By the time he was a teenager, Chris Worthen knew he wanted to be a doctor and practice in a small community like the ones he had lived in. After attending elementary school in Clay Center, his family moved to Concordia where his father managed the local TG&Y and his mother worked as a family practice nurse.

He thought his mother’s work “sounded exciting and rewarding,” and he began working toward the goal of being a small-town doctor, encouraged by a retired physician from nearby Clyde.

“He was really helpful to me,” Dr. Worthen said of Warren Freeborn, MD. “His friendship has been really important. Being a doctor in a small town was my goal from day one. I thought it was something I wanted to do with my life, and I’ve never had occasion to doubt that.”

An opportunity to practice in Clay Center arose just as Dr. Worthen was finishing his residency in Lincoln, Neb., in 2010. Through family friends, he learned of openings in town created by two departing physicians.

“I was happy to come back,” said Dr. Worthen, who joined Clay Center Family Physicians in August 2010. Clay Center is about 45 miles from Concordia where he graduated from high school in 1993 and still has relatives in the area.

He graduated from the University of Kansas in 1997 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in microbiology and the next year completed a Bachelor of Science degree in medical technology at KU Medical Center. He finished a master’s degree in anthropology at the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2002 and earned his MD degree from Ross University School of Medicine in Rosseau, Dominica. He found his fluency in Spanish to be particularly helpful with obstetrics patients he encountered during his residency in Lincoln.

“The best part of practicing in a small town,” he said, “are the relationships you build in the community. In a small town you are able to have a presence in the community as a doctor and also to build meaningful friendships.”

Living in larger cities didn’t have the “sense of place I have here,” said Dr. Worthen, who completed his third and fourth years of medical school in New York City.

The most challenging aspect of practicing in a smaller town is time management, he said. “Maintaining a solvent practice requires that you see a lot of patients every day and spending adequate time with each patient is difficult,” he said. “I want to spend as much time as possible with each patient. But you have to balance all the other demands.”

Dr. Worthen also serves rural areas outside of Kansas. In the past year he visited Haiti twice and will return in July. Spurred by a desire to help others and an interest in cross-cultural medicine and anthropology, Dr. Worthen hopes to continue visiting Third World countries once or twice every year.

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“In the U.S., the problem would have been surgically corrected when he was born,” Dr. Chris Worthen said of the Haitian child he is pictured with. The pressure inside the child’s brain, caused by hydrocephalus, was so severe he lost his eyesight, and the water in his brain caused his head to swell.