By Gary Duda
Of the Kansan staff

SCANDIA — When Deanell Tacha was nominated two weeks ago by President Reagan to the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, her hometown was proud but not surprised.

Tacha, vice chancellor for academic affairs, grew up in Scandia, a small agricultural community in north central Kansas, where she went to a high school with an enrollment of about 100 students.

The town’s 500 people are close, keeping track of each other’s lives. Many of them knew Tacha as a young girl.

And they always knew she would go far, said Tacha’s mother, Mary Reece. The only question was how far.

“They weren’t suprised,” Reece said. “They thought she would do something like that.”

Earl and Vernon Erickson, longtime friends of Tacha, said she was always “extremely peppy.”

Vernon Erickson said Tacha was a good student who took the time to be friendly with everybody. He said that she was always fair to people around town and that he was sure she would use that same attitude as a judge.

Other neighbors, friends and family members remember Tacha as honest and hardworking as a schoolgirl.

Earl Melby, secretary of the Reeces’ construction company, said he remembered Tacha as an energetic girl.

“I knew she was gonna go a long ways,” he said. “She was a sharp girl.”

The Reeces are one of Scandia’s original families. The family construction company was one of the first businesses in the area and was responsible for much of the success in the town, Carl Larson, editor of the Scandia Journal, said.

Now that Tacha is in the spotlight, Melby said, it’s probable that people will try to find something dishonest in her past. He said he wished them luck with Tacha.

“Here’s one person they’re not gonna find any dirt about,” he said. “They might find some dust she kicked up though.”

In high school, Tacha was active, involved in the marching band, cheerleading and playing the organ at church.

Reece said she never tried to push Tacha or her three other daughters but did encourage them to take advantage of opportunities.

“I’ve always felt that women should be educated and have something to do,” said Reece, who received a degree in journalism from the University of Kansas. “I wanted them to be able to make choices. In growing up, I saw women in circumstances that they had nothing to do, and that bothered me.”