

Assisted living facilities for graybeards and grannies have overbuilt in Texas, according to the Texas section of *The Wall Street Journal*, to the point where competition is so severe, a unit in Wichita Falls is giving \$500 a month discounts on the rent and free moving-in services. Included in another offering in Wichita Falls, and from the same article, were free mammograms for visitors and a chance to buy the knickknacks the residents make in their spare time.

The story went on to say San Angelo has 200 empty spaces on a market analyzed to be 35,000 citizens over 65 years of age. No mention was made of free examinations or knickknack specials in the wool capital. I was particularly interested in knickknack sales. Might be the same type stuff we made back in Boy Scout camp in the 1940s, since this is the same generation of men. Demand wasn't high at camp, as I recall, for hand-fired clay ash trays and the horsehair watch fobs the troop plaited. But the Big Depression was still so fresh on people's minds, knickknacks moved pretty slow along any channels.

Giving the visitors free mammograms opened up another avenue of thought, too. Maybe with all this vacant space, some of the very ones assisting old grandpa or granny to move in a new place to develop their knickknack skills, might discover they are prospects to take the room across the hall if they start taking free physical exams.

Way back, an old pal of mine who ran a garage in Mertzon taught me an everlasting lesson on conflict of interest. He owned a machine to test spark plugs manufactured by the Champion Spark Plug Company, or that's close to the corporation's name. Our friendship went on the line every time six plugs needed changing on the pickup, or the one-lung Maytag motor refused to fire on the washing machine at the ranch. Be a complicated state of affairs if in the free moving-in phase, grandfather and grandmother had to turn around and move back home to look after the grandchildren because their siblings had flunked the free examinations.

But if perks develop at the ones over in San Angelo, the citizens will jump on the free deals faster than puff adders inflate on hot ground. Just last week, I baited a couple of good mechanics in Angelo by telling them if they'd move their shop to Mertzon, I'd see they received a dozen eggs every time they filled up in gasoline. I figured on saving 10 times that much having competent mechanics close by to hammer on the ranch's pickups.

A lady living two blocks from the Mertzon house selling fresh eggs for a buck a dozen was part of the scheme. The rest of the idea came from H.E.B. Grocers in San Angelo adding a big row of gas pumps in front of the store right up against a popular brand filling station. Next thing the chain did was offer customers a dozen eggs every fillup. Hoses on the pumps never have a chance to figure-eight. The

overall cholesterol level in San Angelo must have jumped 20 points over folks clamoring for six bits worth of free eggs that cost ol H.E.B. a quarter.

After reading the *Wall Street Journal* article, I have been trying to find how the analysts arrived at 35,000 potential customers out here. Saturday week ago, I called a friend's house to learn his reaction to the article. He was at the ranch working on a windmill just like any Saturday of his long life.

The reason I thought of him is that the saddle shop in Mertzon is making him a new saddle. A young horse he was riding jumped out of his trailer and tore up his old rig too bad to patch. Along with needing his opinion on assisted living, I wanted to know if he wanted to buy the old exhibition saddle here at the ranch to trailer his two year-old colts around.

I reached him on the way home on his cellular phone close to dark. He'd pulled two windmills instead of one on the report. After we'd condemned steel sucker rods and exchanged \$16 air time of old stories, I asked him how he felt about assisted living. He said, "Hell, Monte, I can't stand any more help at the ranch. The one tailing rods today is so slow he drives me crazy."

I haven't been able to reach other contemporaries. They are through shearing and may be shipping their early lambs, or working off a few calves to send to town. I am not eager to research this subject too far. I know a lot of herders

over 65 years old, but before I contact them on the subject of assistance, I want to be sure they understand it is not about trading work.