

Officials go the extra mile to serve residents

Digital platforms improve government services and offer convenience to the public



By YUAN SHENGGAO

Cui Yuhuan, 92, and his wife received a visit by a township official on July 8 at their home in Nandali township in Xiaoxian county in the south of Shanxi province.

The official visited to help the couple apply for an injury-care subsidy for seniors after he read a report from their family members on a local e-government platform.

The couple had been injured several days earlier while walking. Their sons and daughters were informed that seniors could receive a subsidy for injury care from the local government. Even better, the entire application could be processed online.

"I never expected the official to come so soon after my son scanned a QR code," Cui said. "Everything about the application was completed during the official's visit. We didn't have the bother of traveling to the township government several kilometers away."

There are 10 villages under the administration of Nandali township, scattered in the valleys and on the hills. "It takes a long time for villagers to go to the township government for public services," said Zhang Zhirong, head of the township government.

Offering convenience to residents

in public services has always been a top concern for local officials, Zhang said.

Zhang and his colleagues decided to innovate their ways by offering services using modern information technologies. They developed a platform for mobile phone users so that a majority of public service-related procedures can be handled online.

"We have posted notices in visible places across every village to inform residents about the operation of the platform," Zhang said. "And there are QR codes along with the notices so that villagers can connect to our platform."

The official said residents can easily browse information about various service procedures, including materials needed for the services and names and telephone numbers of officials in charge. "Residents can also book services to be handled at their homes if they have difficulties in traveling."

Zhang admitted public services offered that way demand greater efforts from officials than ever.

"But the efforts are rewarding if we can do something to address residents' concerns," Zhang said.

Nandali township is just one example of how officials in Shanxi are using the latest IT to improve governance at community level.

A similar example is taking place in Longquan township in Yanggao county in the northern Shanxi city of Datong.

On July 8, Yan Zhenguo, an agronomist from the county's bureau of agriculture and rural affairs, visited a vegetable farm in the township to provide technical



Residents in the village of Zhangjiawan in Lingqiu read job information posted on a vehicle dispatched by the county government. Sending employment information to villagers is part of the local government's efforts to better serve the people.

WANG ZHONGXUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

instructions to local growers.

Yan said he came to the farm after receiving requests from farmers through a WeChat mini program.

Zhang Xianyun, a vegetable grower in Longquan, said he was very happy to be served by an expert like Yan.

"He is an experienced agronomist and can solve almost all of the technical problems related to vegetable farming," Zhang Xianyun said. "He can be easily contacted when local farmers make a phone call or send a WeChat message and he is always keen to help."

The Yanggao bureau of agriculture and rural affairs has a team of farming experts, with local agronomists and experts from the rest of Shanxi among its members.

Over the past several months, the team has paid 18 visits to rural areas in Yanggao to offer technical solutions to farmers on site. The experts also held six training sessions for more than 240 farmers, according to officials at the bureau.

In Jincheng city in southeastern Shanxi, there is an online legal service platform that helps local laborers protect their rights.

The platform is operated by the Trade Union of Jincheng and a number of local lawyers offer services through the platform.

A recent complaint that the platform handled came from Guo

Qiang, a salesman at a local garment factory.

Guo wanted to settle a dispute with his employer. He said he asked for a leave for about 20 days in October last year due to illness but the company only paid him 802 yuan (\$124) as sick pay for the period and he thought this was much lower than the standard according to the law.

He put forward a request for legal assistance on the platform and a lawyer came to help within days. With the mediation of the lawyer, Guo's company agreed to pay him the right amount according to the law.

"I appreciate the efficiency of the platform and the lawyer," Guo said. "More importantly, the service is offered for free."

Ren Youfu, an official at the trade union, said the union represents local laborers and has a responsibility to serve them.

"All the laborers in Jincheng can use the platform to solve their disputes and all the costs relating to legal services are covered by a special fund set aside by the trade union," Ren said.

According to the official, the platform has offered consultations to more than 1,880 people. It has settled 48 dispute cases, helping laborers secure a total of 16 million yuan in compensation.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.

Industries help locals rise up from poverty

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Located at the heart of the Taihang Mountains, Pingshun used to be one of the least-developed counties in Shanxi province. It had a large number of impoverished areas and an equally large population of poor residents.

But thanks to the booming growth of local industries, the county in Shanxi's Changzhi city has changed for the better.

One such sector helping to alleviate poverty is the emerging medical herb processing industry.

According to the county government, Pingshun has rich resources in medical herbs with more than 300 varieties, including 67 varieties with great potential for industrial development.

Changzhi-based Zhendong Group is one of the enterprises helping Pingshun turn its rich herb resources into wealth by establishing a large-scale business for the growing, processing and sale of medical herbs.

When recalling his first tours of Pingshun several years ago, Li Anping, chairman of Zhendong, said: "We were impressed with the variety and quality of medical herbs in Pingshun."

But the entrepreneur added he was also shocked by the poverty in some mountainous areas. "It took about three hours to travel on an 80-kilometer road to the villages we planned to visit. The village of Qinguang, for instance, was only inhabited by seniors and children. Most people of working age had left to find opportunities for improving their livelihoods."

Li said he then thought it is a pressing task for Zhendong to help locals rise out of poverty.

The company has established a medical herb industrial park in Pingshun. It has signed cooperative agreements with nearly 6,500 impoverished families, helping them grow herbs and purchasing produce from them.

According to Li, the company's move has offered a stable source of revenue for more than 25,000 residents.

With the help of enterprises like Zhendong, the medical herb industry has developed into a rural economic pillar in Pingshun.

In 2019, the county's output value for the industry reached 338 million yuan (\$52.32 million), growing 42.25 percent from 2018.

Like Pingshun, the city of Changzhi as a whole is reaping the benefits of industrial development in improving people's livelihoods.

Playing a crucial role in Changzhi's economic development and employment creation are the high-tech and advanced manufacturing industries, including new energy vehicles, semiconductors, electronics, fine chemicals, biomedicines and high-end equipment production.

Lixun Precise Industry is one of the model enterprises for job creation in Changzhi.

The company has established an industrial park in Changzhi, supplying automotive electronics to renowned carmakers including Geely and Great Wall.

"With the expansion in capacity, our industrial park is expected to achieve an output value of 500 million yuan and create more than 5,000 jobs this year," said Huang Jinpeng, a Lixun executive.

Li Shu contributed to this story.



Workers weld building materials at a plant in Xiaohe, which will be delivered to the construction sites in the Xiaohe New Area.

WANG YU / FOR CHINA DAILY

New urban center to integrate pair of cities

By YUAN SHENGGAO

A new urban center will emerge at the intersection of the Shanxi cities of Taiyuan and Jinzhong, playing an important role in the integration of the two cities.

A ceremony for the completion of two bridges and six major roads was held at the Xiaohe New Area on June 29, marking the area's transport infrastructure taking its initial shape.

The Xiaohe New Area is a part of the Shanxi Transformation and Comprehensive Reform Demonstration Zone, a major industrial establishment in the province.

The new area is designed as a multipurpose hub for conventions, exhibitions, finance, commerce, culture and art.

Huang Hua, head of the opening-up research institute at the Shanxi Academy of Social Sciences, said the Xiaohe New Area will promote the formation of a metropolis cluster centering on the provincial capital of Taiyuan.

"Shanxi is implementing a plan to promote its urbanization," Huang said. "And building a new urban area between Taiyuan and Jinzhong will be a crucial part of the plan."

The researcher said Xiaohe has remarkable advantages in its development.

The new area has emerged as a regional transport hub for being the home of a new airport planned in Taiyuan, a high-speed railway station and a maglev line linking to downtown Taiyuan.

"Xiaohe is surrounded by a number of State-level and provin-

cial-level development zones and neighbors the Shanxi University Town, which means the new area has all the necessary industrial, scientific, technological and human resources for its development," Huang said.

Yuan Xin, president of Tsinghua Tongheng Urban Planning & Design Institute based in Beijing, said the Xiaohe New Area, as its name suggests, should chart a new path for its development.

"We noticed that the new area has mapped a brand-new growth strategy focusing on sustainability and low-carbon growth. It highlights innovation in its industrial development," Yuan said. "Such characteristics are expected to make Xiaohe a crucial part in Shanxi's transformation from a coal-reliant economy to a new one featuring high-quality development driven by innovative, green and emerging industries."

In addition to its transport infrastructure, a number of landmark facilities have been completed or are under construction in the new area.

For instance, the Xiaohe Smart Operations Center, a complex for the area's administrative bodies, saw the completion of its main building recently.

Another landmark under construction is the Xiaohe International Convention and Exhibition Center. With a total floor space of 106,000 square meters, the center is expected to make Xiaohe a convention and exhibition hub for both Taiyuan and Jinzhong.

Wang Pei contributed to this story.

Party's centennial celebrated in style



Forming the shape of a huge emblem of the Communist Party of China, students in a school in Shilou county, Shanxi province, sing *Without the Communist Party, There Would Be No New China* to mark the 100th anniversary of the Party on July 1. While a grand gathering was held in Beijing, there were a variety of events held in Shanxi, including studies of the Party's history, massive celebratory gatherings, awards to model Party members, Party history exhibitions, artistic performances, symposiums and forums, to mark the centennial of the CPC.

ZHANG HUIMEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Attraction in Wanrong demonstrates family's merit

By YUAN SHENGGAO

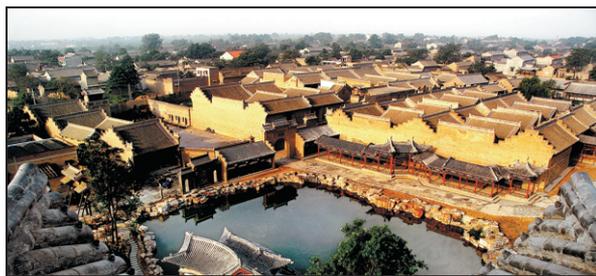
Shanxi is known in China for its many ancient residential buildings, with sites like the Qiao Family Courtyard in Qixian county and the Wang Family Courtyard in Lingshi county being household names among tourists.

But if tourists want to find something different in style, they can pay a visit to the Li Family Courtyard in Wanrong county.

The unique selling points of the site include buildings combining both ancient Chinese and Western architectural styles and the stories of a family of merit.

The Li Family Courtyard was first built some 200 years ago in the middle Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), with 11 courtyards and 146 rooms kept intact today.

Standing among buildings in Chi-



The Li Family Courtyard is a major tourist attraction in Wanrong county. PENG KE'ER / FOR CHINA DAILY

nese style, a Gothic-styled house called Yijing is the most remarkable. It was built by Li Daohang in 1914.

Born to a family of merchants, Li Daohang chose another path for his career development. He went to the United Kingdom in 1907 to study tex-

tile technology at a university there. During his stay, he married a British woman. Li returned to his hometown in 1914 and built Yijing for his wife.

Yijing features an arched gate, a number of Western-style sculptures

and a spacious interior making the best of the natural light.

A couplet hanging on both sides of the gate, reading "love can bring people together despite their distance, and knowledge from both the East and West can help build a better world", shows the values of the residents a century ago.

Over the centuries, the family has also stuck to such values as giving back to the community and helping others, said Wang Dou, a tour guide.

"During a big famine in the late 19th century, the family opened disaster-relief stations in 13 counties in Shanxi, offering people food and medicines," Wang said. "The family sponsored a number of local schools and the Wanrong No 1 Middle School they established is still the leading school in the county today."

Peng Ke'er contributed to this story.