

COMING BACK HOME

Open spaces, no traffic attract Fortkamps

■ **Editor's note:** This is one in a series of feature stories about people who have returned with their families to their hometown of Imperial, after living and working in other communities.

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After years in Michigan, Jerel Fortkamp and wife Mary looked at Imperial as a place to settle and grow. Fortkamp was a 1993 Chase County High School graduate, and persuaded Mary, a Chicago native, to move.

Fortkamp is employed by Allo Communications and is also a consultant at Chase County Schools for its computer system.

Mary is an early childhood teacher at All Stars Preschool, teaching four and five-year olds, readying them for kindergarten.

The couple met in Michigan. Jerel graduated from Concordia College with a Bachelor of Arts in mathematics, while Mary graduated from Concordia College in Michigan with a Bachelor of Arts in early childhood education, with a German minor.

She was a missionary in Germany, and hopes to pursue that in the future, also.

While Jerel was an office manager for a computer business, Integrated Software Systems, for seven years, and also an IT Assistant Systems Administrator for an insurance company, he longed for the small town life. "I was a long way from home. I like the small town atmosphere, the open spaces, and no traffic," he explained.



Mary and Jerel Fortkamp enjoy being able to get from their front door to work in no time, in Imperial. (Republican photo)

Also, his family is in the area. Mary liked being with his family, and said moving to Imperial was "definitely an adventure, but I'm getting used to it. People know me before I know them."

Jerel enjoys being involved in the community and its sporting events. He's coached American Legion baseball, junior high football, track and more. "It's a good school system," he stated.

The couple, who married in 2008, also appreciates the fact that the constellations can be seen from anywhere out here. "It's very cold, but we can see the Milky way and every constellation," Mary noted. As a matter of fact, Jerel proposed marriage while the

couple was viewing a meteor shower.

While Jerel finds the lack of electronic supplies a fault in Imperial, Mary misses ethnic food, museums and the Chicago lakeshore.

But, if the couple were selling Imperial to a friend, they would applaud the laid back atmosphere, affordable housing and safe community. "It's very relaxing, with wide open spaces," Mary noted.

Both Fortkamps like the fact that people know the Fortkamp name, and relate them to others in the community.

They are involved in the Zion Lutheran Church and its organizations, as well as bowling leagues.

And, they're here to stay.

