



Holdrege Rated 2nd Most Livable NE Community

Holdrege is the second most livable community in Nebraska, according to the AARP Livability Index.

The index examines factors that support people as they age, including housing, transportation, neighborhood elements, the environment, health status, and community engagement. These attributes and resources enhance personal independence, allowing people to age in place while fostering engagement in the community's civic, economic and social life.



Don Kraus

Holdrege was second behind Lincoln as the most livable community rankings in Nebraska. Phelps County was ranked fourth as the most livable county.

Holdrege resident Don Kraus said he was happy to see that Holdrege was selected as one of Nebraska's best places to live and retire.

"Holdrege is fortunate to have an excellent medical/hospital system, well maintained parks, a YMCA that provides exercise and pickleball opportunities and a great golf course," Kraus said. "Holdrege should be proud of the recognition."

BUSINESS HALL OF FAME BANQUET

Nebraskaland, Pretty & Fabulous Honored

Gov. Jim Pillen shared his top priorities for Nebraska, and PCDC honored two local businesses at the annual Hall of Fame Banquet on Oct. 26 at the Holdrege Sun Theater & Event Venue.

PCDC's Large Business of the Year award went to Nebraskaland Aviation of Holdrege, and the Small Business of the Year was awarded to Pretty & Fabulous Custom T-Shirts & Boutique in Bertrand.

Nebraskaland Aviation

PCDC honored Nebraskaland Aviation as its large business of the year and inducted the Holdrege business into the PCDC Business Hall of Fame.

Nebraskaland Aviation, 1002 Brewster Road, is a family-owned business that provides aerial application services to farmers along with ground liquid custom applications, dry fertilizer custom applications and chemical and fertilizer sales to growers who do their own spraying.

It serves a 22-county area in South-Central Nebraska and North-Central Kansas. Besides Holdrege, the business has locations in Holstein, Alma, Minden, Phillipsburg, Kan. (Kansas Crop Care) and Smith Center, Kan. (Kansas Ag Care).

Nebraskaland is owned by Tye and Aimee Marquardt of Holdrege and their children. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of Westerlin-Harrington Flying Service, which was started by Dennis Westerlin in the mid-1960s. It was later owned



TOP: Nebraskaland Aviation employees in the company's new hangar (courtesy photo). ABOVE: Sandy Dannehl, Jennifer Weber, Julie Nelson and Emma Larson of Pretty & Fabulous Custom T-shirts & Boutique.

by Jim and Sue Lindstrom. Tye joined the operation in 2007 and learned everything he could from Jim and Sue. He purchased the remaining shares of Westerlin-Harrington Flying Service in 2012.

In an emotional speech at the banquet, Tye Marquardt expressed his surprise and gratitude for the

PCDC honor.

"After 17 years in business, Holdrege is our home," Marquardt said. "We are proud to be in Holdrege. When the community that means so much to you recognizes your business, it means a lot to us."

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Housing Projects Creating More Than 40 New Living Units in Phelps County

Housing options are increasing in Phelps County as Holdrege prepares for a new subdivision, and Bertrand adds three new homes and a new 5-unit apartment complex.

Work is expected to begin soon on Holdrege's Northern Meadows subdivision near the new Holdrege baseball complex between 14th and 18th Avenues.

PCDC Executive Director Ron Tillery said the subdivision will eventually feature 30 new homes. The current plan is for basements to be dug on four homes while the city is completing infrastructure in the area. After those homes are sold, construction will begin on another six homes for a total goal of 10 homes in 2024.

Community Capital Partners, LLC, will build the homes, which will be approximately 1,200 square feet with 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, two-car garages and an unfinished basement.

The project is made possible through a Rural Workforce Housing grant. In partnership with the City of Holdrege, \$400,000 in grant funds and \$200,000 in PCDC matching funds will be used to build Northern Meadows streets, sewer, water and lighting. Hill Street, which is a gravel road on the east side of the new subdivision, will be paved at the same time.

Also in Holdrege, six new homes are awaiting buyers in the CREW subdivision. The new list price on the homes is \$307,750, and a buyer's credit is available on the closing costs, further reducing the price.

Bertrand received \$200,000 in grant funds from the rural housing grant, and Bertrand Community Builders added \$100,000 in matching funds to create three homes in the next two years.

Beverly Hansen, secretary of Bertrand Community Builders, said that in early December, BCB purchased a house that was moved from Johnson Lake and will be set on a lot at 213 Minor Ave. overlooking the Hi-Line golf course. This home is expected to be completed by May 2024.

Hansen said they are also nearing completion of a housing renovation at 402 Knight Street. It is a 1,452 square foot home with 1 bedroom, 1 bathroom, a utility room and an open concept kitchen/dining room on the main floor and 2 bedrooms, a bathroom and family room on the lower level. It has a 2-car detached garage.

Once that house is sold, Bertrand Community Builders will start on a third home.

In October, the Bertrand Housing Authority celebrated the groundbreaking for a five-plex called the Sunset View Villa.

PCDC loaned the housing authority \$30,000 to purchase a dilapidated property on the corner of Marshall Avenue and Kossuth Street. The housing authority then received a \$525,000 grant from the Nebraska Department of Economic Development for the project.

Bertrand Housing Authority Director LaDonna Bennett said McElhinny Builders, Inc., is constructing the 5-plex, which is expected to be completed in early 2024. Each unit is 927 square feet and will feature 2 bedrooms, 1 bathroom, a kitchen/family room area, and generous closets. Washers and dryers are provided, and a private back patio will overlook a spacious lawn.

Rent prices will be between \$1,100 and \$1,275 per month with income limits on three of the units. To inquire about renting at Sunset View, contact the housing authority at HA68927@outlook.com.



Six new homes are available for purchase in the CREW Subdivision in east Holdrege. Contact any local Realtor for details.

Gov. Pillen Speaks at PCDC Hall of Fame Banquet

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He said Holdrege provided the perfect environment for his business to flourish and grow. That perfect environment includes the farmers who see value in their services and products, employees who are like family, local and state business leaders who create a friendly business environment, suppliers who help support the business, and previous owners Jim and Sue Lindstrom for making Nebraskaland's success possible.

"Thank you to Jim and Sue Lindstrom," Marquardt said. "If it weren't for the opportunity that they gave a couple of 30-something-year-old kids quite a few years ago, we could never have imagined owning and operating a business like this. We will be forever grateful."

He also paid tribute to the business' founder, Dennis Westerlin.

"Whether Dennis Westerlin knew or not decades ago when he opened his doors that this would be a great place to do business today, he found just the right spot," he said.

Pretty & Fabulous

PCDC honored Jennifer Weber and her business Pretty & Fabulous Custom T-Shirts & Boutique in downtown Bertrand as the small business of the year.

The store opened full time in 2017 and provides custom-designed t-shirts and clothing, mugs and cups that can also be customized with lettering, candles, crafts, lotions, toys, earrings, dips and jams, and plus-sized clothing.

Besides operating a store, Weber is highly involved in making Bertrand a better place to live and visit. She serves on the Bertrand Brews & BBQ committee, which plans a summer BBQ and music event; the Bertrand Ag Society, which organizes events such as the Bertrand Craft Show and Christmas Tree Walk; and helped on the Bertrand Aquatic Center committee, which organizes a New Year's Gala. She also serves on the Phelps County Visitors Committee.

She also helps those beyond her small community.

When wildfires raged through southwest Nebraska in 2021, Weber and her team designed a Prairie Strong t-shirt to be sold as a fund-raiser for fire departments that helped fight the fire. She was able to donate \$40,000 to help small-town fire departments.

Jennifer said she was "excited and stunned"



Gov. Jim Pillen gave the keynote speech at PCDC's annual Business Hall of Fame banquet on Oct. 26 at the Holdrege Sun Theater & Event Venue.

Previous Business Hall of Fame Honorees:

- Bridal Isle
- Lost Way Brewery
- Landmark Implement
- Phelps Memorial Health Center
- Roger Allmand
- BD
- Planter Worx
- Glion Electric Scooters
- Breinig Diesel
- Phelps County Community Foundation

when she found out about the PCDC Business Hall of Fame Award.

"I felt very humbled that people notice me and are enjoying doing business with me," she said. "It makes me want to continue to grow my business and work with my amazing customers."

In his speech at the banquet, Gov. Pillen shared his top priorities for Nebraska, which are improving the lives of kids, lowering taxes, supporting agriculture and preserving conservative values.

"Our kids are our future," Pillen said. "We must lift up every kid so that no kid falls through the cracks. That is the key to our future workforce development."

He encouraged everyone to consider mentoring a child to make a difference in the future. He also touted his transformative educational plan that lessens the burden of using property taxes and

brings more money to small schools.

Pillen said he is also focused on operating the government like a business and cutting out unnecessary spending while improving efficiencies and upgrading services.

"Next year, we will be spending less money in the state operating budget than we spent this year," he said.

He has a group of 35 people working on a plan to reduce property taxes in preparation for the upcoming Legislative season.

Pillen said that ag is the "heart and soul of who we are."

He said Nebraska could soon become its own circular ecosystem using all the corn it produces for items such as food additives, soaps, cosmetics, etc.

He encouraged all Nebraskans to "stand up for the conservative values we believe in."

If You Can Work From Anywhere, Live Here

Families often move to a new town because of a job opportunity. But families are choosing to live in Phelps County and bring their jobs with them, or they are creating opportunities here. They are enjoying the advantages of living in a small town, which include a healthy work-life balance and a sense of community. A small portion of two such stories are included here.

New Restaurant Owners Enjoy Small-Town Living

As a young boy growing up in the bustling city of Lincoln, Blake Jacobs cherished the quiet summers he spent on his grandparents farm near Axtell. A few miles away, his future wife, Chris (Mattson), spent her childhood days playing carefree in the small village of Funk.

Their paths eventually crossed in Lincoln 11 years ago. They married and remained in Lincoln until March 2022 when they took of “leap of faith” and moved to Phelps County, where an unexpected opportunity awaited.

While applying for a job at Phelps Memorial Health Center, Blake learned about an opportunity at Country Cookin’. Blake had experience in the restaurant industry working as the general manager of Slim Chickens in Lincoln and was hired to manage Country Cookin’ for Mike and Marcia Soneson. After a few months, they were offered a chance to purchase the business.

“I was excited about the challenge, and I thought



Chris and Blake Jacobs are the new owners of Country Cookin’.

I was ready for it,” Blake said. “I had been trained to do the job. I had all the knowledge and tools to do it, so why not?”

Chris, who had previously worked in human services-related fields, handles the billing and administrative work of the restaurant while Blake manages the cooking.

Country Cookin’ is open from 7 a.m.-2 p.m. and serves breakfast and lunch. They also offer catering services and evening take-out orders of wings or chicken tenders with 24 hours notice.

While they are busy operating a restaurant, they are grateful for the community support and the

benefits of small-town living.

“I don’t have to drive in traffic,” Blake said. “I’m literally home in two minutes. That’s the thing I love the most.”

Their son, Rivers, is 6 and has autism. He attends first grade at Holdrege Elementary, and the Jacobs are happy with how well he is doing.

“Holdrege is amazing,” Chris said. “Everybody I’ve encountered has a really open mind, and they do everything for Rivers. This was the right move.”



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Remote Work Gives Ehrenbergs Opportunity to Move to Holdrege



Cassie & Ryan Ehrenberg and dogs, Pearl and Chase

Last winter, Ryan and Cassie Ehrenberg lived in Southern California where they enjoyed year-round warm weather, but they often felt isolated due to traffic and distance.

Today, Ryan continues a job he loves creating visual effects for video games from his hometown in Holdrege. Cassie launched new business (Inkton Solutions) and is volunteering her time and talents to improve a town she has already grown to love.

Ryan is a 2002 Holdrege High School graduate. He earned degree in Media Arts and Animation from the Art Institute of California–Orange County, where he met Cassie, a Michigan native. They married in 2007.

After college, Ryan began his career as a visual effects artist at Shiny Entertainment, then Respawn Entertainment and now Wildlight Entertainment. Cassie worked as a project manager and a quality assurance engineer at Roadtrip Nation, Warner Bros, and Gusto.

Before Covid, they were confined to living



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close to their jobs in the Los Angeles area. After remote work became more of a possibility during Covid, they considered moving farther away from the city.

In late 2022, the couple started considering a move to Holdrege, what that would look like, and if it would be feasible.

“The more we thought about the idea, the more we wanted to make the change,” Cassie said.

They put their house up for sale in March and moved to Holdrege in early April.

Ryan continues work for Wildlight Entertainment, and Cassie is busy launching a business and volunteering many hours.

“We love that we can get around Holdrege quickly, often walking or cycling (if the weather is nice),” Cassie said. “After living in southern California for nearly 20 years, it’s nice to not worry about traffic for every decision you make.”

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT, ATLANTA

Dog-Training Academy Opening in Atlanta

Atlanta Known for German POW Camp, Famous Pie Auction

Atlanta is Phelps County's smallest village (pop. 102). It's most known for its famous pie auction and the former German POW camp, and a new business is set to open in the village this spring.

"There's peace and quiet usually," Village Board President Jayne Ortgiesen said about her town. "We don't have a whole lot of traffic. We know all our neighbors and everyone in town. It's just a good little community."

Atlanta is home to several businesses, including Blonde Hair Salon, Stewart's Tree Service, Janice Ludeke's Wardcraft Homes business, Ludeke Diesel, Hawg Brothers Custom Cycle, and Booe Machinery and Salvage. In 2015, the village annexed property east of town for a major Cargill expansion. Once the 15-year tax-increment financing for the project has expired, the village stands to receive a large boost in its tax revenues.

The first weekend of August each year, the village hosts Atlanta Industry Days. The pie auction has been part of that event for nearly 50 years. The top pie, baked in a collector's edition pie plate, usually brings about \$500. Money from the pie auctions funded the construction of Atlanta's Community Building many years ago, and it funds annual scholarships for Atlanta students.

K-9 Pawsitivity

Atlanta's newest business is K-9 Pawsitivity Training Academy opened by residents Gayleen and Steve Maurer.

Gayleen has always loved animals and has a keen sense of empathy. She started training dogs at age 8 in the 4-H dog obedience program and has never stopped even while working in her full-time careers, first as a nail salon owner and now as the Senior Relationship Banker at Bruning Bank.

"I've always been drawn to animals and people and understanding why or how you get a behavior out of dog, or why they behave a particular way,"



Steve and Gayleen Maurer (pictured with dog, Hank) are opening the K-9 Pawsitivity Training Academy in Atlanta. The new facility will feature indoor and outdoor professional training facilities.

Gayleen said.

So, she decided to finally make an official side business out of her passion. She has spent nights and weekends continuously learning as much as she can about dog behaviors and training. She is obtaining certification from an animal behavior college in California and a professional certification from renowned dog training and canine expert Nate Schoemer in Oregon.

Last fall, the Maurers started construction on a 40 x 60 building on their property on the west edge of Atlanta to house the new business. Inside the building will be a 30 x 40 training room, a small kitchen, a bathroom, and a canine bathing room for members to wash their dogs. The outside of the building will feature a 60 x 8 foot covered porch for customers to view the beautiful Nebraska sunsets. A fenced-in area outside of the building will house an professional obedience ring with agility equipment.

"I will be training both ends of the leash," Gayleen said.

Some of the dog behaviors Gayleen can help with are separation anxiety, fear, reactive behavior, leash pulling, jumping, house-training, and crate training. She will work with dog owners, professionals and volunteers. Her group classes will be limited to six dogs and

owners to provide the best experience for all.

Part of her vision is to inspire clients to look forward to and love training their dog as an activity and to lead a generation of pet owners who are passionate about their own K-9 education and leadership development.

Gayleen is currently training her daughter's dog to be prepared for a new baby in the house, and she is training a Newfoundland and three retrievers to become therapy dogs. One of the retrievers will be taught a specific task to assist a disability.

The Pawsitivity training facility is expected to be completed this spring when the Maurers will invite the public to a grand opening and open house to learn more about the business. For more information, email Gayleen at K9pawsitivitytrainingacademy@gmail.com.

Hurlbert Joins Team at Farm Bureau Financial

Holdrege native Zac Hurlbert started a new job at Farm Bureau Financial Services in Holdrege in September. Hurlbert is a Sr. Account Executive for the office of Phil Hinrichs.



Zac Hurlbert

He is licensed to sell life, health, property, casualty and crop insurance.

Hurlbert graduated from Holdrege High School in 2018 and recently graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a degree in ag business.

He previously worked as a sales associate at Norder Supply in Elwood.

“I am most excited to learn the ropes and help as many people as possible,” he said.

In college, Hurlbert was a member of the AGR fraternity. His hobbies include hunting, fishing and spending time with family.

Brown Begins New Position at First State Bank in Holdrege

Conor Brown is the new Asset Liability Management Officer at First State Bank in Holdrege.

In his new position, Brown will analyze and grow deposits and loans to ensure strength and stability in the bank. He started in the Holdrege office on Nov. 27.



Conor Brown

Brown is originally from Albuquerque, NM, and earned a bachelor's degree in accounting and finance from Benedictine College in Atchison, Kan., where he was in the Gregorian Fellows Leadership Program. He previously worked at the

Bank of Atchison in Atchison, Kan., and Pinnacle Bank in Omaha.

Brown moved to Holdrege with his wife, Katelyn, and their 7-month-old daughter, Annie. He said he is excited to “get to know all the people at the bank to know our customers within the community.”

When he is not working, Brown enjoys spending time with his family, golfing, and football.

Haunted House Continues Under New Owner

The haunted house tradition will continue in Holdrege after a local family purchased the former Grey House Haunts.

Alicia and Jeremy Norton will open Grey's Twisted Manor on Oct. 4, 2024, at 203 High Street and will continue the tradition started by Jan Knuth that lasted for nine seasons.



Alicia Norton

Alicia Norton, who is the kitchen manager at the Holdrege Middle School, is a self-described Halloween fanatic.

“I love Halloween,” she said. “I usually spend a lot of October decorating my yard. I have around 300 trick-or-treaters come to my house so I thought this would be a perfect fit for me.”

Alicia and Jeremy and their family, which includes four children ages 16-22, purchased the business on Nov. 9 and have already started planning for their first season of scares. Alicia said her job at the school allows her the perfect flexibility to use the summer months to prepare for the haunted house season.

The Nortons have lived in Holdrege since 2016, and Jeremy owns and operates Norton Painting. The entire Norton family has always enjoyed visiting area haunted houses, and they are excited for this new venture.

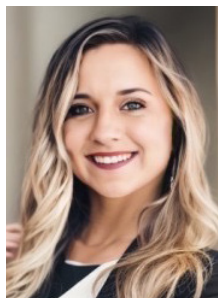
With Knuth's guidance, they are planning to learn the ropes of the business the first year. They will have a new storyline but will keep the attraction similar to years past.

Alicia is hoping to add some new events at the attraction, such as a Halloween costume contest for kids.

The haunted house typically attracts about 4,000 people. It will be open every Friday and Saturday night in October starting at 7 p.m.

Bricks & Co. Choses Anderson for Communications/Manager Role

Jaimee Anderson is the new General Manager and Communications Director of Bricks & Company. She will manage marketing and communications strategies for Bricks & Company, maintain the strategic direction of the organization and oversee theater events, operations and staffing.



Jaimee Anderson

Anderson is a 2013 graduate of Holdrege High School. She earned a bachelor's degree in organizational and relational communication with an emphasis in Business Development from UNK. For the past 5 years, she has worked as the operations manager for Ellyne Bridal in Lincoln.

In college, Anderson served as president of the academic organization Lambda Phi Eta. She is currently involved with the Iron Horse Creative Arts District planning committee in Holdrege.

In her spare time, she enjoys reading, spending time with her family and friends, and traveling.

She is married to Joseph Anderson, and they have a son, Henry, 2.

Cobblestone Hires New General Manager

Kenneth Brown is the new general manager at the Cobblestone Hotel.

Brown has been with Cobblestone for six years in Bottineau, ND, and started in Holdrege on Dec. 1. He also has experience in retail, working



Kenneth Brown

for Shopko (Pamida) for three years in Rugby, ND, as the co-manager and working for Wal-Mart as a manager for 17 years in Alabama, Arkansas, Oklahoma and North Dakota.

Brown spent most of his childhood in Spiro, Okla., where he graduated high school. He has an associates degree from

Dakota College of Bottineau.

“One of the main reasons for locating to Holdrege was the opportunity to be closer to my mother in Oklahoma,” Brown said. “After my divorce, I thought a change would be good.”

When he's not working, Brown enjoys watching college football, bowling and spending time with his four children (his two youngest sons will be living with him in Holdrege).

Blessed Trio Opens New Holdrege Store

Three area business owners have partnered to open a new business called Blessed Trio.

Jennifer Weber, owner of Pretty & Fabulous Custom T-shirts & Designs in Bertrand; Stacey Wendell, owner of Divine Boutique in Bertrand; and Karen Philips, owner of KC Ventures in Loomis; opened the Blessed Trio Boutique and Event Room at 417 Burlington in Holdrege on Oct. 17.

The store features women's, men's and children's clothing; toys; jewelry; popcorn and other gourmet foods; candles and soaps; gifts and books; and custom-designed t-shirts.

The business also has an event space available for rent. The space features a refrigerator, sink and counter, a fireplace and seating for up to 40 guests.

For more information, visit blessedtriboutique.com.



From left, Karen Philips, Stacey Wendell and Jennifer Weber, owners of the new Blessed Trio store on the corner of 4th and Burlington streets in the Boardwalk building.

Former BD Employee Starts Junk & Waste Removal Business

Overgrown yards, cluttered garages and homes, and abandoned cars are a stressful problem.

It's a problem that Gage Stanteiski decided he could help people solve when he started Stanteiski Junk and Waste Removal. At first, the business was a side job that he did from 6 a.m.-2 p.m. before his full-time job from 3-11 p.m. at BD.

But when his job at BD was recently eliminated, he decided to go full-time with his new business, and it has been rapidly growing ever since.

"BD closing was the best thing that happened to me," Stanteiski said. "It gave me time to build connections and network. When you are working an 8-hour job and working 6 a.m.-2 p.m., you don't have time to think."

He started mainly working with homeowners, but he is now being hired by Realtors, apartment owners, banks, investors and organizations.

Jobs have included cleaning up trash and debris from lawns, tearing down and hauling away abandoned buildings, moving a grand piano, cleaning a basement filled from floor to ceiling with moldy clothes and furniture, cleaning gutters, hauling and pouring rock, and cleaning out construction debris and



Gage Stanteiski

scrap metal.

The business, which is located in Holdrege, is already serving 13 counties and has received calls from as far as Hastings and St. Paul.

Stanteiski, 21, said he loves meeting people and encouraged anyone with a clutter or messy concern to not feel intimidated to reach out.

For more information, call Stanteiski Junk & Waste Removal at (308) 655-0379 or visit the Facebook page for photos and job examples.

Jantzis Fulfill Lifelong Dream With Opening of Holdrege Gym

Adam and Lauren Jantzi have purchased E-volve 24/7 Fitness at 311 East Ave. in downtown Holdrege and are now operating the gym as Holdrege Fitness Co.

Adam has a bachelor's degree in exercise science and is the strength and conditioning coach at Holdrege High School. He is also a certified strength and conditioning coach. He worked in commercial gyms before working in athletics. Lauren is a surgical nurse at Phelps Memorial Health Center. The couple moved to Holdrege in 2020 and have three children.

They purchased the business Nov. 1.

"We decided to buy it because we have always wanted to own a gym, and this was an opportunity to make it happen," Adam said. "We are a young family who wants to stay in Holdrege for a long time. We are excited about being able to provide a place for fitness for the town of Holdrege. We would eventually like to expand into a bigger building so we can provide more services."

The gym is 24/7 key-less entry and is not staffed consistently during the day, which fits well with their regular day jobs. Adam will be available for more hours at the gym during the summer.

Holdrege Fitness Co. has pin machines, cardio equipment, the former Curves equipment, a cable crossover, a Smith machine, TRX suspension training, two racks and two platforms, free weights, cardio equipment as well as interactive cardio equipment, and a few plate-loaded machines. It also has a changing room, bathrooms, and a kids' playroom.

For more information, visit Holdrege Fitness Co. on Facebook.



Adam Jantzi



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