



Planter Worx Expanding To Meet Demand

Planter Worx is constructing an 8,000-square-foot addition to its headquarters east of Funk to keep up with increased sales and demand for its planters.

“We are excited to keep growing and thank the locals for supporting us,” co-owner Cody Robinson said. “We are excited to be part of growing Phelps County.”

Robinson said construction on the addition began in March and is scheduled to be completed by August 1. Planter Worx’s welding operations will be moved to the new addition to make room for assembly in the original building.

Planter Worx employs six full-time staff (including three welders) and two part-time staff in addition to the owners. Robinson said they expect to hire more assemblers once the expansion is complete.

Planter Worx recently became an authorized dealer for Milwaukee-brand tools and is working on a new line of products that go hand-in-hand with its planters. That product announcement will likely occur in the spring.

FUNK PROFILE

Read more about Funk businesses in this edition’s Community Profile featuring Funk on page 5.



BREWSTER FIELD

Airport Eyes Expansions As Local Air Traffic Grows

The Holdrege Airport Authority is mapping out its plans for the next 10 years, and the wish list includes more hangars and possibly extending the runway.

These projects are needed as the airport continues to drive and support local economic development in the areas of tourism, medical care, manufacturing and agriculture.

“The airport is a critical economic development resource for us,” PCDC Executive Director Ron Tillery said. “We have two ag-service tenants housed there (Nebraskaland Aviation and Wells Flying Service), and we have a lot of business-oriented aircraft housed there as well.”

Holdrege Airport Authority

Chairwoman Dorothy Anderson said 16,112 flights were recorded at Brewster Field in 2022. Those flights included medical specialists who flew in from Lincoln, Omaha and Colorado to treat patients at Phelps Memorial Health Center, government officials and other workers who flew in to conduct business with local entities, and travelers flying in or out for recreation. Some other planes are flying across the country and stop at Brewster Field to fuel up.

“We are seeing a lot more air traffic here,” Anderson said.

The airport has eight entities on the waiting list for heated hangars and six on the list for non-heated hangars. Currently, the airport houses 37 planes and 1 helicopter.

“We have a tremendous need for more hangars,” Anderson said.

The FAA requires a 10-year Capital Improvement Plan (in addition to annual smaller plans), and Anderson said the immediate priority is more hangars pending federal funding.

Airport projects at Brewster Field are typically funded 90 percent through federal funds and 10 percent local match.

The current major construction at the airport is a privately-funded project by Nebraskaland Aviation. Wells Flying Service also recently completed a private spray facility project at the airport.

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NEDA Honors Tillery, Hueftle as Professionals of the Year

Nebraska Economic Developers Association (NEDA) honored two Phelps County professionals at its annual spring conference in Lincoln.

NEDA selected PCDC Executive Director Ron Tillery as the Professional of the Year in the community category and South-Central Economic Development District Director Sharon Hueftle as Professional of the Year in the state category.

Tillery has served as PCDC's executive director since May 2016. He is recognized by his peers across the state as a leader and role model.

"Ron has the ability to lift others up," said, Cozad Development Corporation Director Jen McKeone. "He has a desire to share what has been successful for him and how to replicate that success. He is top of his game when it comes to recruitment."

NEDA recognized some of the projects that Tillery has spurred in his tenure at PCDC, including a thriving downtown Holdrege; a new brewery; shopping and dining; promoting the Iron Horse Business & Industry Park; expansion and investments at manufacturing plants; expansion of the VA clinic; a new hotel, and administering \$634,000 of small business loans. He was also instrumental in Holdrege being named the Nebraska Diplomats Community of the Year in 2022.

"Ron is the best mentor anyone can ask for," McKeone said. "He always makes sure that



Ron Tillery



Sharon Hueftle

no matter what he is working on, he is first and foremost promoting Nebraska. Ron works harder behind the scenes than anyone in our profession, attending all trade shows, networking events, and regional meetings to further economic development."

Hueftle has served as the director of the South Central Economic Development District for 18 years. She goes above and beyond, along with her staff, to help the communities and businesses in her 13-county region.

She has been a leader in rural housing with the HomeNE Learning Network, which is designed to connect and engage rural community leaders with one another and explore innovative approaches to housing development and redevelopment.

Hueftle and her team were instrumental in administering \$3.1 million in FEMA funds to build the first-ever community shelter in Central City, culminating in a dual function, state-of-the-art dome facility that meets tornado shelter requirements and can be replicated across the states to improve school and community activities.

"Sharon is an outstanding champion for rural economic development in Nebraska," said Katie Benner, Board President of the Central City Child Development Center. "She truly wants the best for each business she speaks with and is always able to answer a question with her wide net of resources. Improving Nebraska communities and the efficiency with which they operate is her superpower."

Brewster Field

continued from page 1

Recently completed Airport Authority projects have included two new lighted signs, an expanded concrete parking lot with 12 more parking stalls to accommodate increased traffic, and entrance and service-road replacements.

The major project for this year is completing the 10-year layout plan, which is partially funded through an FFA grant of \$300,000.

Anderson said the Holdrege Airport Authority Board members (Anderson, Ty Marquardt, Ashley Maloley, Eric Sweeney and Clyde Lueking) have also considered adding an industrial development park on airport grounds.

"Industrial development is part of the vision for the east side of the ground," Anderson said. "We can't afford it now, but it's in our vision."

HOUSING UPDATE

Grants Spur Housing Projects in Holdrege & Bertrand

A Rural Workforce Housing grant is paving the way for 30 new homes in Holdrege and two in Bertrand.

The Phelps County Development Corporation was one of 27 grant recipients in Nebraska to receive \$22,825,000 in Rural Workforce Housing grants funds that are to help communities create quality, affordable housing to accommodate growth.

PCDC received a grant for \$600,000, which will be split between housing projects in Holdrege and Bertrand.

"Phelps County has two communities that are pushing the envelope and being aggressive to attack the housing challenges we have as rural communities," PCDC Executive Director Ron Tillery said.

In partnership with the City of Holdrege, \$400,000 in grant funds and \$200,000 in PCDC matching funds will be directed to build a new subdivision west of Hill Street between 14th and 18th Avenues called Northern Meadows. Grant funds will help create streets, sewer, water and lighting for the new area. Hill Street will be paved at the same time.

Community Capital Partners, LLC, plans to build houses in the subdivision at the same time as the infrastructure work is being completed.

Tillery said Community Capital Partners plans to build 15 houses this year and another 15 houses next year. Construction on the first 15



Community Capital Partners, LLC, plans to start building 15 homes this summer in a new subdivision near Holdrege's new baseball fields. The homes will be similar to the one pictured above and feature 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, a 2-car garage and an unfinished basement.



homes is scheduled to begin this summer. The homes will be approximately 1,200 square feet with 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, two-car garages and an unfinished basement.

"This is huge," Tillery said. "Collectively, all the new housing we are building has the potential

to attract many new residents. It also has the potential for people to move up and make other housing available."

Bertrand will receive \$200,000 in grant funds and \$100,000 in matching funds from the Bertrand Community Builders investment club to create two homes in the next two years. Bertrand Community Builders has already identified lots where homes can be created.

CREW HERITAGE HOMES

Six new Heritage Homes have been constructed in the CREW subdivision in East Holdrege. The homes were built in a climate-controlled factory in Wayne and then placed on basements in Holdrege. The homes are 1,164 square feet on the main floor and feature two bedrooms, two bathrooms and a two-car garage.

The homes are available for occupancy now. All six houses are \$314,750 each and have similar floor plans. For more information, contact a local Realtor or scan the QR code here.



Ten High-Demand Jobs Scholarships Awarded

This is the tenth year of PCDC's high-demand jobs scholarships, and 10 students were awarded a share of \$30,000 to study fields such as agriculture, nursing and education.

The high-demand jobs scholarships are part of the Phelps County Development Corporation's efforts to create a quality local workforce. The students will return to Phelps County after graduation to work. This year, scholarships ranged from \$1,000-\$5,000 each.

Three of this year's recipients are 2023 high school graduates, and the other seven are already in college or are non-traditional students.

Sierra Burrows is the Circulation Manager at the Holdrege Public Library, and she received a \$1,000 high-demand jobs scholarship to pursue a degree in library science. Sierra began working at the library 15 years ago while in high school and served as president of the Friends of the Library for 13 years. She recently earned a Library and Information Services certificate through Central Community College. She is now working toward a bachelor of science in education with a library science major and a public administration minor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She hopes to become a library director or equivalent.

"My goal with my education in library science is to learn all that I can about the emerging trend of 21st Century Libraries," Sierra said. "The colleges have even changed the curriculum for the library science classes within the last couple of years to reflect this changing era."

She is grateful for the PCDC scholarship.

"This scholarship is a seed that can help not only me grow through education, but also grow our community from what I learn and incorporate back into the library," she said. "Receiving this scholarship will allow me to continue chasing my dreams!"

Scholarship winners sign a contract stating their intention to return to Phelps County and work after their education. The scholarships are funded through LB840 sales tax funds, private donors and matching funds from the Phelps County Community Foundation.

PCDC Executive Director Ron Tillery said the organization plans to review the scholarship application process for 2024 to make it simpler for more students to apply, regardless of their level of comfort with essay writing and technology.

The 2023 scholarship winners are **Alexis**

Billeter, 2021 Loomis High School graduate, elementary education, University of Nebraska at Kearney, (\$3,000); **Anna Pelton**, 2021 Bertrand High School graduate, occupational therapy, Oral Roberts University (\$2,000); **Bryce Philips**, 2022 Bertrand High School graduate, agriculture, Northeast Community College in Norfolk (\$5,000); **McCartney Elliott**, 2022 Holdrege High School graduate, pre-pharmacy, University of Nebraska at Kearney (\$2,000); **Hanna Swearingen**, 2023 Holdrege High School graduate, elementary education, Fort Hays State University (\$3,000); **Jersie Hermanson**, 2023 Loomis High School graduate, radiography, University of Nebraska at Kearney (\$5,000); **Kaeley Klein**, 2022 Holdrege High School graduate, pre-nursing, University of Nebraska at Kearney (\$1,000); **Kazia Nelson**, non-traditional, elementary education, Western Governors University (\$3,000); **Reece Vinzant**, 2023 Bertrand High School graduate, biology, Chadron State College (\$5,000); **Sierra Burrows**, nontraditional, library science, University of Nebraska at Omaha (\$1,000).

In the ten years that the scholarships have been offered, \$267,000 and 95 scholarships have been awarded.

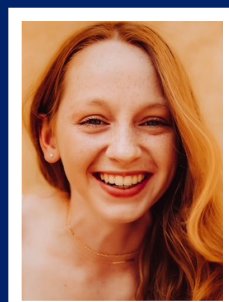
2023 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS



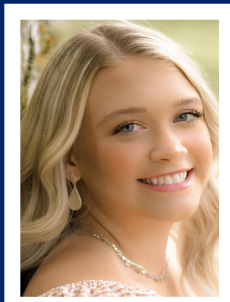
Alexis Billeter



Sierra Burrows



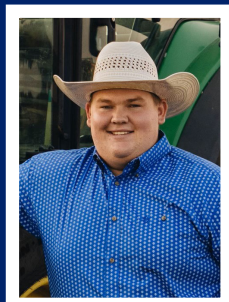
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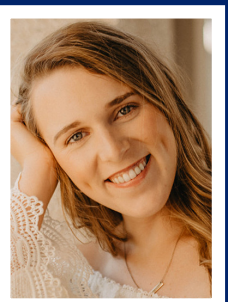
Jersie Hermanson



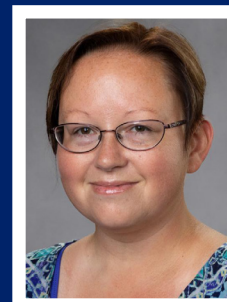
Kaeley Klein



Bryce Philips



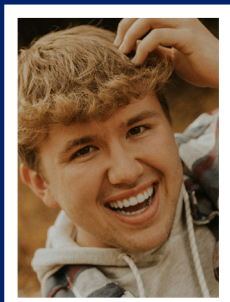
Anna Pelton



Kazia Nelson



Hanna Swearingen



Reece Vinzant

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Volunteers Work to Keep Funk on the Map

Residents Create New Vision After Funk School Closure

Funk is officially the Cupcake Capital of Nebraska, and in July cupcake bakers and hundreds of visitors will descend upon Funk for one of the town's biggest events of the year, the Festival of Cupcakes.

It's one of several events that happen each year in Funk through the efforts of Funk School Community Center volunteers who give their time and talent to ensure this tiny Phelps County community stays alive and vibrant.

"We want to provide a place where the community can come together," Funk School Community Center president Mona Peterson said.

Funk School Community Center

Although Mona now lives in Holdrege, she will always consider herself a "Funkite." She grew up north of Funk, attended the Funk school, and then taught art at the school for 30 years before it closed in 2007. When the school closed, she and others knew they had to do something.

"I felt like it would be devastating to our little community to not have a school," Peterson said. It did remain a school the first year when Loomis Public Schools leased it while its school was renovated.

Then, Peterson and others formed the Funk School Community Center non-profit organization and bought the school with a \$10,000 donation from an anonymous donor. Over the years, major projects have included replacing a boiler with a heater, remodeling bathrooms, replacing the roof and flooring, painting, and installing a commercial kitchen.

It still has some old-school charm with touches like a yellowed American flag and school murals. But, it also had modern updates and high-speed internet. The facility's community room (which seats 100) and the gym (which seats 240) are rented out for weddings, bridal showers, graduation and anniversary parties, family reunions and Christmas parties.

The volunteer board plans several activities throughout the year to bring residents together and visitors to the town and school: a pancake feed in January, a chili cook-off in February, a



The 2023 Funk Festival of Cupcakes will be at 2 p.m. Sunday, July 16. The festival is just one of many events organized by the Funk School Community Center to keep the town thriving.

trivia night in March or April, the July Cupcake Festival and a harvest meal in the fall.

In addition, the FSCC has become a mini business incubator by renting space to businesses and helping them get their start.

Currently, seven former classrooms and spaces are rented, and more spaces are available. Renters include Betty Sayers, a local entrepreneur who makes Buzz Savory mustard in the school's commercial kitchen, and a pop-up playroom that is open for young kids to play (with parental supervision) for set hours each week and by appointment.

Peterson said she is grateful to all of the organizations that have supported the FSCC with grants and donations. She has served as president of the FSCC since its inception, and she has been helped by a dedicated board that now includes several younger residents. Board members are Jeff Soneson, VP; Markie Nelson, Treasurer; Jodi Ronhovde, Secretary; Stacey Hallgren; Kirk Ronhovde; Dave Wohgemuth; Shawna Nelson; Audra Peterson; and Ed Forkner.

"I don't see us slowing down anytime soon," Peterson said.

Life in Funk

Funk resident and Village Board member Michelle Boulware, owner of Heritage Agency

Real Estate, said people like living in Funk and when homes are listed for sale in the town, they don't last long.

"The two houses that made it to market lately had multiple offers within 48 hours," Boulware said.

Boulware said she enjoys the small-town atmosphere of living in Funk and its fast internet (the entire town has underground fiber optic internet.)

"I can count on one hand how many times the internet has gone down in five years," Boulware said. "It's consistent, and the speed is good."

She said one major project coming to Funk this fall is an upgrade of the city's well/water services. A new state-of-the-art system will be installed to ensure water pressure stays steady.

Funk also recently became home to a new Southern Public Power District service center, which opened its doors in 2020.

Fire Chief Greg Vandell said they just put the finishing touches on a new fire hall that was built several years ago.

"The building is really nice, and we don't have to park one in front of another," he said. "All of the vehicles can be moved out immediately without shuffling them around."

A recent open house showcased the fire hall to the community and included free hamburgers and hotdogs, bounce houses and other fun.

Hammond Begins Manager Role at First Interstate Bank

Dustin Hammond is the new Retail Manager at Holdrege's First Interstate Bank.

"I am excited about having a great team to lead that puts the needs of the customers at the top of their agenda," Hammond said.



Dustin Hammond

Hammond previously worked at Great Western Bank in Lexington as a business banker and personal banker. He also worked in the commercial documentation department before becoming the retail manager of First Interstate Bank in Holdrege in March.

He is originally from Lexington and has a bachelor's degree in business administration with an emphasis in management. He and his wife, Hannah, have a 2-year-old son, Cooper. When he's not working, Hammond enjoys traveling with his family, shooting sports, hunting, hiking, video games and science fiction movies. He recently became a Phelps County Food Pantry volunteer.

Dallman Promoted to Sr. VP of Clinical Operations at PMHC

Phelps Memorial Health Center promoted Rachel Dallmann to Senior Vice President of Clinical Operations. Dallmann has 5 years of experience at PMHC and previously served as the Director of Revenue Cycle at PMHC.



Rachel Dallman

In her new role, Dallmann will serve as an integral member of the senior leadership team and play a major role in ensuring the organization operates smoothly and observes all healthcare standards and best practices. She is responsible for planning, coordinating, and overseeing clinical

operations to ensure growth, development, accountability, and implementation of efficiency in operations, systems and departments. She will oversee the overall operations of Cardiopulmonary, Laboratory, Imaging, and Therapy.

Dallmann lives in Elm Creek.

NEW DENTISTS AT HOLDREGE CLINICS

Hohman Returns to Hometown as Dentist

Dr. Isaac Hohman has returned to his hometown to join his father, Doug, in serving dental patients in the area. Doug has worked as a dentist in Holdrege for 33 years.

Together, they will see patients at the newly named Holdrege Family Dentistry, P.C. (formerly Hohman Family Dentistry).

Issac graduated from Holdrege High School in 2015 and earned a bachelor's degree in microbiology from UNL in 2019. He graduated from UNMC with a doctorate of dental surgery (DDS) degree in May 2023.

"I just really like our community and wanted the opportunity to serve the people I know and care about," Isaac said. "I'm really excited about working with my dad because we get along super well. We have similar personalities."

Isaac is recently married (wife Chloe), and the couple resides in Holdrege. When he's not working, Isaac enjoys hunting, fishing, golf and watching sports. In college, he volunteered as the treasurer for the American Student Dental Association. He is looking forward to being involved in Pheasants Forever in Holdrege.



Dr. Isaac Hohman

Alma Native Joins Holdrege Family Dental

Dr. Nicole A. Philips began seeing patients this summer at Holdrege Family Dental, LLC.

After graduating from Alma High School in 2013, Nicole attended Wayne State College for two years and then UNMC for dental hygiene. She graduated in 2017 and worked as a hygienist for two years before going back to school to earn her doctorate of dental surgery (DDS), which she did in May of 2023.

"I'm excited to provide care for people in the area that I grew up in and see familiar faces and learn new faces," Nicole said. "I am passionate about preventative care, and I'm excited to implement that and provide that for patients. Everyone at Holdrege Dental is wonderful, so I'm excited to work with them as well."

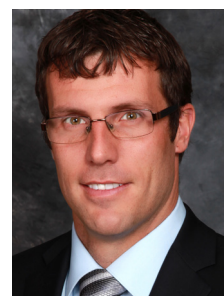
Nicole and her husband, Andrew, live south of Loomis. When she's not working, she enjoys gardening, reading and spending time outside.

She joins Dr. Jonathan Sand and Dr. Tom Nelsen at the dental office. She will see patients on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays.



Dr. Nicole A. Philips

Bruning Bank Announces Thorell as New President



Luke Thorell

Luke Thorell is the new Holdrege location President for Bruning Bank.

"We are excited to have Luke move into the President of the Bruning Bank- Holdrege position," said John Boehler, Senior Vice President. "I look forward to watching the bank grow and help customers build and maintain wealth under Luke's leadership."

Luke began his career in banking in 2009 after graduating from Nebraska Wesleyan University in 2008 with a degree in Business Administration. He has been with Bruning Bank since the Holdrege location opened in November 2009.

Luke and his wife, Ashton, live in Loomis and have three sons and a daughter. He is involved with many youth activities and serves on the Loomis School Board, The Phelps County Foundation Board and plays an active role in the Loomis Evangelical Free Church.

John Boehler has served as Holdrege location's President since 2009 and will continue at the Holdrege location as Senior Vice President. Kyle Anderson, another long-standing Bruning Bank employee, will continue as Senior Executive Commercial Lender at the Holdrege location.

Longtime Employees Buy AgWest

Phelps County natives Justin and Carrie Trompke purchased AgWest Commodities on March 31 from founder Steve Knuth and his wife, Jan. AgWest serves as a "Marketing Partner" for ag producers, helping them build and execute marketing plans for their crops and livestock.

"Justin and I have had the dream of continuing Steve's vision for AgWest for a long time, and we are grateful for the opportunity Steve and Jan have trusted us with," Carrie said. "As we start this next chapter, we are excited to keep AgWest a locally-owned company and are committed to providing opportunities for our employees as well as servicing our customers with integrity and customer service as the top priority."

Knuth started his business from his home in rural Harlan County and relocated to Holdrege in 2006 due to PCDC's recruitment efforts and incentive package. When AgWest built its new headquarters in 2012 at 415 West 4th Ave., PCDC assisted the company with a low-interest loan. Knuth sold the business to the Trompkes as part of his retirement planning.

Carrie started working for AgWest in the fall of 2002 as the office assistant when the business was still in Steve's rural home between Holdrege and Alma. She took on the Office Manager responsibilities after Steve's business partner, Susan Platt, died in a car accident in 2003. Carrie's role has continued to expand with



Carrie & Justin Trompke

company growth. She now serves as AgWest's Financial and Compliance Officer.

Justin joined the company in 2005 as a Broker and Cash Advisor and over the past 18 years, he has worked his way to being AgWest's largest Cash Advisor. His role is now transitioning to less servicing of customers to focus more

on company-wide program offerings and management.

Currently, AgWest has 44 employees and 10 office locations: five in Nebraska, three in Iowa, and one in each Kansas and Colorado.

"We are very fortunate to have a great team of employees whose main focus is customer service and working together with producers to be an integral part of their farming operation," Justin said. "We will continue to be committed to servicing our customers with the highest integrity that AgWest is known for."

Carrie graduated from Loomis High School in 1996, and Justin graduated from Holdrege High School in 1997. After college, they returned to Phelps County and now live and also farm in rural Loomis. They have four children: Wes, who will be a freshman at Oklahoma State University in the fall pursuing a Professional Pilot Degree; Ben, 15; Graham, 14; and Tori, 11, all who attend Loomis Public School where they are involved in a variety of activities.

When they aren't working, the Trompkes enjoy watching their kids in their many sports and 4-H activities as well as spending time with family at Johnson Lake. They are members of Bethel Lutheran Church and serve on the Loomis Baseball/Softball Commission. Carrie just finished a term as President of the Phelps County Community Foundation Board of Directors.

The Drawer Celebrates 20 Years With Expansion, Building Purchase

The Drawer Upscale Resale, 405 West Ave., recently celebrated 20 years in business in downtown Holdrege with a remodel and building purchase.

Owner Denise Swanson purchased the Opera House building where her store is located and expanded and redecorated her store, including painting the ceiling and updating lights, flooring and a bathroom. She expanded into the space behind the Viero Store where she displays women's shoes and seasonal items (swimsuits in the summer, Christmas décor in the winter, etc.) and created a large dressing room.

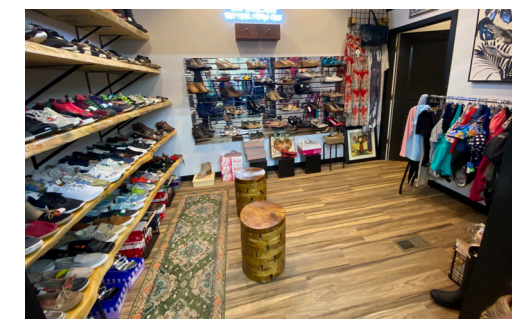
She also rebranded to "Upscale Resale." She still accepts consignments (although only 10 at a time) of clothing, home décor, shoes, jewelry and smaller furniture. Many of the items she receives

still have tags as people don't return items they purchased online. The store has more than 2,000 consignors who are interested in selling and buying "repurposed" clothing and accessories that are brand name and/or in near-new condition. Swanson sometimes purchases items wholesale to complement the store and fill a need.

The store also sells items online through Shopify to customers around the nation.

"I encourage anyone who has never shopped in a resale shop to stop in and check it out," Swanson said. "To me it's the thrill of the hunt. Finding desired items at a fraction of the original cost can be very satisfying."

Swanson will continue to rent the other two spaces in the historic "Opera House" building on the corner of 4th and West Avenues to Viero Wireless



The Drawer's new shoe room.

and Twin Dragon Martial Arts. She has visions of someday re-opening the upper-level opera house.

PCDC assisted The Drawer project with a sign grant. Crossroads Mission Avenue and Bricks & Company are also recent PCDC sign-grant recipients.



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Mammoth Burger Will Open in The Dale

A new restaurant will open this fall in The Dale.

The owner of Catrinas Mexican Cuisine in downtown Holdrege will welcome diners to another dining experience called Mammoth Burger. It will feature burgers of all sizes, hotdogs, grilled chicken, steaks and wings (BBQ, Garlic, Buffalo and Mango Habanero).

Jesse Berber is the local owner of Catrinas Mexican Cuisine. He is partnering with his older brothers, Miguel and Jose, on his second Holdrege restaurant. His family is Hispanic and hails from Texas. They own several restaurants in Texas and Mexico, including a Mammoth Burger. The restaurant features a taste of both Texas and Mexican cultures.

"It's going to be special," Berber said. "People are going to love it."

The Dale location is just down the street from Catrinas, and Jesse said it's a great location for another restaurant because of the high traffic on Fourth and East Avenues. They also have found the Holdrege business climate to be welcoming.

"We love this town," Berber said.

