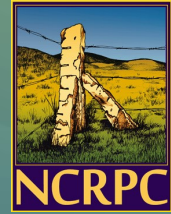


NCRPC NEWS

An update from the North Central Regional Planning Commission



ABOUT US

Serving Kansans since 1972

Our Mission

Advancing rural Kansas through comprehensive planning and development services.

Our Vision

Communities in rural Kansas will favor choices that embrace innovation, increase prosperity and demonstrate resilience.

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EXECUTIVE BOARD

- Ellen Barber, *Marshall County Partnership for Growth*
- Karen Brumbaugh, *Ottawa County*
- Craig Chamberlin, *Dickinson County*
- Tom Claussen, *Mitchell County*
- Brian Eilert, *First Bank of Beloit*
- Mark Fleming, *Jewell County*
- Rod Franz, *City of Salina*
- Bill Garrison, *Cloud County*
- Heather Hartman, *Mitchell County Community Development*
- Patrick Hoffman, *City of Ellsworth*
- Kelly Larson, *Lincoln County Economic Development Foundation*
- Luke Mahin, *Republic County Economic Development*
- Raleigh Ordoyne, *Washington County*
- Kermit Rush, *Ellsworth County*
- Hannah Stambaugh, *Saline County*
- David Thurlow, *Clay County*

Positive Responses in Challenging Times

People have come together in inspiring and innovative ways to help one another thrive during these challenging times. What follows are just some of the examples of how communities have responded to situations created by COVID-19.



Scott Specialties, Inc., headquartered in Belleville, recently started manufacturing cloth masks. (Photo by Fred Arnold, courtesy of The Belleville Telescope)

Businesses pivoted and changed their traditional business models. Many restaurants adapted their normal operating procedures to transition to drive-through, delivery, and carryout only. Clay County Economic Development Group went another step and adapted a “Takeout Bingo” game to support area restaurants.

Businesses also learned to use technology in new ways. Ellsworth County Economic Development created an online grocery ordering system for a [local grocery store](#) as a way to improve safety and efficiencies.

Local food banks/pantries have seen an increase in need for assistance. In response, several communities created

initiatives to help fill the needs. Through the Caring for Cloud County program, the Community Foundation for Cloud County donated matching funds to local food pantries through a gift card/ Chamber Bucks program. Concordia Chamber of Commerce, Cloud County



The Rock Hills Jr/Sr High School senior class donated \$1,500 to Jewell County Helping Hands Ministries. (Photo by Chris Klos, courtesy of Jewell County Helping Hands Ministries)

Tourism and CloudCorp partnered in the program. A Caring for Cloud County 2.0 campaign will begin soon with additional partners from Clyde and Miltonvale Chambers of Commerce.

Grocery assistance to families in need is one aspect of Mitchell County Strong, a partnership of the Solomon Valley Community Foundation, Beloit Area Chamber of Commerce and Solomon Valley Economic Development. The program also helps get money back into

(Continued on page 2)

Viewpoint: COVID-19 Impacts and Looking Forward

By Emily Benedick, ebenedick@nckcn.com

At NCRPC, we know the topic on everyone's minds is COVID-19. I must admit, this is not how I pictured my first 12 weeks serving as Executive Director. When I started in this position on March 2, I envisioned learning side-by-side with Doug McKinney up until his final day on May 1, but COVID-19 had other plans.

In these times, it is easy to get bogged down by the negative which inadvertently causes many of us to turn a blind eye to the incredible positives that have risen up in our communities. While the negative impacts are certainly serious and need to be understood, the positive stories also provide hope and inspiration as our communities continue moving forward.

There are a lot of "what ifs" happening right now because I do not



Emily Benedick

think anyone really knows when this virus will be under control enough that life can continue on as normal. I am not sure we even know what the new normal is going to look like for the next few months or even year. What I do know is our communities will come back stronger and more unified than ever after surviving such an unprecedented and challenging time together. The North Central Regional Planning Commission will continue to serve our Cities, Counties and everyone in between as best we can to help ensure the success of North Central

Kansas for many years to come. I want people to know that we are truly here as a resource and willing to listen to any challenge and try to help as best we can.

As we begin to look forward, I am eager to explore what new opportunities we can bring to North Central Kansas, as well as continue to ensure our current program offerings thrive. As an organization, we are fortunate to have a wide range of experience from dedicated and ambitious staff. Thank you to the many individuals, businesses, and organizations who are working hard to keep North Central Kansas resilient. The teamwork and heart that comes out in our communities and region during these trying times is unlike any other.

Keeping Kids Connected

NCKCN is proud to announce the Kids Connect Program in North Central Kansas. The program is spearheaded by Brent Cunningham, Vice President and Manager of Cunningham Telephone & Cable (CTC). NCKCN is a NCRPC affiliate. Working with CTC and area schools, the program provides free Internet access during the COVID-19 crisis to student rural households that did not have Internet to finish out the school year with their respective schools. Rolling Hills Electric Cooperative, Inc. also provided utility poles at households with challenges to access the NCKCN Fixed Wireless. Kids Connect school district participants include: Belleville USD 109, Beloit St. Johns, Beloit USD 273, Concordia USD 333, Courtland Pike Valley USD 427, Mankato Rock Hills USD 107, and Miltonvale Southern Cloud USD 334.

Responses

(Continued from page 1)

the local economy through a gift card program. Even students have joined in the effort to support local organizations. The senior class at Rock Hills Jr/Sr High donated to Jewell County Helping Hands Ministries from funds they had been saving for a "senior" trip.

Continuous learning forced students and schools to adapt — and communities stepped up to help. Local Internet providers made sure students had the Internet access they needed to complete the school year. Teacher parades, yard signs, and virtual ceremonies helped celebrate the successes of students and graduates.

Communities created t-shirts, websites and campaigns quickly and with great success to benefit businesses, individuals and families. Neighbors helping neighbors has always been a foundation of North Central Kansas and its citizens. That spirit will be important as the region recovers.



One initiative of Mitchell County Strong is the Hungry Hungry Hero program that was created to help provide lunch once a week for those working on the front lines during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Photo courtesy of Mitchell County Strong)

Home Ownership Pilot Program Launches in Three More Counties

Buyers purchasing a home in three North Central Kansas counties may now qualify for financial incentives designed to make home ownership more affordable.

Pilot home ownership programs officially launched in Dickinson County March 6, in Ottawa County April 28 and in Republic County April 29. The



program provides a combination of down payment loans and closing cost grants to eligible buyers. Funds are limited and available on a first come, first served basis.

Primary objectives of the pilot program are to reduce the number of homes on the market, be a catalyst for first time home buyers, benefit employers in recruiting and retaining employees, and attract alumni back to the region to work, start/buy a business, or retire. The program is

made possible through a partnership of local banks, businesses and charitable foundations. The NCRPC is administering the program.

“We are pleased to bring the pilot program to these counties,” Debra Peters, Program Manager, said. “It offers an opportunity to make home buying a reality for individuals and families, particularly in these challenging times.”

Similar pilot programs have been completed in Cloud, Ellsworth, Lincoln and Mitchell Counties. Since first launching in 2018, home ownership programs in the region have combined to assist in the purchase of 33 homes at an approximate value of \$4.6 million. Results of the pilot programs will be used to develop a permanent regional home ownership program sometime in the future.

To learn more about the pilot program in Dickinson, Ottawa or Republic County, contact your local bank or realtor or visit www.ncrpc.org/services/homeownership.

Staffing Transitions Announced

Spring brought new roles in the organization for some NCRPC staff members.

Emily Benedick was named Executive Director in March, succeeding Doug McKinney after his retirement. Adding to the leadership team, Lisa Peters accepted the Assistant Director position previously held by Benedick. Peters has been with the organization since 2011 and also serves as Homeland Security Fiscal Coordinator.

Other position changes effective April 1, 2020 include Amanda Horn being named Community Development Representative. She joined the staff in

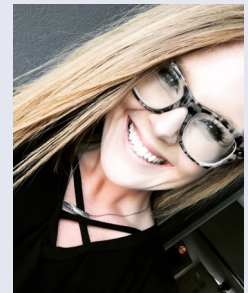
2019 as Administrative / Research Assistant. Brett Beck was named NCKCN Assistant Systems Administrator / Outside Plant Manager. He has been with the organization full time since 2006. Michael Draemel, who has been with the organization since 2016, was named NCKCN Assistant Systems Administrator / IT Plant Manager.

“The success of our organization and services we offer would not be possible without a great staff,” Executive Director Emily Benedick said. “These individuals have proven their commitment to high-quality work over and over again.”

NEWS BRIEFS

Harr Joins NCRPC Staff

NCRPC is pleased to announce the recent hiring of Dairiahna Harr as Administrative Assistant. In this role, she will be handling accounts receivable and provide support to NCKCN, the 501(c)3 Internet Service Provider operated by the NCRPC,



Dairiahna Harr

and many of the NCRPC programs. Dairiahna will also be managing the Crown Home Development in Beloit and the Heritage Homes in Jewell.

Dairiahna, a lifelong resident of Beloit, is the mother of a spunky little boy. She enjoys being involved in her community through volunteerism, such as serving as Vice President of Beloit's Cassiopeia Club. In addition to coaching sports her son is involved in, Dairiahna enjoys going to the gym, being outside, and making memories with family and friends. She is joining the NCRPC team with 9 years of customer service and a banking and pharmaceutical background.

EVENTS & DEADLINES

Thursday, July 30, 2020
NCRPC Executive Board Meeting
Miltonvale, KS, 2 p.m., EMS Building
The Board does not meet in June.

Find more on the web:

Events: www.ncrpc.org/news/events
Funding sources and deadlines:
www.ncrpc.org/funding



North Central Regional Planning Commission

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Finance Program Assists in Transition of Salina Business

A loyal customer base and a desire to see the business continue were key motivators in Design Central's succession planning.

Located in downtown Salina, Design Central provides commercial interior design services throughout Kansas. The business specializes in the design and furnishing of new and remodeled spaces such as libraries, schools, hospitals, clinics, community centers, offices, and more.

"Small, locally owned businesses are so important to our communities, but they can be challenging to transition," Design Central's former owner Suzanne Hokett said. "We have lots of loyal customers and I wanted there to still be local service and a local support system for them. Also, I knew that if Design Central stays in Salina, that money stays locally as well."

The NCRPC Business Finance Program, through its NCKCN-Four Rivers Down Payment Assistance Loan Program, was one of the funding sources used for the transition to new ownership. Other funding came from First Bank Kansas, the seller, and investment by the new owners, Scott and Meghan Bird.

"Having funds available to an investor is invaluable for small business," Hokett said. "First Bank Kansas was great to work with and they brought NCRPC Business Finance services to the table. The process was very seamless."

Design Central President/Designer Audrey George now manages the day-to-day operations for the business.

"The whole transition has been a wonderful opportunity for our business," George said. "The new



Suzanne Hokett (left) and Audrey George (right) have had an important role in Design Central's business transition. *(Courtesy Photo)*

owners have empowered the employees to keep doing what they know how to do — and that is providing quality design services and commercial furniture to businesses."

For more about the NCRPC Business Finance Program, visit www.ncrpc.org/services/business. For more about Design Central, visit www.designcentralks.com.