# Gas makes a town boom...

### Associated Press Writer

ELK CITY, Okla. (AP) — In this second-time boom town perched on the rim of the high plains, there's a place for anyone miles north of town. If a man gets off the bus in Elk City, dead who wants to work — but not everyone who comes to work can broke and unskilled, Grace says he'll put him to work that find a place to live.

The natural gas boom in Elk City is largely hidden from motorists passing through on Interstate 40, the old Route 66. The forest of derricks that marked earlier boom times is gone due to an Oklahoma law limiting drillers to one deep gas well

But the figures still add up to "boom town." February's sales tax collections were 24 percent higher than Pebruary 1980, and the town's three banks and three savings offered a job building a nearby pipeline. and loans have estimated assets of more than \$200 million about \$20,000 for each man, woman and child in this town of

The 1980 census shows a 29.7 percent growth rate in the 182 telephone directory Yellow Pages is listings for companies weary Dickson said.

Elk City first struck it rich on oil in the '40s and '50s. Five years ago another wave of prosperity rolled over the town, located 110 miles from Oklahoma City, when oilmen began drilling for gas locked deep in the Greater Anadarko Basin. Experts estimate the entire basin holds about 88 trillion ubic feet of recoverable gas in deep zones below 15,000 feet. Shallow zones may contain an additional 30 trillion cubic feet or

town's capacity to provide essential services like housing.

afternoon, at \$10 an hour. With an annual 50 percent turnover in roughnecks, Grace's operation is hungry for men.

Garry Dickson, 29, and his wife, Shirley, 27, drove into Elk City one recent rainy day from Grenada, Miss., their worldly goods piled in the back of a pickup truck. Dickson, a welding assistant who has been out of work for four months, had been

The Dicksons had been on the road three days, searching the highways of western Oklahoma for a place to stay. "We found some little motels, one room, no phones, no ice buckets - just a bed, a bathroom and a TV. And they wanted 1970s. Townspeople think it was more. Nearly a quarter of the \$20 a night. That's the cheapest we could find," the travel-

"If I don't get something here I'm going home. We've got

settling in Elk City can be a nightmare. Growth "has put pressure on us to work harder at olanning," said Mayor Larry Wade, who doubles as publisher

# ...while one looks to the future

from the arid Trans-Pecos prairies. Instead of a dusty town that looks like little more than a good

place to stop for a chicken-fried steak, they would see wine vineyards, feedlots, factories, and one of the busiest airports in and other items. the world, with huge jetliners taking off and landing as fast as air controllers could clear the skyways. A few residents still believe this will someday be one of the world's great cities: New York, Paris, Rome, Tokyo - and Van enterprises.

"This is all going to be in the garden one day," says M.J. Mitchell, a retired Ford dealer, past president of the Van Horn Chamber of Commerce, and one of the town's foremost dreamers. "This is going to be Imperial Valley No. 2." Other citizens share Mitchell's hopes, but not his optimism

His dreams seem to have bypassed Van Horn, much as the interstate, forsaking the old main highway's route through the center of the town, skirted around its southern edge. Only drivers who take the Broadway Street exit ever seen Durham's Barber Shop, the Sage Theater or Van Horn's 17

Most residents make no bones about the fact that Van Horn is a small town where the main attraction on Saturday night is the church social or a pitcher of beer and a game of pool at the

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land in Van Horn instead of Washington or New York. VAN HORN, Texas (AP) — If this town's dreams had come "We're centrally located on the North American continent. true, motorists crossing West Texas on Interstate 10 would be and we were going to give them 1,000 acres rent-free for 50 startled by a giant agricultural-industrial metropolis rising years for a hangar and a terminal," he says. Other dreams were less farfetched.

Van Horn sits near the world's largest deposit of nonasbestos talc, mined for talcum powder, ceramic tile, plastics Mitchell and others laid out a 370-acre industrial park and publicized plans for a talc-processing factory, a tile plant, a gasohol refinery, an alfalfa-cubing operation and other

"All this used to be nothing but weeds," Mitchell says, sweeping his arm over the area set aside for the new businesses, a large pasture near the airport. The problem is

What went wrong? It wasn't for lack of water. Van Horn sits on an underground water supply so vast that the city allows unlimited use for irrigation, supplies its 3,400 citizens and those of Sierra Blanca. 30 miles to the west, with drinking water "and we have enough left over to drown El Paso," 120 miles to the

Banker Mike Hensley says some of the out-of-towners who proposed new industry had "financial statements that were

Ray Shotnell, who owns the town's funeral home, says residents should be realistic. "We're going to have to take a

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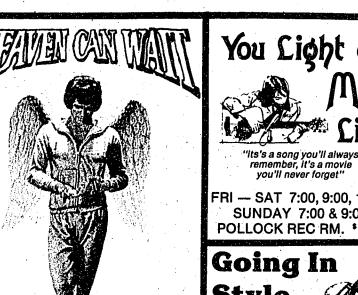
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