



**GROWING OPPORTUNITIES**

Working Together to  
Grow a Vibrant Phelps  
County Economy

**GO! HOME  
UPDATES**

Changes are coming to the GO! HOME program in 2020 to focus on bringing new residents to Phelps County.

PCDC will no longer offer Renter Relocation Grants.



Instead, PCDC will focus efforts on helping newcomers buy homes with down-payment assistance grants.

PCDC will match employer funds of up to \$2,500 to help employees living outside of the county purchase a home in Phelps County.

In 2019, PCDC received 19 applications for down-payment assistance grants. This resulted in 40 new residents and a total investment of \$1.7 million in local homes purchased.

PCDC will also continue the residential exterior improvement grants for new home owners and the grants for new construction, major renovation and lot clearing for contractors.



## Holdrege's Largest Employer Begins Next Stage of Growth

### BD Makes Additional \$40 Million Investment in Holdrege

Hiring has started at BD after the October announcement of 35 new jobs and a new product line at the Holdrege manufacturing plant.

Brian Deakin, Human Resources Manager at BD, said some of the technical and engineering jobs associated with the new product line have been posted, and they are now starting the selection process.

Another wave of hiring will begin in February when BD will advertise the equipment operator positions. The salary for operator positions ranges from \$17.50 to \$21 per hour.

"They won't hit all at once," Deakin said of the new jobs. "They roll out over a year-long process."

The new jobs are the result of BD adding the production of general-use

syringes to the Holdrege plant. BD already produces general syringes at other plants, but they are new to Holdrege.

BD Holdrege previously focused on manufacturing smaller insulin syringes for diabetes care. The Holdrege plant is the world's largest producer of insulin syringes, manufacturing more than 2 billion each year that are distributed around the world.

"We have demonstrated that we can make it happen here performance wise," Deakin said. "We are just excited to bring the product on. I think it's a good vote of confidence from our corporation headquarters about what we can do in Nebraska, especially here in Holdrege."

Construction is already in progress on the internal and external modifications to create the manufacturing areas needed for the general-use syringes.

BD completed a 14,000-square-foot expansion in 2014 and then announced a \$100 million expansion project at the Holdrege plant in 2016. The final stages of the 2016 investment are almost complete.

With the announcement of the new product line, BD is making an additional \$40 million investment in the Holdrege plant.

For information on the new jobs at BD, visit [www.jobs.bd.com](http://www.jobs.bd.com).

The new additions are expected to bring BD's employment in Holdrege to more than 650 people.

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### Executive Director

Ron Tillery  
Ron@PhelpsCountyNe.com

### Director of Business Services

Carley Bruning  
Carley@PhelpsCountyNe.com

### Director of Administrative Services

Stacy Pafford  
Stacy@PhelpsCountyNe.com

### GO! NEWS Editor

Kristine Jacobson  
Send news releases,  
news tips and story ideas to  
kjacobson@krjpr.com  
or call (308) 995-5561

### PCDC Officers

Reed McClymont - President  
Phil Hinrichs - Vice President  
Michele High  
- Secretary/Treasurer

### Board of Directors

Janet Boehler  
Nate DeWald  
Fred Diedrichsen  
Jared Engelbert  
Grant Hinze  
Thomas Nutt  
Tim Rehm  
Doug Stevenson  
Shane Westcott

### PCDC Offices

502 East Avenue, Suite 201  
PO Box 522  
Holdrege, NE 68949-0522  
ph (308) 995-4148  
fax (308) 995-4158  
www.PhelpsCountyNe.com



Restaurants is just one of the four areas identified as an opportunity for growth in a recent study completed for PCDC.

## Retail and Restaurant Recruitment Top Priority for PCDC In New Year

A new year marks a new focus on retail and “amenity” recruitment for the leaders of the Phelps County Development Corporation.

“Part of what we are hoping to accomplish with retail is also commonly referred to as place making,” said PCDC Executive Director Ron Tillery. “People often make a decision about where to live before they make a decision about where to work. They want to be in places that have amenities and cultural activities that are attractive. Retail is an important component of that. We are prioritizing retail development as part of our overall campaign to make Holdrege a compelling, attractive place to live.”

Tillery said PCDC learned some interesting statistics from its new partnership with Retail Strategies, a nationwide data, marketing and recruitment firm.

Retail Strategies presented its first report to PCDC staff in mid-November. The report details the county’s demographics, current businesses, local real estate options and compares Phelps County’s retail offerings to similar-sized areas.

“One of the surprising things to me is that despite the fact that we have a few fine grocery stores in town, there’s a lot of money going out of town in that category,” Tillery said.

Retail Strategies reports that annually, a retail leakage of \$13 million exists in the grocery category.

Besides groceries, based on consumer buying patterns both in and out of the county, the report

showed opportunities for Phelps County in three areas: restaurants/food and beverage, apparel and general merchandise.

Tillery noted there was room for growth in the gas station/convenience store category as well.

The report is a “starting point to begin the proactive marketing to a national network of retailers, brokers, developers and key industry contacts on behalf of the community.”

PCDC’s newly created Retail Recruitment Committee led by PCDC Board Member Nate DeWald met in December to review the report and will begin formulating an action plan.

“Our goal is be ready to hit the ground running in January,” Tillery said. “We’re going to be aggressive in the pursuit of new and expanded businesses.”

Tillery said PCDC’s work with Retail Strategies will also benefit current local retailers to help them better understand their market, see where their customers come from and how large their potential market could be.

“We can drill down into purchases and products sold with great detail,” Tillery said. “This is helpful to existing businesses who want to add more product.”

Tillery said as part of the retail recruitment strategy, PCDC will put an emphasis on downtown revitalization. He said towns are often judged based on the appearance of their downtowns, and that a strong downtown indicates a strong community.

# Eleven Chosen for Inaugural Leadership Holdrege Class

Eleven community leaders have been selected to participate in the first Leadership Holdrege class.

The new program aims to inspire, connect, educate and engage leaders in Phelps County to make a stronger impact in their workplaces and in the community.

Cory Steinke, Hydraulic Project Operations Manager at Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District, is among the inaugural class members.

“I applied for this program to become a better leader and possibly expand my involvement within the community,” Cory said. “I am most looking forward to gaining community contacts and learning from other area leaders.”

The Leadership Holdrege class met for the first time in early December for a kick-off retreat, which was partially in Grand Island. They heard from Grand Island area leaders and from local business leader Robert McCormick. They also participated in the Gallup Strength Finders survey to discover their top five strengths.

“I think the strength finding exercise will be the most impactful lesson so far,” Cory said. “Knowing your strengths, and working to those strengths, can help you overcome your weaknesses.”



Kelsey Stevenson, who just celebrated her fifth year of owning Salon 31 in downtown Holdrege, said she has always had a heart to serve Holdrege and to be a part of the community.

“It thought this was a good opportunity to be able to execute better and work with people better and get a foot in the door,” she said.

She described the kick-off retreat as “incredible.”

“It was really interesting to see the massive impact you can have on a community by being involved and putting yourself out there and being kind of risky,” she said. “You can truly thrive in whatever you want to do in a small community.”

Those selected and their employers are: **Ashley Pople**, Pople Construction; **Ben Loberg**, FSB Investments; **Carley Bruning**, PCDC; **Chris McQuillan**, First State Bank Loomis; **Colby Gray**, Country Road Realty; **Coni Park**, Young at Heart Senior Center; **Cory Steinke**, CNPPID; **Kelsey Stevenson**, Salon

31/Holdrege Area Chamber of Commerce; **Leah Gleason**, Fye Law Office; **Mark Kraus**, Lost Way Brewery/Real Estate Connection; **Shaun Keeshan**, Black Hills Energy.

Leadership Holdrege is a project of the Holdrege Area Chamber of Commerce and is supported financially through participants’ class fees, by the Phelps County Development Corporation and through a grant from the Nebraska Department of Labor Worker Training Program.

Central Community College is a partner in the program, and several area businesses are also involved by providing tours or speakers, including the City of Holdrege, Phelps County, Phelps County Community Foundation, South-Central Economic Development District, Glion, Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District, Phelps County Sheriff’s Office, Holdrege Police Department, Educational Service Unit No. 11 and Phelps Memorial Health Center.

The class will continue to meet monthly through May with sessions on government, education and community investment, industry and agriculture, natural resources, and economic development/medical.

A graduation ceremony is planned for May 8.

# Construction Boom Continues Throughout Winter Months

Several area construction projects are continuing at a brisk pace, even during the winter months.

Construction began on the new Cobblestone Hotel in early November, and crews have been working seven days a week to complete the project in time for a summer 2020 opening.

Dirt work began in October on the new Crew Workforce Housing Subdivision in east Holdrege. The subdivision is part of efforts to bring more workforce housing to the community and will result in more than 40 new living units once completed.

Construction is also progressing rapidly on the Phelps Memorial Health Center and clinic expansion and the Allmand Inc. expansion.



Phelps Memorial Health Center



Cobblestone Hotel



Allmand Inc./Briggs & Stratton



Crew Subdivision



PHELPS COUNTY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION #GROW 37

## A PROSPEROUS YEAR 2019 MILESTONES



### ATTRACTING NEW RESIDENTS

#### 86 New Residents

- Moved to Phelps County with support from GO! HOME

#### 18 Downtown Living Units

- Created at Iron Horse Flats with Help From PCDC GO! DREAM

#### \$5 Million Investment/40 New Homes

- Included in the new Crew Subdivision in east Holdrege

#### Retail Priorities

- Worked with Noddle Development to attract potential tenants to vacant Shopko Building
- Established new retail recruitment targets with Retail Strategies

#### Workforce Recruitment

- Invited 600 displaced workers in Murray, Ky., to live and work in Phelps County

### SECURING A FUTURE WORKFORCE

#### 10 Scholarships Totaling \$26,000

- Awarded to future Phelps County workers for high-demand jobs

#### \$15,000 for Education

- Invested into STEM/CSI Lab for area middle schoolers

#### 11 Future Leaders

- Learning Valuable Skills in First Leadership Holdrege Class



### GO! DREAM

#### \$32,500 in Grants

Awarded to six downtown businesses, resulting in \$90,700 in private investment



### MARKETING & BRANDING

#### Sharing the News

- Distributed the quarterly printed PCDC Business Journal to all Phelps County address and key leaders across the state and nation

#### Updated Website

- Added new facts, stats and stories to keep the PCDC website relevant to new and existing business owners and site selectors

#### Annual Meeting

- Hosted sold-out crowd at annual meeting

#### Certified City

- Secured recertification as a Certified Economic Development Community

### SUPPORTING BUSINESS GROWTH

- BD completes \$100 million automated equipment installation and then announces two new product lines and 35 new jobs

- Allmand Inc. begins \$8 million expansion, which will eventually lead to 60 new jobs

- Bids awarded to pave Gustin Street near Iron Horse Industrial Park

- Cobblestone Inn begins \$4.2 million project in Holdrege, which will create 22 new jobs

- Southern Public Power District builds new service center in Funk

- PCDC provides 18 bidding opportunities to Builder's Bureau

### PROVIDING BUSINESS TOOLS

- Labor Market Study Completed

- Targeted Industry Study Updated

- Provided Professional Development Workshops to Holdrege CRA

- Promoted Phelps County Livestock Impact Study

- Surveyed Farmers About Integrated Livestock Opportunities

# Local Employers Invest in Retaining Local Talent

## Janssen Auto, BD Create Programs to Train Future Workforce

Local businesses are leading the way in recruiting a future local workforce with innovative learning ideas.

Janssen Auto is partnering with Holdrege High School and Central Community College to create a new career development program to train automotive technicians, a job that is in high demand in the area.

Janssen Auto group owns eight regional auto dealerships, including three in Holdrege.

Owner Dan Janssen said the local program would be modeled after a similar program in Wisconsin called "Pistons to Pathways."

Although the details haven't all been finalized, it is hoped that students would be able to earn dual credits for both high school and community college plus get a jump start on their careers. It would be a two-year program for high school juniors and seniors.

Janssen is offering the local Ford dealership as the class meeting location and a technician to teach the class. Central Community College is working on the curriculum requirements. The Phelps County Development Corporation will pay for tuition for the first year of the program.

"If the student participated over two years, he or she could possibly get almost a full semester (12 credits) under his or her belt prior to getting to the CCC campus," Janssen said. "Students would also receive Ford certifications through the Ford ACE (automotive career exploration) program."

After high school graduation, Janssen said students who passed the class could start work right away for Janssen Ford or further their education through Central Community College. If they worked for Janssen right way, they would need additional training.

HHS Principal Bob Drews said the program is a win for the school and for students.

"We have kids every year who would like to know more about auto tech, and as a public school, it's really cost prohibitive for us to start a program from scratch," Drews said. "The access to the current materials and information from a business locally is really invaluable."

## Scholarships Available for High-Demand Jobs

Students interested in future careers in Phelps County are encouraged to apply for the 2020 High-Demand Jobs Scholarships.

The scholarships are provided by PCDC and the Phelps County Community Foundation and are intended to help local graduates obtain training in high-demand careers in Phelps County. This will be the seventh year the scholarships have been provided.

The high-demand careers are in nursing, agribusiness and technology, diesel mechanics, engineering technology, electromechanics engineering, injection mold technology, electromechanical technology, tool and die making, construction trades and welding.

**Applications are due February 15** and are available at [www.phelpsfoundation.org](http://www.phelpsfoundation.org)

Drews sent a survey to high school students this fall to determine interest in the program, and about 20 students expressed interest. He is now gathering information about the best time of day for the class. It is hoped that the program can begin in fall of 2020.

"We are looking forward to this new partnership and are hoping there are some other industries out there who want to be the driver of new opportunities, like Janssens," Drews said.

High school students from other area schools would also be invited to participate in the program.

PCDC Executive Director Ron Tillery said PCDC's role in this program has been as an advocate and partner.

"Sometimes it takes employers taking that initiative to get things done," Tillery said.

**BD HOLDREGE** has also taken the initiative to train future workers with its new mechanic apprenticeship program.

The apprenticeship program pays local students to earn a degree while at the same time giving them on-the-job training in a variety of manufacturing areas at BD.

"Students actually work for us, and we send them to school," said Brian Deakin, BD's human resources manager. "When they finish the program, they actually have a credential in mechanical technology."

The three-year program is registered as an official apprenticeship through the Nebraska Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Labor.

BD announced the program in early 2019, posted the apprenticeship opportunity and received applications from around the region.

Two area students, one from Axtell and one from Lexington, were selected for the first year of the program. One of the students started the program right out of high school, and the other student started after going into the military.

"We are very pleased with the program so far," Deakin said. "I think our first two selections are going to work out wonderfully."

The two apprentices are paid to attend classes at Central Community College. BD also pays for the classes and pays the student to work at BD and learn various aspects of manufacturing.

While they are attending school, Deakin said the apprenticeship jobs are on the first shift to accommodate class schedules. The pay is competitive – around \$18 an hour for someone just graduating from high school or a few years out.

"Our goal is to help students who live in this area to start their careers and get going," Deakin said. "It's a great job. It puts someone in a great position to move forward."

Deakin said manufacturing jobs are in high-demand across the state and country, and students with this training have abundant opportunities. And, BD's scholarships and apprenticeship programs help them graduate with little to no college debt.

Applications will be posted early in 2020 for the second year of the program, and information will be sent to area high school guidance counselors.

Deakin said the apprenticeship is targeted to students who have some mechanical aptitude and like to work with their hands and can learn and understand the technical aspects of modern automation.

# New Art Gallery Opens in Downtown Bertrand

A new art gallery has opened in downtown Bertrand that features the work of Phelps County native Jeremy Hansen.

Jeremy and his wife, Cristal, own and operate Those Blasted Signs & Designs in rural Smithfield, and Jeremy also works as a professional artist.

In November, the couple opened the Jeremy Hansen Gallery at the Herald, 615 Minor Ave. in Bertrand, with an open house for the community.

"It means a great deal to us because we both love the small-town community feel of Bertrand and to be able to save a historic building while showcasing what I do and love is unbeatable," Jeremy said.

Jeremy and Cristal both graduated from Bertrand High School and from the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Jeremy earned a degree in studio art with an emphasis in painting.

"Art is my form of expression or meditation, and it has always been what I turn to for comfort and therapy," Jeremy said.

He has worked as a professional artist since 2000 and attends major art shows annually in cities such as Chicago, Denver, Miami, Houston, San Diego and Dallas. He describes his artistic style as mostly abstract expressionism.

Jeremy said he loves the history and feel of the old Bertrand Herald building.



**Bertrand natives Jeremy and Cristal Hansen opened the Jeremy Hansen Gallery at the Herald in downtown Bertrand in November. (photo courtesy of the Hansens)**

"It was an opportunity that popped up, and I just had to do it," Jeremy said.

The Hansens gutted the interior of the building and remodeled the space to be more open.

For now, Jeremy said the space serves as a place to showcase his art. Other artists may be featured in the gallery in the future. He and Cristal have many dreams and ideas for the new gallery.

"We hope to bring together the community to discuss, educate, and explore the arts," Jeremy

said. "We hope to have special events that will further mix the history of Bertrand with the exploration of fine art."

The Hansens hosted a Christmas ornament decorating event at the gallery in early-December.

The gallery will be open during special events and show openings or other times by chance. To schedule a time to visit the gallery, contact Jeremy at (308) 991-1372. To see Jeremy's art online, visit [www.fineartzero.com](http://www.fineartzero.com).

# Loomis Native Involved in Keeping Local Radio On The Air

The Nebraska Rural Radio Association (NRRRA) believes in the importance of a local radio presence in a community and has purchased KUVR 1380 AM and 96.9 FM in Holdrege from Legacy Communications in Grand Island to keep local radio on the air in Holdrege.

"We're still bullish on radio," said NRRRA CEO and Loomis native Craig Larson. "Our mission is to serve agriculture and rural Nebraska. Holdrege and surrounding areas deserve their own radio station. Good local radio is important to a community."

The sale, announced in November, is pending approval by the Federal Communication Commission.

The NRRRA is farmer owned and has a strong legacy with many resources around the state. Its flagship radio station is KRVN in Lexington, which started in 1951. NRRRA added KNEB in Scottsbluff in 1984, KTIC in West Point in 1997, KTMX and KAWL in York in 2015 and KAMI in Cozad in 2015.



And now, KUVR has joined the legacy.

"KUVR has a rich history going all the way back to the Whitlock family," Larson said. "We want to continue that tradition and provide Holdrege and the surrounding communities with great local radio."

In addition to the Holdrege transaction, Legacy will also be selling six Scottsbluff area stations to

the NRRRA. Legacy will retain ownership of 97.7 FM.

Larson said the main focus right now is getting 1380 AM up to full power and getting more coverage for 96.9 FM. The station was temporarily off the air after losing its radio tower this fall. The new owners are working on a new tower location.

For Larson, who has served at CEO of the NRRRA since 2012, ensuring the future success of KUVR is a bit personal. He grew up in Loomis and worked at KUVR in 1981 part time and then full time from 1982-84. He spent his career in radio broadcasting working in Arizona, Louisiana and Missouri before returning to Nebraska in 1995 to work with KRVN.

"It'd be sad if Holdrege lost its radio station," Larson said. "It's good to promote local businesses and events and cover high school sports. Holdrege KUVR plays an important part of that, and we want to be sure it continues. We want to be a good local station that promotes Holdrege and the area."

## Broekemeier Selected to Lead CHS Holdrege

Matt Broekemeier has been hired as the new General Manager for CHS Holdrege in south-central Nebraska.



**Matt Broekemeier**

Matt has worked for CHS Holdrege since July 2013, starting as the sales development manager. He most recently served as the agronomy division manager before stepping into the role of interim general manager in July 2019.

He previously worked at Aurora Cooperative in various positions.

Matt is originally from Aurora and graduated from the University of Nebraska at Kearney with a degree in business administration with a management emphasis.

Matt and his wife, Randi, live in Kearney and have three children: daughters Kynlee, 8; and Reeslyn, 6; and son, Baker, 4.

Matt is a Kearney YMCA board member and a youth sports coach.

"I am grateful and excited to start this position at CHS," Matt said. "Being from Central Nebraska, I take pride in helping out our local producers and customers. We live in the best ag-producing area in the world, and I appreciate the opportunity to get to work with great customers and employees on a daily basis. There is a lot of pride in our local communities and the cooperative system. We hope to be a company growers can lean on."

## Rich Begins Work as Edward Jones Financial Advisor

Holli Rich is the newest local Edward Jones

Financial Advisor. She previously worked as the senior branch office administrator for Steve Allen for nine years and became a licensed financial advisor for the company in November 2019.



**Holli Rich**

Holli, who is a Phelps County native of Atlanta,

graduated from Holdrege High School and earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

She lived in Houston for 18 years before returning to Holdrege in 2009. She is a member of St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church and serves on the Holdrege Duster Booster Club board.

Holli and her husband, James, just celebrated their 25 anniversary and are parents to four children: Dorothy, who lives in Houston; Anna, who lives in Flagstaff, Ariz.; Caroline, a junior at UNL; and Trey, a sophomore at HHS.

"Phelps County was a great place to grow up, and our children have benefited from that same small town upbringing," she said.

Holli will continue to work with Steve Allen at the Edward Jones office at 416 West Ave. in downtown Holdrege.

"I look forward to continuing to serve our clients and to helping them work toward achieving their long-term financial goals," Holli said.

When she's not working, Holli enjoys reading and yoga.

## Fye Law Office Hires New Attorney

Hastings native Leah Gleason began work as a full-time attorney at Holdrege's Fye Law office in September.



**Leah Gleason**

Leah is a 2012 graduate of Hastings St. Cecilia. She earned bachelors of science degrees in criminal justice and political science from the University of South Dakota. She then studied at Creighton University School of Law, where

she earned a juris doctorate and a master's degree in negotiation and conflict resolution.

She is currently involved in the Phelps County Bar Association, where she serves as treasurer. She also is part of the inaugural class of Leadership Holdrege.

Leah's primary focus will be family law, but she will also assist with estate planning, take appointments for guardian ad litem and will serve as defense counsel in criminal cases.

Leah is planning an August wedding with

fiancé, Nate Birnie, who is originally from Broken Bow.

She connected with Tana Fye at Fye Law office through an interview with the Rural Practice Initiative.

"I knew when I went to law school I wanted to move back to western/central Nebraska," Leah said. "South Dakota was wonderful, but I knew I ultimately wanted to move closer to home, where Nate and I both had family. For the short time we have been back, I have been so impressed by Holdrege. I love that people know who I am when I walk into 4th Avenue Coffee for painting or that after Fye Law office's open house, we had several people looking at houses for us. I don't think I would be getting all the wonderful opportunities I have been given if I had stayed in Omaha, or moved to Lincoln. I have loved being back in small town Nebraska."

When she's not working, Leah enjoys scrapbooking, playing tennis and reading.

## Holdrege Housing Authority Chooses New Executive Director

The Holdrege Housing Authority has hired Stephanie (Stevie) Meyers as the new Executive Director of the Holdrege Housing Authority.



**Stevie Meyers**

Stevie previously served as the executive coordinator for the HHA for the past 4 1/2 years.

She is a graduate of Holdrege High School. After high school, she

worked with her dad, Bob Edwards, at Bob and Norm's Quality Floors until they sold the business.

Meyers, a lifelong Holdrege resident, is married to Ben Meyers, and they have four children: Emily, Katie, Madi and Tyson.

"I am looking forward to getting to be more involved with the community," Stevie said about her new role. "It's a great place to be."

She is also looking forward to continuing her work with the "great people" involved in the Holdrege Housing Authority work.

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PHELPS COUNTY BUSINESS JOURNAL

# GO news

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## Business Tools Available on PCDC Website

Did you know that the PCDC website contains the latest information about business tools, home-buying grants and other great programs?

Here are a few of the newest additions to the award-winning site:

**Sites & Buildings:** A great tool if you have a building or site to sell or are looking to buy. Properties listed here are shared nationwide with site selectors and business owners.

**Office Spaces for Rent:** A new section on the website will feature office spaces for rent or sale in Phelps County.

**Franchises:** PCDC offers major grants to encourage the development of new franchise owners in the county. Details are on the site.

**Find A Career:** This section lists scholarship and internship opportunities, links to job listings in the county and a list of major employers.



**GO HOME!:** Grant applications and details on PCDC home programs.

**Market Research:** Detailed reports about important statistics in the county, including the Livestock Impact Study, Labor Availability Report, Housing Study and Market Trend Report.

Visit the website at [www.phelpscountyne.com](http://www.phelpscountyne.com).