

Nekoma job brought them to place they never wanted to be

■ Now, many connected with ABM site can't get N.D. out of their hearts

By Kevin Bonham
Herald Staff Writer

CAVALIER, N.D. — Eighteen years ago, Jim and Mary Hines couldn't imagine living in North Dakota.

Then, when they moved here from El Paso, Texas, in March 1974, they were greeted by one of the region's worst blizzards.

Four years later, when Jim Hines' military career took them away, they couldn't imagine raising their family anywhere else. So, they vowed to come back.

And in 1987, after he retired from the military, Jim and Mary Hines did just that.

They're not alone. The Hineses know at least a dozen other people in the Cavalier

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area who came to North Dakota in the early 1970s — because of the Safeguard Anti-Ballistic Missile program — and either stayed when it closed or came back later to retire.

A few dozen others with similar stories now are living in Langdon, Walhalla and other communities around the area.

"There are people who hated it when they came and they left as soon as they could," he said. "But a lot of people who came here fell in love with it, with the lifestyle."

Jim and Mary Hines could have been like the first group. Mary was raised in El Paso, Jim in Chicago. Neither had experienced small-town living before.

The Hines weren't even supposed to come here in 1974. Jim Hines was pursuing an Army career and had received a promotion to captain and a transfer to Colorado Springs, Colo.

A few others from Fort Bliss, Texas, were being transferred to Cavalier and Nekoma, N.D. And some of them — at least those with large families — were having trouble finding housing in the area.

Jim and Mary Hines were new-lweds with no children. So they reluctantly accepted a trade in assignments. They'd come to North Dakota, where Jim Hines would serve at the old PAR site, now known as the Cavalier Air Force Station in Concrete, N.D., which oversaw the operation at Nekoma.

"It was probably one of the the best decisions we ever made," Jim Hines said.

Some good experiences contributed to their fortune. Mary Hines recalls that 1974 spring blizzard. They had arrived without winter clothing. So Jim went to a local business to find some.

"They gave him all the hats in the store to bring home and said bring back what you don't need," she said.

Then, when they were looking for a house to rent, they found a beautiful farmhouse just outside of town. But they were convinced that the rent would be too high.

"The landlord said, 'what can you pay for rent?' And they gave us a washer and dryer to use," Jim said.

"It was that giving," Mary Hines said, that drew them back.

Jim Hines was an Army captain when they arrived in 1974. By the time he left, he was promoted to major. In the next seven years, the Hines family lived in Texas, New Jersey, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. He retired from the military in 1985 with the rank of lieutenant colonel.

Everywhere they went, they kept in touch with friends in Cavalier. They subscribed to the weekly newspaper, the Cavalier Chronicle, and even came back to town from the Middle East for a reunion.

The Hines family went back to El Paso, where Hines managed a radio station and did some substitute teaching. But after a year there, they decided to sell their home and move to Cavalier. They came back in December 1987, without a job or even a job offer to attract them.

"We wanted our kids to grow up in that environment," Mary Hines said.

Two of their three sons were born in Cavalier. The oldest, Matthew, will graduate from high school this spring. Tim is 15, and the youngest, Daniel, is 13.

Today, Mary Hines is executive director of the Cavalier Area of Chamber of Commerce. Jim Hines is a state parole officer and director of the Pembina County Community Service, Restitution, parole and probation office. He's also a part-time postal clerk in Cavalier.

Together, he says, they add up to a full-time job.

Mary says Jim also enjoys helping friends work on their farms, when he has time. He's driven sugar beet trucks and recently served as master of ceremonies of the annual Osnabrock Barley Festival.

"That's the highlight of my career," he said.



Jackie Lorentz, staff photographer
Jim and Mary Hines returned to Cavalier, N.D., to live after retiring from the Army and making several moves around the world.