

HIGHLIGHTING REGIONAL LIFESTYLE, BUSINESS & ARTS

NORTHWEST KANSAS TODAY

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Northwest Kansas Today is a publication of the Dane G. Hansen Foundation
P.O. Box 187, Logan, KS 67646

OUR MISSION:

The Dane G. Hansen Foundation is committed to providing opportunities for the people of Northwest Kansas to enjoy the highest possible quality of life.

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Doug Albin
Carol Bales
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CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Erin Mathews
Betsy Wearing, editor

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS

Erin Mathews
Betsy Wearing

PUBLICATION DESIGN

Julie Hess Design

CONTACT US

Northwest Kansas Today is designed to share stories for and about the people and communities in the 26 most northwest counties in Kansas. If you have a story idea, please contact us at: NWKansasToday@danehansenfoundation.org.

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

Northwest Kansas Today is distributed at no cost to all verified post office addresses in the Hansen Foundation's 26-county service area. In order to efficiently provide the magazine to all residents, we are unable to remove an address from our mailing list. If you do not wish to enjoy the magazine, please share it with someone who might.

After enjoying Northwest Kansas Today, please help us preserve beautiful Northwest Kansas and recycle your copy.

Learn more about the Hansen Foundation at: www.danehansenfoundation.org.

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ON THE COVER: Jennifer Heineken, of Beloit, gives a thumbs up after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine from NCK Tech nursing student Brittney Dorman. Dorman, who is placing an adhesive bandage on Heineken's arm, was among several nursing students who helped staff Beloit community vaccination events in March and April sponsored by S&S Drug.



Welcome to another edition of *Northwest Kansas Today* — our eighth issue! These pages are filled with interesting stories about our area, reflecting the positivity and community pride in Northwest Kansas.

This issue features an intriguing small business with nationwide customers, a peek at the fabulous redesign of the Hansen Museum, and the powerful role of broadband in rural areas. Also featured is the considerable impact of our technical colleges as they prepare area students to fill key positions that benefit our people and businesses. You can also read about two communities — both with populations well under 1,000 — with big things happening.

What a unique time and opportunity for Northwest Kansas. Not long ago, when we shared ideas of remote work, many asked what this meant. Now it is part of the daily news. Many communities are reporting that what was previously an abundance of homes for sale has rapidly diminished. A steady flow of people from metropolitan areas is relocating to more rural, safer communities. Among those making this move are families with school-age children, as parents seek out communities where schools offer in-person attendance. While the cause of this migration is unfortunate and unexpected, the resulting repopulating of our communities benefits the overall health of our region, including our schools and businesses. Importantly, it is also offering new social and cultural opportunities. We welcome our new residents.

The Hansen trustees and staff are focused on three overarching and critical goals for our region. They are to:

- Strengthen and support our communities
- Improve economic opportunity
- Reverse the population decline

We are committed to focus on these goals with each grant made and each strategic initiative implemented. It is our hope that others in our area will adopt these same or similar goals within their own counties and communities. Recent events give us this unique opportunity to accelerate the achievement of these goals that are so beneficial to our region. As we work toward a common purpose, we believe even greater accomplishments will result in Northwest Kansas.

It is with great pleasure the trustees and staff of the Dane G. Hansen Foundation serve all of you in Northwest Kansas!

Doug Albin
Dane G. Hansen Foundation
Board of Trustees



Find more online!

Watch Lil Grizz make a hat, add twine to the World's Largest Ball of Twine with caretaker Linda Clover, and listen to a song from the *Our Trudy* opera at danehansenfoundation.org.



Teaching the

Technical colleges provide students with a path to well-paying area jobs

“It’s called higher education in general, but we spell it H-I-R-E.”

JIM GENANDT | PRESIDENT, KANSAS TECHNICAL COLLEGE PRESIDENTS COUNCIL

Trades

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ERIN MATHEWS

This is a big month for Cameron Church. He graduates from Salina Area Technical College, and then he expects to launch his new career in an area machine shop.

Church, 26, of Minneapolis, had been working in the health care field until the COVID-19 pandemic convinced him to make a change.

Looking for a fresh start, he came to the Salina technical college. There he discovered the Machine Tool Technology program. He found it rewarding to “create something and have something tangible.” After a year of training, he was excited about his future.

“I’m not worried about finding a job,” he said. “There are a lot of opportunities around here.”

Church’s plan to stay and work in the area would have made the late Dean Haddock— another Minneapolis native— smile. Haddock, who died in 2017 after a career as a banker in Beloit, first proposed the idea of vocational technical education in Kansas as a way to keep young people from leaving area communities. He had seen the success of similar programs in Delaware.

“He talked to Rex Borgen, his legislator, who took the idea to Topeka, and it took off like wildfire,” said Eric Burks, president of NCK Tech.

More than 56 years later, the 26-county area served by the Dane G. Hansen Foundation includes three of the state’s seven tech colleges. NCK Tech, which has campuses in Beloit and Hays, had a full-time equivalency (FTE) of 607 students on Oct. 1, 2020. Salina Area Tech had a

Auto technology students Cole Williams and Daylynn Fifer look for problems on the undercarriage of a vehicle in the shop at NCK Tech.

397 FTE, and Northwest Kansas Technical College, in Goodland, had 595 FTE.

“We were started with the purpose of retaining youth in our communities, and we do help keep youth in the area,” Burks said. “We play a pivotal and critical role. I’m talking about NCK Tech, but I’m also talking about Salina Area Technical College and NWK Tech. That to me is one of the most important things that we accomplish. We’re helping sustain the way of life here.”

Although the enrollment numbers for 2020 were significantly down from what they had been in previous years, student interest appears to be high for the coming term. College administrators are hopeful that a lot of students who chose to sit out 2020 because of the coronavirus will be ready to pursue their educational goals in 2021.

“We keep the world working”

“If you take out COVID, the tech colleges have been the biggest-growing area of higher ed in the state of Kansas,” said Jim Genandt, president of the Kansas Technical College Presidents Council. “We train the people who hook the power back up when the ice storm goes through, the nurse that takes care of you at the clinic, the people who fix your air conditioning when it goes out in the summertime and who fix your car. We keep the world working.”

Offering popular one-year certificate programs and two-year associate degrees, tech colleges pump graduates into the local workforce faster and with less debt than traditional, four-year universities. They also prepare students for well-paying jobs that are available in the area, and most graduates make their homes within a 50-mile radius of the college.

“All of our programs are essential occupations, so our job placement rates are well over 90 percent, usually around 95 or 96 percent,” Genandt said. “It’s called higher education in general, but we spell it H-I-R-E.”

Recognizing the value

Recognizing the value the technical colleges bring to the area, the Dane G. Hansen Foundation recently announced



ABOVE: Emmi Ensign styles the hair of Natalie Schears. The two are Goodland high school students who are completing half-day cosmetology programs at Northwest Kansas Tech.

RIGHT: Construction technology student Jordan Castaneda listens as Kevin Watters, head of the Salina Area Tech College Construction Department, explains how to brace a structural wall. Students were assisting with renovations to an Ashby House family shelter.

grants of \$600,000, to be awarded over three years to each of the three tech colleges in Northwest Kansas. The funds can be used at the discretion of the colleges to meet immediate needs. In addition, the foundation has announced a challenge grant to each of the schools of up to \$150,000 annually for three years to match contributions made to endowed funds. Endowed funds create permanent sources of income for the colleges.

Genandt said technical colleges do not have taxing authority like school districts and community colleges do. The seven Kansas tech colleges split about \$22 million in state funding based on enrollment. The amount of state dollars for postsecondary aid has not changed for a decade, so it now covers only about 30 percent of each college’s budget, he said.

He said technical colleges need more partnerships with private industry to keep student tuition, fees and the cost of tools as low as possible. Donors who support a tech college are helping students acquire skills that are in demand and improve their earning potential, Genandt said.



“If you want to have fun sometime, go to a commencement ceremony at a tech college,” he said. “It’s a party. It should be. We change people’s lives.”

Granting a wish

At Salina Area Tech, the Hansen Foundation grant funding will provide a major gift to launch fundraising for a \$650,000 project to add about 3,000 square feet of dining and meeting space.

“We want to have a commons area or student center that includes a bookstore

See **TRADES**, page 6

RIGHT: NCK Tech nursing students and faculty helped at a community COVID-19 vaccination event sponsored by S&S Drug in Beloit.

BELOW: Zaide Korb, a graduate of Salina Area Tech, stays busy with his business, Generation Construction and Handyman Services.

BOTTOM: Northwest Kansas Tech medical assisting student Nybria Carter fills a syringe.



TRADES, from page 5

and some open space for eating and congregating,” said President Greg Nichols. “It gives us an opportunity to help the students and provide that campus feel that we really haven’t had as an organization.”

At NCK Tech, Burks said the funds will be used to hire a foundation director who will focus on building the college’s endowment. Funds will also be used to assist with the high cost of tools, so that expense is not a barrier for students seeking training in diesel technology or other programs.

At Northwest Kansas Tech, grant funds are being used to expand the carpentry program and add a plumbing program, said President Ben Schears.

He said carpentry students had been building homes in the community, but large projects required so much time that sometimes students weren’t getting experience in all aspects of construction. Also, he said, when the houses were auctioned off, sometimes they sold for less than they cost to build. This semester, students switched to building tiny houses.

The first project was for student Logan Klein. After graduation this month, Klein plans to drive back to Yuma, Colo., in his pickup with his new home in tow. When he arrives to set up housekeeping, he also will have the skills to start his own handyman business.

“What’s nice about this is I was able to get enough scholarships to come here to school that I could use the money I had saved for college to pay for this,” Klein said. “So, I’m going to graduate from college debt-free with a place to live.”

Plans were being made to work with the community of Nicodemus on some tiny house construction projects.

Finding work they enjoy

Zaide Korb, who graduated from Salina Area Tech in 2019 with an associate degree in construction technology, has found significant demand in Salina for his handyman skills. In Salina, construction and carpentry students get experience by volunteering for Habitat for Humanity home-construction projects.

Korb stays busy with his business, Generation Construction and Handyman Services. He said his parents built their own house 11 years ago when he was 10 years old, and he aspires to build his own house as well.

Currently, he owns three houses he fixed up in Salina. Two are rented, and he



Match program doubles your gift to support tech colleges

Not only do the Dane G. Hansen Foundation Trustees recognize the value technical college degree programs provide to students, but they also see how Northwest Kansas communities benefit.

Degrees offered at the technical colleges often are those most needed in Northwest Kansas: welding, plumbing, construction science, nursing, automotive,

diesel mechanics, commercial driver certification, precision agriculture, and culinary arts, to name a few. Business management courses also are offered to assist with establishing and maintaining a new business.

For the next three years, the Dane G. Hansen Foundation will match gifts of up to \$150,000 per college, each year. The match requires that both the

donor funds and the matching Hansen donations be placed in permanently endowed funds.

Endowed funds can be established to benefit a particular program or scholarship, though unrestricted endowments offer the college the most flexibility.

The Trustees believe technical colleges are critical to the future of Northwest Kansas.

The match is an effort to provide an accelerated path for the colleges to accumulate sufficient endowed funds to ensure operational stability, and to assist the college foundations with efforts to share their story and attract donors.

For information on how you can make a meaningful gift to the technical college in your area, please contact:



North Central Kansas Technical College

Eric Burks, President
PO Box 507, Beloit, KS 67420
eburks@ncktc.edu
785-738-9057



Northwest Kansas Technical College

Ben Schears, President
1209 Harrison, Goodland KS 67735
ben.schears@nwktc.edu
785-890-1501



Salina Area Technical College

Greg Nichols, President
2562 Centennial Road, Salina, KS 67401
greg.nichols@salinatech.edu
785-309-3182

lives in the third. He has a goal of owning 10 houses before he's 30. He said he puts the skills he learned at Salina Area Tech to use every day.

"I'm proud to have that degree," he said. "I earned it — I know that. I learned a lot. Getting to build houses from the ground up is a lot different than seeing them built from the ground up."

A high school start

Sarah Sexton, another recent Salina Area Tech graduate, said her education led her to a job she loves as a registered medical assistant at Salina Pediatrics.

"This is my dream job. I absolutely love it to death," Sexton said. She said she takes vitals, assists with blood draws and testing, calls patients, administers vaccines and assists nurses as needed.

"As a medical assistant, we have a lot of patient interaction," she said. "We get to play with the kids a lot more than some other jobs in the clinic. I've only been here for seven or eight months, but even

in that time there are 8-month-olds who were tiny little babies when I started. It is super fun to watch them grow up."

"This is my dream job. I absolutely love it to death."

SARA SEXTON | REGISTERED MEDICAL ASSISTANT, SALINA PEDIATRICS

Sexton said down the road she might pursue emergency medical technician training. She became a certified nursing assistant while still in high school by taking tech school classes available free to high school students.

While there are more students of a traditional age on campus, high schoolers make up an important part of the demographic at Northwest Kansas Tech, Schears said. About 15 students from five area high schools were learning welding at the college's satellite location in Quinter. Goodland area high school

students can come to the main campus to pursue training in a diverse array of career options, including engineering technology, auto body, cosmetology, welding and cloud computing.

"There's a skilled labor shortage across the nation," Schears said. "The demand is there, and that's been driving salaries up. Money talks."

Expensive gadgets

The newest program in Goodland is precision agriculture, which was added about five years ago to give young farmers an opportunity to learn about new technology.

"There's a lot of good technology out there that can really help farmers save money, make good decisions on their fields and do more with conservation to make sure those resources are there when their grandkids come around," Schears said.

To teach students to use smart technology, the school needs the latest

See **AUTOMOTIVE**, page 24



Crystal Cline, of Downs, works on a project for her graphic design business, Calico Hill Creative, while her daughter, Alaina, 5, watches a video online. Cline said the speed of internet service has never been a problem for her home-based business. (COURTESY PHOTO)

In a high-speed world, Northwest Kansas can hold its own

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ERIN MATHEWS

After she had worked 40 years in Denver as a professional computer programmer, Diana Crouch's coworkers were predicting things would not go well



DIANA CROUCH

when she and her husband decided to move to the hunting cabin they owned in a small unincorporated community in Kansas.

What her coworkers didn't know when she moved to Graham County nine years ago was that Crouch had fiberoptics to her premise through Nex-Tech. Her internet speed was better than she had in Denver. Although in the 1950s, tiny St. Peter was the last town in Kansas to get electricity, it didn't wait as long for a high-speed connection to the worldwide web. Crouch has since moved 10 miles north to Morland, but she said her internet

speed remains stellar.

"Nobody really believes it, but it's absolutely true," she said. "To this day I do a lot of website work. I maintain close to 70 websites. I'm on it all the time, and I never have a problem."

Crouch's experience is not uncommon, but unfortunately, it's not yet universal, said Stanley Adams, director of the Office of Broadband Development at the Kansas Department of Commerce. However, he's optimistic that high-speed internet availability will continue to improve. He said quality broadband — or high-speed internet — was once considered "a luxury, or nice-to-have, but now it is absolutely an essential service for the most basic of everyday life."

"The pandemic has opened a lot of eyes to the criticality of universal access," he said. "Having broadband access by itself does not guarantee economic growth in Northwest Kansas, but the lack of broadband access makes



“Having broadband access by itself does not guarantee economic growth in Northwest Kansas, but the lack of broadband access makes it very difficult to fully participate in the growing digital economy, let alone be able to facilitate remote learning and telemedicine services.”

STANLEY ADAMS | DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF BROADBAND DEVELOPMENT
KANSAS DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Making the CONNECTION

it very difficult to fully participate in the growing digital economy, let alone be able to facilitate remote learning and telemedicine services.”

COVID increases demand and funding

When COVID-19 forced events, meetings and classes to become virtual, much of Northwest Kansas was well prepared for that challenge. Area businesses that had long been developing their online presence had a distinct advantage and saw sales grow, even though fewer people were coming in the door. On farms with connectivity, smart technology could be used to its fullest extent.

Places where internet services weren't keeping up became more apparent when demand spiked that spring as more people were on Zoom. By fall, Adams' office was distributing federal COVID-19 stimulus money in the form of 66 matching grants totaling \$50 million to improve service in problem areas. The projects, prioritized by Gov. Laura Kelly's

administration and the Strengthening People and Revitalizing Kansas task force, initially had a Dec. 30 deadline until Congress acted to allow more time for completion.

Nex-Tech, the service provider covering the largest area in Northwest Kansas, received grants to improve speeds available in parts of Decatur, Norton, Phillips, Republic, Rooks, Sheridan and Smith counties. Cunningham Telephone & Cable partnered with the North Central Kansas Community Network, which received grants to install towers and shoot a high-speed wireless signal over some hard-to-reach areas in Jewell, Mitchell, Cloud and Republic counties. Twin Valley Communications and Connect & Advance Kansas were awarded grants for projects in Saline and Ottawa counties.

The fiberoptic highway

“We're all about helping our customers. That's what we do,” said Rhonda Goddard, chief financial officer at Nex-Tech, based in Lenora, and also a Hansen

Foundation board member. “It means the world to us when communities in our service area have access to strong broadband. Access opens doors to a whole new world.”

Nex-Tech, which now provides high-speed internet to more than 45 communities and rural areas, started out as one of 33 rural, independent telephone companies across the state. Goddard said Nex-Tech was among the first in the nation to start replacing its copper lines with fiberoptic, and the company's fiber buildout continues.

Adams also administers the state-funded Broadband Acceleration Grant, which first became available in the fall of 2020. Nex-Tech received an \$875,000 matching grant to improve service this year to Bird City in Cheyenne County.

A new fiber route from Oberlin through Atwood and McDonald will provide internet connections with upload and download speeds of up to a Gigabit per second to locations along the route and to businesses in Bird City. Fixed wireless

See **CONNECTION**, page 10

CONNECTION, from page 9

service, with speeds between 25 and 100 megabits per second (Mbps), will be offered to residential and surrounding rural areas.

“We’ll go down Main Street with fiber. We give free broadband service to the library in every community that we serve,” Goddard said. “We’re really excited about this project because the Bird City area desperately needs better broadband service.”

The need for speed

Grant funding also helped cover the cost of services for low-income families. Brent Cunningham, general manager of Cunningham Telephone & Cable, based in Glen Elder, said when COVID first hit, he heard from superintendents at seven school districts who were worried about how students would be able to learn remotely when their homes didn’t have internet.

“We dropped everything and went out and connected over 100 student households,” he said.

Since 2015, the Federal Communications Commission has defined the minimum standard for a connection to be considered broadband as downloads of 25 and uploads of 3 Mbps.

In March, a group of four senators asked the FCC’s acting chair to increase the standard for base speeds to 100 Mbps for both. They said after a year when more people were working remotely and many children attended school online, it was apparent that minimum speeds needed to increase.

Cunningham said usage doubled when COVID-19 hit, and it has remained at a higher level.

“We’re glad we had made investments in our system because we were able to handle it, but it took two years of our planning and just kind of tossed it out

the window, and ramped our timeline up,” he said.

According to the FCC map of broadband services, as of December 2019, 79 out of the 125 largest cities and towns in the 26 counties served by the Dane G. Hansen Foundation had internet options available that would meet the proposed 100 Mbps download and upload standard. Many communities and even rural residences have internet options that far surpass it.

Connectivity changes lives

Marriage and family therapist Rachel Hnizdil moved to St. Francis from Seattle, Wash., in May 2020. A good internet connection has been the key to continuing online therapy sessions with her Washington state clients while



RACHEL HNIZDIL

she works to establish mental health services in Northwest Kansas via telehealth. Hnizdil is partnering with Livewell Northwest Kansas to develop

a mental health counseling service called Bressler Station. The goal is to provide online counseling to people in Kansas by the end of the year — and later expand to Nebraska and Colorado.

“I chose to have an office in St. Francis because St. Francis had fiberoptic internet,” she said. “Fiberoptic has the most consistent, clear images when you’re video conferencing.”

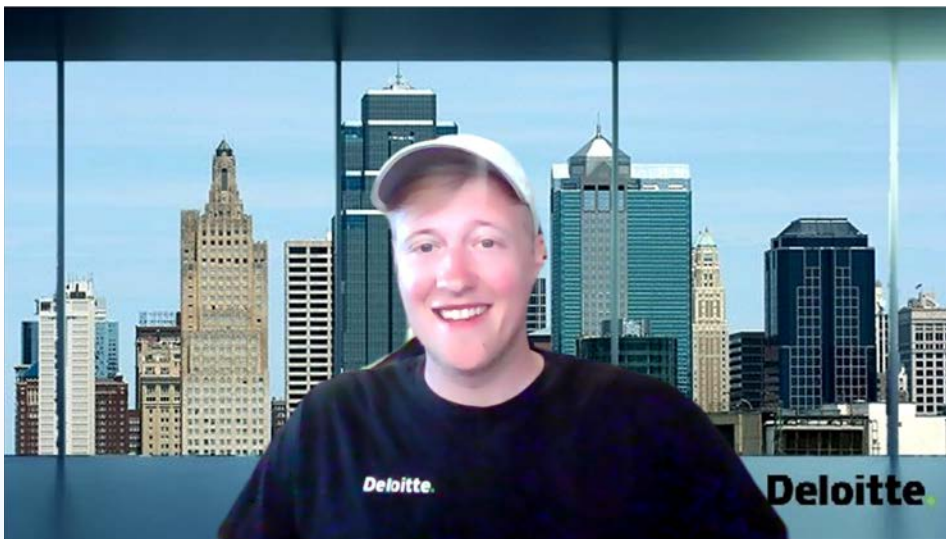
Graphic designer Crystal Cline launched her own design business, Calico Hill Creative, in 2016 — about a decade after she and her husband moved back to her hometown of Downs. Cline, who shares design projects and meets with clients



Chris Basgall, Nex-Tech engineering technician, splices fiberoptic cable in rural Trego County.

BELOW: The Nex-Tech construction team plows fiber in the rural service area — part of the hundreds of miles of fiberoptic cable the company has installed and maintains. (COURTESY PHOTOS)





Payson Maydew works from the basement of his new home in Logan, but co-workers see a virtual Kansas City skyline behind him during online office meetings.

online, said her internet connection has “never, ever” been a concern.

Even now that the two oldest of her four children have their own devices connected and play games online, her connection hasn’t been slow.

“We’re doing something on the internet all the time,” she said. “We definitely put it to the test.”

Working remotely

The combination of high-speed internet and rural life has proven an attractive one, now that more people than ever are working remotely. When employees are free to do their job from anywhere, some are choosing to work from Northwest Kansas.

“Twelve of the last 15 houses that were sold in

one community were sold to remote workers,” said Scott Sproul, president and CEO of Northwest Kansas Economic Innovation Center Inc., based in Norton. “That seems to be happening everywhere.”

Payson and Sage Maydew bought their first house when they moved to Logan from Kansas City last year. Their daughter, Willow, who turned 1 in March, enjoys frequent visits with grandma, who also lives in Logan.

Sage teaches third grade in Phillipsburg, and Payson works remotely as a tax consultant from the basement of their new home. The virtual background for his work Zoom meetings makes it look like he’s in an office in downtown Kansas City, but since he’s not, he no longer has to pay for a downtown parking spot.

Instead, he applies that money toward buying a bigger internet package.

“I haven’t had a problem with the internet,” he said. He has also enjoyed

other aspects of life in Logan.

“I’ve been doing a lot more golfing and hunting than I got to in the past, so that’s been a lot of fun,” he said.

The cost of connecting

Federal and state funding has been pivotal to help cover the high cost of installing fiber to areas without a large customer base. Fiber costs \$30,000 a mile, and Cunningham Telephone operates in an area that averages 1.3 subscribers per mile and has more deer than people.

But Brent Cunningham and his brother, Terry, knew their name was on the door. In 2010, they took out a nearly \$15 million loan from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and built fiber to every home in their regulated service area.

“We want to be the best community partner we can be, and we figured it was going to take fiber to be able to provide what our customers needed,” he said. “My brother and I were just getting into management. We thought, ‘This is either going to bankrupt us or carry us on into the future.’”

Cunningham said his company is still paying on its loan, but he knows they made the right decision, and he sleeps a lot easier these days.

He said thanks to a solid network and great staff support, his customers don’t have anything to worry about either.

“I think a lot of our customers take it for granted, but maybe that’s a good thing,” he said. “We’ve had broadband available for a long time, so maybe it’s a compliment that they’ve come to expect it to work for anything they want to do. We’ll keep investing in our network to make sure it does.” ■





A (renovated) Legacy on Display

A beautiful renovation unveils more of the Hansen Family history

**STORY AND PHOTOS
BY BETSY WEARING**

[LOGAN] Kate Hansen lived most of her adult life in Japan, where she taught music and, at times acted as dean of the music department and even as president of Miyagi College. She and her traveling companion, Lydia Lindsey, were revered by the Japanese people. In 1955 Kate and Lydia were decorated in absentia by Hirohito, Emperor of Japan, for their service to the people of Japan.

In October of 1941, Kate and Lydia were informed that if they wanted to be out of Japan before war broke out with the United States, they needed to leave immediately. Wasting no time, they prepared to leave.

“They sailed on the last ship leaving Tokyo at 4 p.m. the next day,” said Carol Bales, Hansen Trustee and a member of the Hansen Museum board. “They landed in California, and Kate went to talk with a classmate from KU, Colonel Karl Baldwin, and told him, ‘Something’s coming down.’ Pearl Harbor was bombed (on Dec. 7, 1941) within one week of her return to the States.

“We have two letters



Much like her more famous brother, Kate Hansen (center) had a remarkable career working in Japan. Her story is part of the family history displayed in the Hansen Museum in Logan.

on display from the U.S. military. One asking Kate for information, and one thanking her for all the maps and pictures of Japan that helped the military out.”

Honoring the whole family

Dane Gray Hansen is the most well-known member of the Hansen family, and rightly so. His entrepreneurial success in Northwest Kansas and quiet influence in not only Kansas, but also national politics, made him an important figure in history long before his charitable foundation was established. His story is well documented.

But Dane Hansen wasn’t

the only remarkable member of his family. And that becomes apparent with a visit to the recently renovated Hansen Museum.

The Hansen Foundation, established in 1965 with a generous estate gift from Mr. Hansen, is located in the beautiful Hansen Plaza in his hometown of Logan. The building also houses a large community room where art from a permanent collection is displayed. Classes are frequently held there as well — everything from painting and photography to crocheting, cooking and quilting. The classes are offered by the museum, which fills the bulk of the building.

THE HANSEN MUSEUM

Admission is free.

Open 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday; 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 5 p.m. Saturday; and 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday.

For more information or a class schedule, visit the website at hansenmuseum.org, or find the museum on Facebook.

The museum is home to a permanent collection of artifacts and mementos detailing the history of the Hansen family. In the gallery area, it hosts traveling art exhibits from all over the country and features an artist of the month. There is always a new reason to visit.



Snapshots of the renovation process, top to bottom:

Painters from Gray and Company (Topeka) make a plan of attack for the day as, on the ladder, Chuck Atkinson (job site superintendent) smooths out some drywall on the cloud.

Center Monuments crew (Joe Stansbury, Smith Center) installs the new digital sign in front of the Hansen Museum.

Museum board members Debra Berg and Carol Bales prepare Mr. Hansen's collection of political pins for display.



Making his story come alive

Museum Director Shari Buss credits a dedicated volunteer board who did significant research to discover previously unknown family history. That information has been added to the vast history previously displayed, and now offered to the public in a beautiful, renovated space.

In addition to telling Mr. Hansen's story, including his relationship with President Eisenhower and many business interests in Northwest Kansas, a large part of the museum chronicles the life of Dane's older sister, Kate. In addition to the letters of her surprising assistance to the military in WW II, stunning artifacts from her travels and unique kimonos

are all on display.

At a March gathering of members of the Hansen Museum board, they were proud of the finished product — the beautiful, interactive displays, and new museum offices. But their proudest accomplishment was achieving their goal to better honor and share the legacy of Dane G. Hansen and the Hansen family.

"We stayed true to his story and who he was as a person," Buss said. "All of this beauty will fade away, but we took the extra time to work on all of this content, to make his story come alive and be an inspiration."

A new HVAC system proved to save thousands of dollars in utility costs. New windows and doors are expected to help reduce utilities as well. None had been updated since the building was constructed in 1971.

"The building has great bones, and in its day, it was a shining jewel," Buss said. "And it still was a shining jewel, it just needed buffed and polished."

A meeting with the Dane G. Hansen Foundation Trustees in spring of 2019 resulted in funding for the renovation and a recommendation to get a professional design firm to help with the interior and displays.

Hours of meetings and a velvety find

The museum board members went to work.

After a recommendation from the Kansas Historical Museum in Topeka and a trip to Kansas City, they selected Dimensional Innovations (DI), an Overland Park firm. They also visited the newly renovated Eisenhower museum for ideas.

Back in Logan, board members met weekly for one to three hours to work on design and content.

"We had homework every week," noted board member Debra Berg.

They also had weekly Zoom meetings with DI. When the DI staff member who did most of the writing for the project read content to them, they found another element to the renovation.

"We fell in love with her velvety chocolate voice," Buss said "So, we asked her to record the audio introductions on the kiosks."

The board members reviewed every line of the writing for the kiosks and displays, being mindful of their audience.

"We live in Northwest Kansas. I feel like we had to sometimes tell them — DI —

See **MEETINGS**, page 14

MEETINGS, from page 13

this is Western Kansas, keep it so people from this area feel like we are talking to them,” said board member Linda Toll.

Everything from the outside stonework that was washed and re-pointed, where needed, to the new roof that fixed a decades-old drainage issue, were part of the project.

Inside, permanent displays include a newly designed replica of Mr. Hansen’s office, complete with the photos on his desk and walls, his hat and coat neatly on the coatrack, gadgets such as his Dictaphone, and Buss’ favorite — a cigar that actually puffs smoke.

“It was a state-of-the-art office when it was remodeled in 1934,” Buss said. “It was written about in newspapers far and wide.”

A health concern is ultimately fruitful

A replica of the bedroom shared by Kate and

younger sister Alpha Florence is another of the permanent displays. The furniture is more than 100 years old — a gift from their father, Peter.

On display are paintings done by Alpha Florence, who suffered from rheumatoid arthritis and died at age 39, leaving one son, Dane Gray Bales.

“There’s so much information about Kate, and Kate did wonderful things and was such a maverick for her time. She was deeply committed to promoting educational opportunities for women and advocated for women’s rights,” Buss said. “But I feel like Alpha, with her life being cut short, she was also remarkable, just hindered by her health.”

“Alpha Florence had a very hard life,” Bales said. “If you read in her diaries, in her 20s she had pain in her hands and

RIGHT, FROM TOP TO BOTTOM:

A recreation of the bedroom Kate and Alpha Florence Hansen shared as girls.

Polly Bales thought adding a gun collection would give the men something to look at while the women looked at the art.

Mr. Hansen’s office: when it was redesigned in 1934, it was written about in newspapers far and wide.

The large center kiosk displays Hansen family history — each piece with a unique story.

LEFT: A replica of a covered wagon on the museum grounds helps tell the story of an 1891 Hansen family trip to the Rocky Mountains.





FROM LEFT: Shari Buss, museum director, and board members Debra Berg, Janene Schneider (front), Linda Toll, and Carol Bales. The museum board members dedicated many hours of time researching and making design decisions as part of the renovation.

there were days she couldn't stand up because it hurt so bad. That's why she went to Missouri." There Alpha Florence sought treatment in the hot springs of Missouri, and also met her husband, Elles Bales.

"Lucky for us that she did, or we would not have any of this," Buss said. "We would probably have had the foundation, but not the museum and none of the family history."

Polly's influence

A large, central kiosk displays, among other items, a silver baby spoon, and locks of Mr. Hansen's famous childhood golden curls.

All the new kiosks include written information, photos and videos.

A large, interactive welcome screen can be formatted to announce current or upcoming exhibits and classes. It also tells the history of the museum and pays particular homage to Polly Bales, wife of Dane Bales, Sr., Alpha Florence's only child.

"The museum was her passion," Carol Bales said. Carol was married to Dane and Polly's

son, Dane Bales, Jr., known as "D," who died in 1998. "There probably wasn't a day that she didn't promote it to somebody. Even Sunday in church."

Berg agreed.

"Polly was here daily, walking through with people — then taking them across the street to her home to have a piece of pecan pie."

Polly passed away in 2013, but she is credited by the museum board members for providing many, if not most, of the artifacts and information included in the museum.

"Her scrapbooks were invaluable," Buss said. "We found a lot of history we did not know we had."

Carol Bales had much to contribute.

"Not only things that Polly gave me, but also things that D had. I started sorting through things that had not been opened since 1998. That's where a lot of surprises and fun things came from, like diaries of Alpha (Florence), his grandmother."

Another surprise was a silver baby spoon.

"Polly had given it to me," Carol said. "I knew it was

Dane's baby spoon, but I wasn't sure which Dane it belonged to. After I polished it, I saw it had R.D.B. on it. We racked our brains to try to figure who in the Hansen or Bales family had the initials RDB."

The mystery was solved when Buss found the baby book of Dane Bales, Sr. at the Logan Area Historical Museum. Turns out that when he was born, he was named Robert Dane Bales — RDB. When he was 8 months old, they changed his name to Dane Gray Bales.

Less than six-degrees of separation

One of the critical success factors of the impressive research is that, in addition to Carol Bales, many of the museum board members have a personal connection to the Hansen family. Berg's parents were close friends with Dane and Polly Bales. Janene Schneider worked in the Hansen office with Mr. Hansen and Dane Bales, Sr. Linda Toll lived next door to Dane and Polly Bales for many years. Polly and board member Betty Baird were close friends and board member Jim McDonald, for many years, attended the same church as the Bales.

"The timing really was perfect," Buss said. "We had Janene's first-person account, and Carol was cleaning out some of D's things, and Deb was cleaning out her parents' house. Deb found different things like letters and newspaper articles that added depth to our content. It was just the perfect time."

The large family Bible Mr. Hansen had in his office was also helpful when searching for birth and marriage dates and

confirming spellings.

The museum also features an impressive display of firearms. The collection was not owned by the Hansen Family. It was purchased from the estate of Otto Schuck, a German immigrant who settled in Logan. Schuck's niece, Mariana Kemper, is another Hansen Museum board member.

"It was Polly's idea, to add the gun collection, so that the men would have something to do while the women looked at the art exhibits," Buss said, laughing. "It's always been a big draw."

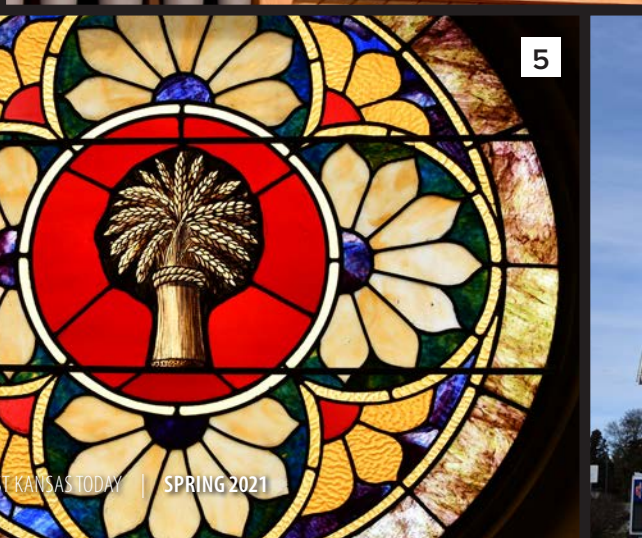
A large photo of Mr. Hansen with a multi-point buck hangs in this area. Buss said they wanted to connect the guns to Mr. Hansen's love of hunting. His nickname among his friends was "One-shot Hansen."

Here for the streaker, the stroller and the scholar

On the museum grounds they added a covered wagon, commemorating a family trip to Colorado when Dane was a child. Visitors can climb aboard and get a feel for what travel was like in the 1800s. It's a fun place for a photo, too.

The museum reopened on March 9. Buss said they did not have a large reopening event due to COVID-19, but she hopes to have a celebration next year in conjunction with their 50th anniversary.

The museum is now set up for every kind of visitor, Buss said, "the streaker, the stroller and the scholar — if you want the overview, you go through and read the titles. If you want a little bit more, you read the title and the subtitle. If you want to sit here all day, we will keep you busy." ■





Stevens Chapel, 12 miles southwest of Atwood, is the oldest existing church structure in Rawlins County. Construction was completed in 1892. A preservation committee formed by the Rawlins County Historical Society raised funds in 2020 to replace the roof and repair the steeple.

Glory to God

Photos by Erin Mathews and Betsy Wearing

From the simple to the sublime, churches and cathedrals were some of the earliest structures built in the area. Faith was an important part of life for the area's settlers and remains so in communities today.

1. The identical square bell towers of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Damar can be seen for miles rising above the community. The cathedral, constructed in 1912, has a copper roof the thickness of a penny. The roof was installed in 1947.
2. Small churches like the Lone Star Presbyterian Church, built in 1915 13 miles north of Gem, were a vital part of the lives of early settlers. They were served by circuit-riding preachers who rode from one congregation to the next. It now stands on the grounds of the Prairie Museum of Art & History in Colby.
3. Cawker City's United Methodist Church houses the oldest organ in Kansas. Built in 1886 by Pilcher & Sons in Louisville, Ky., the organ originally belonged to the Congregational Church in Kinsley.
4. At 165 feet, the main tower of the Holy Cross Shrine in Pfeifer is believed to be the tallest Gothic church spire in the state. Inside, the post rock limestone cathedral, completed in 1918, features ornate altars and a vaulted rib ceiling.
5. A stained glass window from St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, in Beloit. The church, completed in 1904, was constructed of native limestone quarried and dressed by parishioners.
6. After the original church building was destroyed by fire, the United Methodist congregation in Wilson constructed this building in 1888 out of native stone.
7. Thirty-three years after it was constructed in 1878, Hopewell Presyterian Church members reconstructed their church building. The tin ceiling was one original feature that was maintained. Today the chapel stands in Glen Elder State Park.
8. When the Basilica of St. Fidelis, known as the Cathedral of the Plains, was dedicated in Victoria in 1911, it was the largest church west of the Mississippi River. A three-month project to repair cracked plaster, re-lead stained glass and repaint the interior of the grand structure was recently completed. In March, scaffolding was about to be removed.



Our Trudy

Prairiesta in Russell to feature opera about influential local art teacher

PHOTOS AND STORY BY ERIN MATHEWS

[RUSSELL] When Alex Underwood began telling friends and colleagues he had an idea for an opera, he found them intrigued.

“Every time I would pitch it,” Underwood said, “people would be like, ‘There are aliens at the end of this story? What?’”

Encouraged, Underwood commissioned *Our Trudy*, an opera that will make its debut June 10–12 in three outdoor performances as part of *Prairiesta*, a celebration of Russell’s founding that occurs every 10 years. The opera tells the story — or, more accurately, many stories — of the late Trudy Furney, a beloved Russell teacher who for more than three decades inspired students to explore and develop their artistic talents. She was also a founding member of the Russell Arts Council and Russell Original Art Review.

While celebrating her many lasting accomplishments, the opera will not shy away from the final years of her life, when — searching for answers following a series of personal losses — Furney became a believer in apocalyptic prophecies involving space aliens and angels.

Following her funeral in September 1991, those beliefs became widely known after four of her acquaintances disappeared, causing concern in Russell. They, too, had believed aliens and angels were coming to save mankind. Law enforcement eventually found the women in an airport in Washington, D.C., before they boarded a plane to Israel to await the end of the world, Underwood said.

Underwood remembers as a child hearing Furney described as having gone “crazy” and spoken of in hushed tones. However, he began thinking of Furney’s story more empathetically after hearing

it retold about five years ago while he was having dinner with one of her former students.

He found out that Furney’s husband had died of cancer in his 50s, and she’d lost her son to suicide after he returned home from the war in Vietnam. Furney herself had also been diagnosed with cancer before she became involved in the UFO cult.

“I thought any of us might make that decision at that point,” he said. “This isn’t a person who lost her mind. This is a person searching for answers. This is the story of a hero, and this is a tragedy. That is what opera is. It’s telling those kinds of stories.”

He said Furney, like many people, struggled to process her heartache.

“It’s a very human thing to do, right?” he said. “I think it’s unfair of us to be super judgmental of people who are solving problems in ways that are not the way we would solve them or even in misguided ways.”

Setting her life to music

As a choral conductor and musical educator, Underwood, like Furney, has inspired scores of middle and high school students in Russell and Hays to develop their creative talents. In 2014, he started bringing world-class opera performance to his hometown of Russell when he founded the Ad Astra Music Festival. That was also the year he completed a Master of Music in choral conducting at Westminster Choir College, in Princeton, N.J.

The Ad Astra festival typically happens in July and includes upwards of 10 concerts and opera performances. Because it is a *Prairiesta* year, the Festival is on hold and will return in 2022. *Our Trudy* will be the only opera performance



Alex Underwood, founder of the Ad Astra Music Festival in Russell, stands before *Seventh Trumpet*, a statue created by former Russell teacher Trudy Furney and her students.

in Russell this year.

In March, Underwood was busy finalizing the rehearsal schedule and contracting the seven instrumentalists who would accompany eight opera singers performing the work. The opera was composed by Anna Pidgorna with a libretto, or text, written by Maria Reva. The two are rising stars and also sisters, who were born in the Ukraine, grew up in Canada and completed graduate studies in the United States, he said.

Underwood said after hearing Pidgorna’s work online, he emailed her in 2017 about writing music for the opera. A year later, Pidgorna and Reva were in Russell interviewing people who knew Furney and getting a sense of the community. They saw *Seventh Trumpet*, a statue of an angel Furney and

Tickets to *Our Trudy* are \$25

They can be purchased at
prairiesta2021.com.

students created in the late 1980s. It stands in Lincoln Park and will be visible to the audiences during opera performances in June.

Pidgorna and Reva wrote and composed the opera based on the 13 hours of interviews they did with former students, friends and colleagues of Furney. It examines who Furney was from a variety of perspectives. Underwood said he expects there to be people in the audience who personally knew Furney, including his own mother, who was among Furney's many students. Furney died in 1991 at the age of 71.

Underwood said he likes to imagine Furney's response to finding out there would be an opera written about her.

"I like to think she would be so overwhelmed, and I love that," he said. "I think in a way this is a perfect way to honor her and her work and her students."

Trudy takes the stage

Katelyn Mattson-Levy, a mezzo soprano from Sterling, will portray Furney. She said she is excited about the project and looking forward to opening night. She said it's nice to have the opportunity to work directly with the people who composed the music and wrote the words.

"It should be something pretty special," she said. "It's really a wonderful tribute to her and that area of the state, as well. There's a lot in the score about the beauty of the wheat and the steel of the oil fields around Russell."

Mattson-Levy holds a post-graduate degree in opera from the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music and now works

as classical music coordinator for Radio Kansas. Her mother was an art teacher in Sterling and a contemporary of Furney.

Mattson-Levy said she admires Furney and feels like she understands her in a lot of different ways, including the later years of her life when she was "questioning and always searching for answers."

"She was everybody's favorite teacher," she said. "She was so deeply loved by her students. There is a huge responsibility there to make sure that her memory is honored and the way she is portrayed is authentic."

In addition to the opera, Prairiesta performances will include monologues by Hays playwright Catherine Treischmann and short films produced by high school students. Collectively, they will tell the history of Russell, which was founded 150 years ago. The four-day event also will include a parade, a carnival, a rodeo and plenty of other entertainment.

As a part of the tribute to Furney, during the month of June, the Deines Cultural Center will exhibit artwork by Furney, her long-time colleague Derrill Castor and their students.

Underwood said funding from the Kansas Creative Arts Industries Commission and the Dane G. Hansen Foundation helped underwrite production expenses, including the cost of a video wall that will serve as a backdrop to the stage. He said he hopes to give the opera a wider audience by attracting New York or San Francisco companies to pick up the opera.

"Our hopes and dreams would be that this will have a life outside of Russell," he said. ■

Katelyn Mattson-Levy portrays Trudy Furney in an original opera about the beloved Russell art teacher.

Things are
Looking
in Downs

Up

The steel frame for the KM Pathogens Defense building had been completed in March.

*Just about six miles apart on U.S. Highway 24, **Downs**, located in Osborne County, and **Cawker City**, in Mitchell County, are benefiting from investment in development. The results are exciting new projects during a challenging time.*

DOWNS

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ERIN MATHEWS

[DOWNS] It was just an average Thursday afternoon, but downtown Downs was full of activity.

“That’s Marilyn,” Mayor John Bisnette said, pointing out the vehicle ahead. “At Christmastime, she puts reindeer antlers on her car.”

Downs, population 800 to 900, depending on whom you ask, is a place where most people know each other pretty well. But it’s also a community that has proven it is ready to accomplish surprising things.

In March, the steel frame of the latest project stood in Griffith Industrial Park. That’s where KM Pathogen Defense LLC will soon be creating a product that sounds like a game changer in a world where the threat of airborne pathogens has recently become all too well known.

This summer, the new pilot plant is expected to begin operation, producing an antimicrobial treatment for air filtration products and systems.

The nanotechnology-based product has proven effective in independent tests at eradicating bacteria, viruses and fungi, said Thomas Allen, KM Pathogen Defense manager.

The patented product, a silver-based nanoparticle coating for air filtration media, has not been tested specifically against COVID-19, but it is extremely effective against viruses of a similar structure, he said.

“The trade name of this unique coating material is NanoFense,” he said. “I’m unaware of any air filtration treatment in the world that has been proven effective against such a broad spectrum of harmful pathogens in such short exposure times.”

Pandemic prevention

Allen, of Spring Branch, Texas, said he has been concerned for years about a deadly pandemic, and development of the product began more than a decade ago. He said once testing had confirmed its effectiveness, work began to develop a way to manufacture it in larger quantities. He said production of NanoFense had begun at a plant in South Korea, but when COVID-19 lockdowns made the facility inaccessible, a new location in the United States became top priority.

Allen had been planning to lease commercial space in El Paso, Texas, but then he was informed about personal protective equipment (PPE) manufacturing grants that had become available in Kansas. One of the

primary air filtration applications of NanoFense is to treat the outer layer of face masks.

“Air filtration markets are enormous, and NanoFense can actually protect people from harmful airborne pathogens,” Allen said.

Once the PPE grant had been obtained through the Kansas Department of Commerce, discussions with Downs Enterprises, a local economic development group, got serious, Allen said.

“We got to talking with him about it and we said, ‘Hey, this checks every box,’” said Tim Brush, a Downs Enterprises board member. “It onboards jobs from overseas; you can’t get anything more COVID-related; it’s manufacturing, and it’s in a rural location. It’s a product that’s going to have a high, high level of interest with the current environment.”

Allen said the grant funding made Downs an easy choice. He was familiar with the area. For several years he competed in the horseshoe tournament at the Tipton picnic while visiting relatives nearby.

“This opportunity to work with the Department of Commerce and the city of Downs made a lot of sense for all the right reasons,” Allen said. “To help bring a disruptive technology to this part of Kansas, to create jobs and to have the support system that was available here — it just made it a smart decision. I’ve met a lot of really genuine and supportive people here.”

KM Pathogen has contracted with the Technology Development Institute at Kansas State University on project design and oversight. Once the building is constructed and equipment is installed, “everything should move full steam ahead,” Allen said.

Allen said COVID-19 has made many more people aware of the real threats posed by airborne viruses and bacteria and has substantially increased interest in NanoFense.

“The capabilities of this technology go far beyond COVID,” he said. “There will be another pandemic. That’s not a question of if — it’s just a question of when.”

The art of advertising

Even before the arrival of a new manufacturer, there was a lot going on in Downs.

Brush is also president and CEO of The Brush Group, which includes Brush Art Corp., a marketing firm started by his parents 58 years ago that is a major employer in Downs. From Brush Art’s conference room window, he and the 26 local employees were able to watch the KM Pathogens Defense building go up.

However, with a client list that includes the Kansas City Royals, K-State, the University of Kansas and Caterpillar — just to name a few — they couldn’t stand at the window for long.

Brush said no one had to be laid off during 2020,

although many of the group’s printing jobs went away when games and concerts were canceled. He said the return of a familiar order — the Royals pocket schedule — indicates 2021 will be better.

“We do about 680,000 of those,” he said. “That to me means things are getting back to normal.”

Brush said his son and daughter, the third generation,

are active in the family business. Through Downs Enterprises, Brush is actively working to ensure that the community continues to thrive and provide new opportunities for young people.

In March, Downs Enterprises was in the process of having the industrial park mapped and certified so that it could be listed on websites as a Rural Opportunity Zone, indicating that tax incentives may be available for businesses that locate there. A concrete entrance road, along with utility infrastructure, was about to be installed. Downs Enterprises has a history of constructing a building and providing it to a new business on a lease-to-own basis, Brush said.

“We’ve done that several times, and it’s worked out well,” he said of the lease-to-own offer. “Two occupants aren’t the original owner, but they’ve never gone for more than a month without a business in them. When we get done with this project, we’ll probably build another pilot facility.”



A sampling of recent print projects is displayed in front of Tom Brush, vice president of sales, and Tim Brush, president and CEO of the Brush Group, which includes Brush Art Corp., a marketing firm started by their parents.

See **UP**, page 25

Not just stringing along

CAWKER CITY

Cawker City: Home to about 400 people, and one giant Ball of Twine

[CAWKER CITY] Drew Duskie grew up in Cawker City. Now he intends to grow old there.

“It’s safe. Our kids can run around, and we don’t have to worry about them in the yard,” said Duskie, who was recently elected mayor. “It’s just the simplicity of small-town life.”

Duskie is among about 400 people who call Cawker City home. They aren’t there just to see the World’s Largest Ball of Twine or because the city is near the recreational opportunities at Glen Elder Reservoir. But they like those things about their city, too.

In recent years, residents have been focusing efforts on getting the many travelers who come through on U.S. Highway 24 to stop and stay awhile.

That’s a lot of laundry

To accommodate guests, long-time Cawker City residents Bill and Pamila Brummer operate an RV park, and they’ve purchased and renovated a number of



Mayor Drew Duskie is proud of the recent investments residents of Cawker City have made in their community.

buildings in the downtown area over the last five years to serve as lodging for travelers. Two of their unique locations to stay were built nearly 100 years ago as gas stations.

“I’ve lived here my whole life, and I’d never seen a light on in the building. It had just been sitting there,” Pamila Brummer said of the former gas station that is now the Old Station Inn. “I said, ‘We’ve got to do something with this. It’s just going to fall down and be an eyesore.’”

The Brummers fully restored the outside of the building, including period gas pumps, to make it look just as it had when it was new. Inside is a comfortable bed and other amenities for guests.

When all their locations are rented, Pamila Brummer has bedding from 21 beds to wash the next day. That’s why they put in a laundromat.

The Brummers aren’t done yet. Additional plans include a travel plaza and a small diner, she said.

Photo op

The annual Twine-A-Thon, picnic, Christmas lighting ceremony and other special events are planned by members of the Cawker City Community Club, of which Cole Eberle is president.

Eberle is also president of the city council, and he and his wife, Colleen, recently built the newest addition to downtown — a 2,000-square-foot space that houses their



Pamila Brummer and her husband, Bill, renovated two nearly 100-year-old gas stations into places to stay the night in Cawker City.

It's been the answer to a 'Jeopardy!' question. It's been the solution to a 'Wheel of Fortune' puzzle. It's been mentioned on 'The Martha Stewart Show'...

photography and videography business, Eberle Studios. The grand opening is set for May 20.

Eberle said that like him, several young professionals who were involved in the project, including the contractor, the plumber and the man who installed the drywall, all grew up in the area. In March, insulation was still visible in one wall and finish work remained to be done, but the lighting fixtures Colleen had selected were working, and the elegance of the space was becoming apparent.

"We're excited," said Cole Eberle. "We're very proud of the new building."

Monster mania

A business that recently opened in an existing building downtown is Eyegore's Odditorium and Monster Museum, which co-owners Matt Alford and Julie Agee believe adds a needed second attraction for Ball of Twine visitors to enjoy.



Matt Alford and partner Julie Agee left behind the stress of their healthcare professions and opened Eyegore's Odditorium and Monster Museum in downtown Cawker City. Here Matt stands in front of the "griffin door," a play on words for Harry Potter fans.

Alford, who had spent 15 years clinically assessing sleep disorders at a hospital in Richmond, Va., came to Cawker City last summer to see the Ball of Twine while on a tour of roadside attractions. He noticed a downtown building for sale, and by December he owned it.

He and Agee left behind the stress of their healthcare professions, and by April they were in business. Their monster museum is more for laughs than screams, and visitors can grab a pop or souvenirs while marveling at a juvenile sasquatch, an alien baby from Area 51 and other monstrous oddities.

"This town feels like it needs it, and it feels like an opportunity for us," Alford said. "Let's see what flies and have fun doing it."

Having a big ol' ball

Alford knows the attraction of the Ball of Twine. It's been the answer to a *Jeopardy!* question. It's been the solution to a *Wheel of Fortune* puzzle. It's been mentioned on *The Martha Stewart Show*. It's all over the Internet. But most importantly, it appears on bucket lists the world over.

It seems to have captured the imagination of people everywhere, thousands of whom plan trips each year that include a stop in Cawker City. They come just to gaze upon more than 27,000



Linda Clover poses with the World's Largest Ball of Twine. Clover has been official twine record keeper, caretaker, marketer and historian since the early 1990s.

pounds of sisal twine wrapped into a ball about 45 feet around that towers over their heads.

"You would be surprised on a daily basis how many people actually stop there," said Mayor Duskie. "It's a lot."

With any luck, visitors catch Ball of Twine caretaker Linda Clover at home, and she brings over the official twine spool so they can add to it, or they bring twine of their own and tie it on. She takes their picture; they take plenty of selfies, and then it's off to the next great adventure.

"If people come to see a ball of twine, it's going to be fun, right? Why wouldn't it be fun?" Clover said in March. "It's not serious, so people just relax. Right now, we need all of that we can find."

Some months last year, Ball of Twine visitors had to have the experience without Clover, who stayed socially distanced but left measured and weighed pieces of twine at the city office for people to tie on the ball. Also, she made sure the Ball of Twine was wearing a mask.

"It was masked up, and people thought that was fun because they would pose with their masks and the Ball of Twine wearing a mask, so that made a good memory for 2020," she said. "I took the mask off at

See **TWINE**, page 24

Halloween because I turned it into a Jack-o'-lantern."

From near and very far

Clover, a retired school librarian, has been the Ball of Twine's record-keeper, caretaker, historian and public relations coordinator since the early 1990s. Now that she's had her vaccinations, she's again happily greeting guests, some of whom have traveled incredibly far, just to take in all that twine.

"I say people of every nation have come. I had a friend who said, 'Linda, do you realize how many nations there are? Do you watch the Olympics?' I said, 'Yes, but I still don't doubt that it's the truth.'"

In early March, Clover pulled the notebook that serves as a guest book out of the Ball of Twine's mailbox. Leafing through the pages of recent signatures, Clover spotted names of people who had recently arrived from the Czech Republic, Japan and England. And that was during a time when travel was nowhere near normal levels, she pointed out.

Twine on the farm

The Ball of Twine was started in 1953 by area farmer Frank Stoeber with leftover pieces of twine he cut off the hay bales he fed his livestock. When his friends saw the ball beginning to take shape in his barn, 90 of them started saving their twine for him. He added their contributions and recorded their names in a little notebook he kept in the pocket of his overalls. It was already impressively large when he gifted it to the city.

"He grew up in the Depression. You did not throw away anything," Clover said. "That poor man would be amazed that it's still in existence, and everybody knows about it."

Clover said she gets emails and phone calls from twine adventurers about every day.

"People just know about it. They just love it. They just come," she said. "And you know what? They smile. Everything we see doesn't make us smile, but a big ball of twine sure makes people smile." ■



Cameron Church, Minneapolis, operates a lathe in the machine tool shop at Salina Area Tech.

AUTOMOTIVE, from page 7

in farm equipment. The cost of staying current on equipment needs in precision ag and many other programs presents a major financial challenge, Schears said. That's why he hired a grant writer three years ago.

"In the last three years, we've been able to pull in about \$1.7 million in technology and equipment in grants across the institution," he said. "That's been huge."

At Salina Area Tech, several recently donated vehicles are giving students the opportunity to work on electric and hybrid vehicles, as well as traditional gasoline engines.

"It's an amazing transition in the automotive industry, and we're right there in the middle of the transition," Nichols said. "My auto people tell me that there are more computers in any of the passenger cars than the commercial jets we fly. There's an average of 45 to 50 different computers in the cars we drive."

Burks said in addition to the challenge of funding equipment, another big financial hurdle tech colleges face is providing adequate pay to attract faculty. Many of the people they seek to hire have the credentials and skills to make much better money working in their trade.

"We were trying to hire an electrical instructor on our Hays campus, and we couldn't get them to come because of

our salary," he said. "They were making \$90,000 as an electrician."

"Start here, go anywhere."

Burks said a lot of NCK Tech's former students have gone on to become very successful in their professional lives. Some own companies that are major employers in the area.

"There are lots of paths to success," he said. "University is one of them, but certainly a lot of paths to success have led right through NCK Tech, right through NWK Tech, right through Salina Tech. We don't want to discourage or make our children or grandchildren think those aren't good, viable options."

He said learning a skilled trade is a good move for both students who did well in high school and students who struggled, maybe because they learn better by doing. He said tech college credits transfer, so for some they could be just the start of higher education.

"What I've told my kids is, 'Get a skill,' " said Schears of Northwest Kansas Tech. "Get something that allows you, if you choose to go on to college, to work so you don't have to flip burgers, do work study or take out student loans. You can set up a payment plan and work through it. Keeping the next generation out of debt is a big focus of where my heart is at."

Schears said he struggled in high school, until he had an opportunity to take heating and air conditioning and electrical classes at the local tech school. There, he said, he discovered he was a hands-on learner. He said his tech classes raised his overall grade point average, so he continued to pursue his education. In March, he was in the final stages of earning his doctorate.

"It's a good time to be in tech ed right now — the demand and industry support has been huge," he said. "This is what I tell our junior-senior kids every time I do presentations: Start here, go anywhere." ■

Big projects, big business

Bisnette served on the city council four years before becoming mayor four years ago. He thinks the future looks bright for Downs.

"We have a number of older residents, but some young people are coming back," he said. "A fair number of them said when they left, 'I'll never come back to this town.' But they have started coming back. That's really neat. There's no place like home."



MAYOR JOHN BISNETTE

Bisnette is proud of the improvements at the industrial park, as well as other major city infrastructure projects. The city's new \$1.8 million water plant began operation in March, and in April a \$1.6 million street renovation downtown was slated to start. Both projects received

Community Development Block Grant funding.

Bisnette said he does not expect the street project to be a hardship for the businesses in the community's bustling downtown, which includes a grocery store, furniture store, pharmacy, hardware store and a new restaurant. Also, farmers driving loaded semis from surrounding counties will still be able to reach the Scoular Grain elevators near downtown during construction. Scoular recently invested in a major expansion, adding 3 million bushels of grain storage capacity at its Downs location.

"The fall harvest was good," said location manager Doug Lantz. "The weather was perfect, and everything came together properly."

In addition to staples like the bank, accounting firm and insurance agency, the city's business community also features some more unusual endeavors. There's a business that builds pipe organs, a hunting guide business, a business specializing in air compressors and a business that offers equipment that makes it possible to change lights at the top of cell towers without climbing them, Bisnette said.

Downtown destinations

Two downtown businesses that make Downs a destination are Shoes etc. & Stonz Jewelry, and Schoen's Bridal World.

Joni Heiland, who has owned Shoes etc. & Stonz Jewelry for 25 years, saw a marked increase in her online sales during 2020.



Evgeniya "Eve" Albert owns Schoen's Bridal World, which has been a destination for future brides from across the state for more than 40 years.

BELOW: Joni Heiland, owner of Shoes etc. & Stonz Jewelry, uses an iPad to film a live show for Facebook. She is modeling the day's featured clothing item.

"COVID did escalate our business, and we ship a tremendous amount," said Heiland, who is known to her boutique's more than 27,000 Facebook followers for the livestream shows she and her staff do.

The atmosphere is upbeat as they model new clothing, footwear, handbags and accessories from shipments that arrive daily. Followers place orders by commenting on posts, sending private messages or calling the store. Every request is followed up on by store employees.

She said she is committed to staying competitive and currently has an app in development to give customers a direct connection to the store's merchandise from their mobile devices.

Evgeniya "Eve" Albert owns the bridal store next door that has been bringing future brides to Downs for more than 40 years. Albert has owned the store for 10 years and personally does alterations at no charge when a bride picks her gown.

"My mother-in-law bought the dress for my wedding here 20 years ago," she said. "If you live in Kansas, pretty much everyone knows about the store."

Making life fun

Mayor Bisnette is quick to point out several other features of the town that improve quality of life for all ages, including a community garden, swimming pool, a restored historic train depot where community events occur, the nine-hole Downs Golf Club, a disc golf course and newly installed horseshoe pits.

After a year off during the pandemic, two popular annual events — the Downs Celebration, set for June 17-19, and the Kansas Storytelling Festival — are expected to return in 2021. The storytelling festival, traditionally held in April, has been moved to Sept. 17 and 18 this year.

"The storytellers who go to events in Chicago or any large city are the same people who come to Downs," said Glennys Doane, coordinator of the festival. "They like our Midwest hospitality." ■





Hats off

Louisiana native finds success selling headwear online from tiny Northwest Kansas town

Lil Grizz polishes the edge of a hat brim. Some of the hat blocks he uses, seen on the shelves, are more than 150 years old.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ERIN MATHEWS

[NEW ALMELO] Looking like he just stomped Santa Fe Trail dust off his boots, Lil Grizz tells tales about his life that keep getting taller.

They start with his birth in the lonesome-est place in Louisiana — “Bayou Selph.” There’s the hot air balloon incident that gets him banned from Paris, and the coat that hangs on the back of a door in his shop: “That’s yeti fur. It’s rare.”

You can attempt to separate fact from

fantasy. Or, you can just go with it.

The stories and the look are part of the Lil Grizz appeal. Professional artists have been inspired to paint him. Musicians have written songs about him. But mostly, people from across the nation and around the world are buying and wearing the hats he makes in his basement shop in an unincorporated community in Norton County.

Using hat blocks and tools — some of which are more than a century and a half

old — he stretches, shapes and trims pieces of fur-blend felt. He crafts hats to the size and head shape of the individuals who will wear them.

“It makes us feel so proud when they call back later on and say it fit them perfect,” he said.

Who are the people in Lil Grizz’s “hat family”? They are an eclectic mix of people, including a professor who specializes in British castles, an Elvis impersonator, and a cowboy poet. Many of them just like

1. Immerse a piece of hat felt into scalding hot water.



2. Stretch the felt tightly over the hat block.



4. Tie the hat to the block with string to maintain its shape.



5. Place wet ironing cloths on the brim.



looking good in a hat. Lil Grizz makes headwear for everyone — from gentleman to pirate.

“He loves making hats. Had you noticed?” said Lil Grizz’s wife, Joy, aka Mizz Grizz. “I try to get him to take a break.”

“On weekdays, it’s a job. On weekends, it’s a hobby,” Lil Grizz explained.

It’s fitting that the name of the online business they started in 2015 — Hats by Grizz Made with Joy — gives a tip of the hat to Mizz Grizz.

Part of Lil Grizz’s success at making a profit from an “ancient” craft — he claims to have learned hat-making “in the shadow of the pyramids” — has been modern-day social media. Lil Grizz doesn’t know how to operate the computer and has no phone. It’s Mizz Grizz who makes videos of her husband at work, which she posts or livestreams on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. She also designed and sews the sweatbands that add to the comfort of the hats.

Telling it like it is

Even told without embellishment, Lil Grizz’s path through life has been fairly unique. Before settling down as the “Pope” of New Almelo (unknown to most, his real last name is Pope), he had spent nearly three decades roaming the country making hats and taking old-time photos at Civil War re-enactments, mountain man rendezvous and pirate festivals. His hats range from historically accurate reproductions that have appeared in movies to creations of his own invention — more than 120 styles in all.

He learned how to block a hat while working at a western clothing store during high school, and later his photography work got him into making hats as props for his pictures. Eventually, film and dark room



Happiness is making hats for Lil Grizz and Mizz Grizz.

chemicals became hard to come by as digital cameras took over. He set aside his camera and concentrated on hats.

Lil Grizz hadn’t grown up dreaming of one day being a hatmaker. He tried being a carpet layer, plumber and carpenter. Then he went to college in Louisiana, got a degree in forestry and worked in the logging industry. Later, he got into the oilfield business. In 1990 at age 40, he retired. He’d been attending historical reenactments as a hobby since the 1970s and decided to try making a career out of photography at those events. The money wasn’t great, but life was an adventure, and he lived at various times in Arkansas, Wyoming, Texas, Florida, Mississippi and Pennsylvania.

In 2000, he bought a home in Kansas, so that wherever he went, he’d be halfway home. He eventually sold that house in Hill City and went on the road again. Then he met Joy at a rendezvous in Wyoming, and soon they were married. In 2014, they returned to Kansas and “literally drove

every paved road between Gem and Russell” looking for a place to live, Joy said.

“We made notes in a notebook of every property we could find that had a house and maybe a garage or shed — something he could use for a shop,” she said. “On the third or fourth day we came here to New Almelo.”

Once the cast iron stove and other hat-making equipment found its place in the basement of the New Almelo house, Lil Grizz quit hauling it to shows. Through the high-speed Internet connection, he could sell hats just fine. They’d received a loan to establish their online business through the Northwest Kansas Economic Innovation Center Inc., based in Norton. Soon, that debt was paid in full.

“We’ve had to raise our prices several times — not just to keep up with cost but to keep up with demand,” Mizz Grizz said. “In 2017, we sent out almost 450 orders. There was no way for us to keep at that level. It almost killed him. We’ve had to raise our prices considerably to get it to a level we can keep up with.”

Each hat in the Hats by Grizz shop at Etsy.com ranges in price from about \$150 to \$315.

“Our prices are definitely high end, but they’re not just paying for the hat,” Joy said. “They’re paying for the legend.”

She said when they first started posting online, Lil Grizz was the last craftsman they were aware of making felt hats traditionally in North America. Thanks to his videos on YouTube, he’s no longer alone. A.M. Hats is owned by a young man who built his own tools and became Malaysia’s premiere hatmaker after watching Lil Grizz — and there are others.

“We have literally dozens of young hatmakers learning from Lil Grizz,” she said. ■

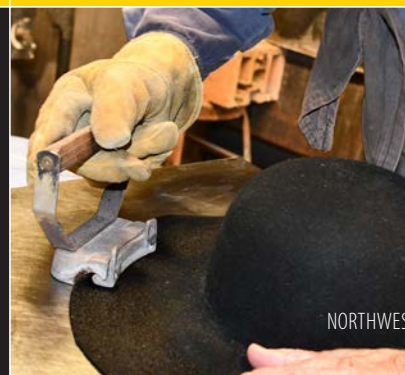
6. Iron the brim flat.



7. Trim the edges of the brim.



8. Curl the edges of the brim.



9. Sew in the sweatband.



When opportunity and country

Agra woman finds a new dream career in the Army Nurse Corps

STORY AND PHOTOS BY BETSY WEARING

[AGRA] Ninety-six-year-old Lora Dettmer remembers vividly Christmas Eve 1944. She was a student nurse.

“It was during the war,” Lora said. “I was working in pediatrics. It was Christmas Eve. I had about eight of the littlest children who were so sick, and I thought, ‘Half of these are going to die before morning.’”

On that shift, Lora says, she was tasked with administering a new drug. It was called penicillin.

“I had to give that penicillin in their poor little butts. I just carried babies all night long to get them through that. And they all lived. I thought, ‘Boy, look at that. These babies all lived, and about four of them should have died last night.’”

“It was a Christmas miracle.”

Though discovered in 1928, penicillin was first used in the United States in 1942. But it was not a mainstream drug for several more years. The need to treat soldiers in WWII had also boosted the progress to get penicillin in those tiny bottoms.

“The war really helped it along,” Lora said. But it almost wasn’t available that night.

Carla Dettmer, Lora’s daughter-in-law, noted that the student nurses all worked at Kansas City General, the hospital for the poor, and the board of directors had not approved the purchase of the new drug.

“Oh, yes,” Lora nodded. “The board said, ‘We’re not going to spend money on that.’”

The babies — and countless others no doubt — were saved by the generosity of a pediatrician.

“A woman doctor bought that penicillin for all the little kids that she was the doctor to,” Lora recalled. “I know she did.”

A dream career wasn’t a dream

Lora’s journey to that Christmas began in tiny Agra, in Phillips County, a stone’s throw from the Nebraska border.

“I grew up here and there and everywhere,” she said. She was Lora Rahjes then. “My dad was a WPA (Works Progress Administration) person. Mostly around here in Phillips and Smith County.”

She graduated from Agra High School in 1942 and followed her dream of becoming a teacher.

“I taught in country schools for two years,” Lora said. “That was a bummer.”

“I planned all my life I was going to be a teacher. When I got ready to do that — well, you couldn’t get there. It was in the country, and I couldn’t drive. So, my daddy took me. You stayed all week and boarded in the place. It wasn’t for me.”

With teaching less than satisfying, Lora found opportunity in a newspaper ad.

“I don’t even remember how I could have seen that ad. Not sure who had

the paper; my dad did not have the daily paper,” she said.

“The war was on, and the ad said I could join the Cadet Nurse Corps. It was that or WACS (Women’s Army Corps) or

WAVES (Women

Accepted for

Voluntary

Emergency

Services for



96-year-old Lora Rahjes Dettmer spent her early years, and now her later years, in Agra. In between, she studied nursing in Kansas City as part of the Army Nurse Corps. She still has the uniform she wore in training, and also once much later as a Halloween costume when she worked at the nursing home in Kensington.



the Navy). And I thought, 'Well, nurse corps sounds like more of an education than WACS and WAVES,' so I chose that."

Big city bound

It was a leap of faith.

"I'd never seen a nurse — didn't know anything about what a nurse did. It just sounded better," she said matter of factly.

The decision meant leaving Agra and heading to a city.

"When I was gonna go, I had to go to the doctor to get a physical," she recalled, "Dr. Lee said, 'Go to a big place.' I told him I was going to Kansas City. He said, 'That's big enough.'"

"I took the train out of Agra," she said. "Mother was with me, and I could tell by her feeling — you know we didn't do much hugging in those days — that she thought she was sending me to outer space!"

Lora thought otherwise.

"I'm doing something different," she said. "I'm doing something special. I wanted an education."

Another vivid memory was when the train pulled into Kansas City.

"I had never seen Union Station. I got off that train, and what do I do now? Follow the crowd up these moving stairs," she said. And at the top, there's all these big windows. And every window had a yellow cab in front of it. I thought, 'OK, I'll get in a cab and they'll tell me where to go.'"

It turned out the school was only three or four blocks away. Lora said had she

known that she would have just walked. She quickly settled into her room. It was quite a change from the farm in Agra.

"I was on the northwest corner of the third floor," she said. "I could see all those cars into the main part of Kansas City, and I thought, how far does this go?"

Hard work and new friends

Everything was provided by the government as part of the nurse corps program. "Every two weeks they gave us a check for a few dollars for your toothpaste and your personal items," she said.

Training lasted three years. It was hard work, but Lora enjoyed it.

"You completed one ward and then went to another," she said. "I liked surgery the best. It was great fun. Great to know it all."

She said her first roommate did not finish. Many of the girls did not finish. But she made great friends, including her second roommate, Loretta Cartwright.

"We called her Gib. Her last name then was Gibson. She was not a Loretta, that didn't fit her at all. We never called her Loretta.

"I was from out in the country, and she had never seen the country. In that way we were so different," Lora said "She came out here once. She rode on a tractor; she had never seen one before."

Gib now lives in Missouri. "We still keep in touch, have nice phone conversations."

Good for the whole world

On September 2, 1945, Lora said she was working in surgery. Everyone was waiting for the official word that Japan had

surrendered.

"The surgeons had done their duty overseas, and they were back here." She said they kept sending her out of the surgery suite to listen to the radio to see if Japan had signed the surrender papers. "I came back in when it was done. I said, 'They're on the ship and they've signed the thing. It's over.'"

"It was exciting. Good for the whole



LORA RAHJES - 1947

world to have it over," she said.

She graduated from nurse's training in 1947. Because the war had ended, she never had to serve overseas, which

was a requirement of the nurses who were enrolled in the corps.

"I would have gone, but I was glad I didn't have to," she said.

By then she was engaged to her future husband, Irwin.

Both Irwin and Lora grew up in rural Agra, and even went to high school together for a year. But they never dated until much later.

"He was a high school football star, and I was a ninth-grade nothing," she laughed.

One weekend during her training, Lora was home visiting family. Irwin spotted her in church. He was back home after his service overseas.

"So, after church he approached me and asked me to go to the show that night. That was great," she said. "That was really great."

See **NURSE**, page 31

Craving COMMUNITY

Consultant says people are choosing rural over urban

STORY BY ERIN MATHEWS

If he were writing his best-selling book *13 Ways to Kill Your Community* now, one chapter would be called, “Don’t Have Connectivity,” Doug Griffiths told a virtual audience of staff and board members from area community foundations and economic development organizations.

“I heard you guys have amazing high-speed Internet,” he said. “That’s going to be as important to the success of our communities as water is to our survival.”

But the connectivity people are seeking is not just high-speed Internet. As a result of the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic, and even starting before that, people have been craving personal connection, he said. Small communities and neighborhoods are attractive because they are places where connections can be made.

“Community matters more than it ever has before,” he said. “Everyone says shop local. No. Be local. Live local. Connect local. It’s not just about spending money. It’s about all these other dynamics.”

As the keynote speaker at the Dane G. Hansen Foundation’s 2021 (Virtual) Forum on March 31, Griffiths reviewed advice from his 2010 book — a how-not-to manual for people who want their

communities to survive and grow. He also talked about a new book he’s working on about the revival of rural communities.

“For a decade now, people have been moving from bigger centers to smaller centers because that’s where quality of life is,” he said. “You need to think about socialization, about aesthetic beauty, about connections to nature, walking trails, because that’s what people are looking for.”

Griffiths, a community consultant from Alberta, Canada, said he wrote *13 Ways* to help community leaders “eliminate some of the lies that we tell ourselves — the things we say that we want to be true that aren’t necessarily true.”

“I had this realization that everywhere I went people wanted success, they wanted to do things, but their actions were actually counterproductive — they were doing the opposite of what they needed to do to find success,” he said.

He included some of those lessons in chapters like “Reject Everything New,” “Shop Elsewhere,” “Live in the Past,” and “Don’t Paint.”

Finding the way forward

The book he’s writing now is designed to help rural communities take advantage of current trends and thrive. He said whether you are



DOUG GRIFFITHS

talking about a city, a corporation or even a house, “big is dying, and small is seeing a rebirth.”

“The next generation doesn’t even want to live in a three-bedroom, two-bathroom, two-car garage house,” he said.

A better building strategy would be smaller homes near the downtown area, so that people have places to socialize within walking distance. He also recommended investing in nice co-working spaces — and putting up twinkle lights.

“They want to go to yoga, to a coffee shop, to a brew pub, to a restaurant. They want parks. They want gardens. They want dog parks and walking trails. They want all that,” Griffiths said. “The truth for economic development is that it

“Everyone says shop local. No. Be local. Live local. Connect local. It’s not just about spending money. It’s about all these other dynamics.”

DOUG GRIFFITHS | COMMUNITY CONSULTANT & AUTHOR

equals community building.”

He said the younger generation has grown up with access to the whole world at their fingertips.

“We used to be afraid of things being different. Now we crave things being different,” he said. “So many of our communities have cultural diversity. You need to celebrate it and bring it to the forefront to attract young people, who want to not just see it on the internet but see it in the community they’re in.”

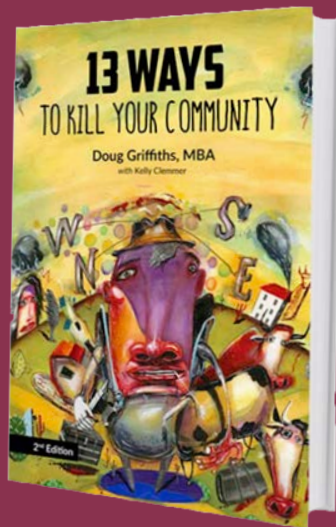
Jobs moving to people

Economic development strategies have typically focused on lowering taxes and cutting regulations, but Griffiths said that’s not what works today. Now, instead of people moving to the jobs, jobs are moving to places people want to live, because that’s where the workforce is.

“Our notions of economic development have to shift,” he said.

Griffiths said communities also need to embrace changes brought about by advances in technology. On the horizon are autonomous vehicles, widespread use of electric cars, robot doctors that diagnose health problems with an algorithm and 3D-printed beef and leather.

He said society quickly adopts new technologies. Some changes may not be to an individual’s liking, but they will still come.



The speed with which technological changes have already occurred over the past 50 years became plain to Griffiths when he realized his children did not recognize that the button they push on their smart phones to make a call shows a telephone receiver — or that the save icon on their computer is a replica of a floppy disk. The teenagers had never seen a phone with that kind of receiver, or a floppy disk.

To prosper, communities need to have an understanding of and a strategy for dealing with the technological, economic, social and demographic shifts headed their way.

“Make sure it’s based on the way things are changing, not the way you want them to be or the way you think they should be,” he said. “You need to be adaptable.” ■

NURSE, from page 29

Family first, then back to nursing

After she graduated, the couple wanted to marry, but the Dettmer farm was rented.

“We couldn’t get married until we had a place to live. So, I got a job in Hays and worked at Hadley Memorial for probably six months.”

They were finally married March 28, 1948. Lora was finished with nursing — for a while.

“First, I raised a family,” Lora said. She and Irwin had three sons, Craig, Van and Brian.

In 1967, when Brian was in the fifth grade, Lora went back to work at the new Prairie Haven Nursing Home in Kensington.

“When it was built, Bob Hodge was looking for someone to run it. They hired a nurse. But she only lasted about two weeks.

“He knew that I was a nurse. I said I could come a couple days a week. I worked a few hours one day or a couple hours another day, whenever I could get away from the farm. Whenever I was needed at home, like harvest time — I was able to be at home.”

A couple hours here and there turned into a 22-year career at Prairie Haven.

“I told Bob Hodge that I would work part time if there was a need,” she said. “That need got to be quite a lot.”

She and Irwin lived in the family farmhouse until 1990. Today, Lora lives in a small house across the road from where she and Irwin raised their children. On the wall hangs a picture of Kansas City’s Union Station — a gift from her grandchildren.

Irwin passed away in 2005. Van and Carla live in the family house, and the other two boys farm nearby. They are all close enough to visit mom whenever they want.

Lora kept her nursing uniforms and her wool Army Nurse cape. All are still in perfect condition, and Lora looks as though she could slip right back into them — the uniforms, and the memories. ■

NWKansas **READS**

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