

Then the black dust clouds came. Wet sheets were hung from windows to let air in on hot summer nights but keep the dust out. They'd be black by morning, and bathtubs would be filled with an inch of dirt.

It was after the worst dust storms that the Specters moved to Russell — a town of about 3,000 at the time — from Wichita. Arlen was 12, six years younger than Dole. His father, Harry, had made a living selling cantaloupes door-to-door and was ready to try his hand at the salvage yard business.

Just as Dole had worked for his father, Specter worked for his, picking up scrap pipe and metal from the oil fields. At harvest time, he'd help out on the Mills farm hauling wheat.

The Specters were the only Jewish family in town, and they welcomed Jewish servicemen from nearby Walker Air Force Base into their two-bedroom bungalow on Elm Street to celebrate holidays.

At first, Arlen was the subject of anti-Semitic remarks from some of his classmates, but he soon became popular acting in high school plays and winning the state debate championship.

"He was very active, very brilliant," said Alice Mills, his algebra teacher, who is 94 and still lives in Russell. "Arlen was very outgoing, more fun-loving. Bob was more serious."

Arlen was Mrs. Mills' favorite and still is.

But to most of Russell, Dole is the hometown boy.

"I don't feel anything awkward about it," said Specter's sister-in-law, Joyce Specter, who still lives in Russell. "May the best man win."