



GROWING OPPORTUNITIES

Working Together to
Grow a Vibrant Phelps
County Economy

**Survey Focuses On
Livestock Interests**

The Phelps County Development Corporation is working with Ag West Commodities to conduct a survey of area ag producers to determine interest in diversified livestock development opportunities.

PCDC Executive Director Ron Tillery said a variety of types of livestock models are trending today, and the survey will measure interest levels of some of these models from financially strong and experienced farmers.

The survey was sent to Ag West customers in Phelps County and contiguous counties.

**Livestock Creates
\$616 Million Impact**

In September, PCDC received the results of a recent livestock impact study created by Nebraska Public Power District. According to the study, the livestock industry (mainly cattle) creates a \$616 million economic impact in Phelps County. See details on page 3.



CORN & CATTLE

Phelps County Among Top Producers In The Nation

When it comes to farming, Phelps County has a little bragging to do.

Phelps County's human population is estimated at just under 9,000, but the cow population is 186,204, according to the USDA's recently released 5-year ag statistics report. (Based on 2017 estimates)

That translates into more than \$400 billion dollars in annual cattle sales, which places Phelps County as the 5th highest cattle producing county in Nebraska and the 29th highest in the nation.

When it comes to corn, soybeans and other grains, Phelps County produces \$172 billion in sales annually, which ranks 17th in the state and in the top 7 percent in the nation.

"We want to leverage that in our economic development efforts to attract more commodity and food processors," said Ron Tillery,

Phelps County Ag Stats

- Number of Farms:** 371
- Number of Farmers:** 612
- Acres in Farms:** 341,523
- Average Farm Size:** 921 Acres
- Top Crops Grown in Acres:**
Corn - 160,892; Soybeans - 88,365
- Number of Cattle:** 186,204
- Total Value of Ag Products Sold (2017):** \$578 billion
- Per Farm Average Value of Products Sold:** \$1.6 million



PCDC's executive director.

Tillery has attended the World Dairy Expo and other tradeshows to make connections with those in the ag industry and potential food processors.

"That cornfield supports a variety of area businesses, and post-harvest, that field supports livestock, ethanol and other end products, and we hope to develop other options for our local producers," Tillery said.





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Nate DeWald is the newest member of the PCDC Board of Directors.

Local Attorney Looking Forward To ‘Cultivating Economic Soil’ on Board

A Holdrege native who returned home and started a thriving young law firm has joined the PCDC Board of Directors.

Nate DeWald said he is honored to be asked to serve on the board for the Phelps County Development Corporation.

“I only like to serve where I feel like I can ‘move the needle,’ and business is one of my favorite topics of discussion,” he said. “When we are talking about economic development, we are talking about improving the overall well-being and quality of life for all of the people in Phelps County. To borrow an agricultural image, we are cultivating the economic soil to create an environment where individual people and businesses can grow and prosper. It will be great fun.”

Nate will replace longtime board member Jim Wisner, who recently retired from the board due to health reasons.

Nate and his wife, Sarah, both graduated from Holdrege High School and initially didn’t plan to return to Phelps County to live and work. Nate earned a bachelor’s degree at Doane College and then his law degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln School of Law. After law school, he worked as in-house counsel for a 500-person corporation and in a law firm that specialized in environmental and water law.

When their first child was born, they had a change in heart on where they wanted to live.

“Both of us wanted to raise our children in the

same environment we had,” Nate said. “Having roots in the area helped us to return, where our extended family has come around us to support us as we raise our own children.”

Nate has now been working as an attorney in Holdrege for about 10 years. He and his business partner, Luke Deaver, started their law firm in January 2014. The firm has recently welcomed a new partner and is now called DeWald Deaver L’Heureux PC, LLO.

Nate said he enjoys practicing law in rural Nebraska because of the high need for legal services here.

“Ultimately though, Phelps County is just a county with much to offer, and I think we are seeing a wave of young professionals come back for that very reason,” he said.

Nate said that if a business is open to operating in a small community in Nebraska, there are few communities of our size that are as great as Phelps County.

“I know a lot of people who were not sold on the idea of moving to Holdrege until they came and saw the community for themselves, and then they were hooked,” he said.

Nate and Sarah have now been married for 16 years. Sarah is finishing a degree in special education and will seek a job in that field in the next few years. Their children are Caleb, 11; Leah, 9; and Isaac, 6.

Community Celebrates Hotel Groundbreaking

Community leaders celebrated the start of construction on the new Cobblestone Hotel in early October at a groundbreaking ceremony and were hopeful that the project could be completed in time for Swedish Days and Rib Fest 2020.

“This is a big project for our community,” said PCDC Board President Reed McClymont. “It’s a more than \$4 million facility, and it will generate a lot of positives for Holdrege.”

Reed said bringing the hotel to Holdrege was a team effort that included PCDC, the City of Holdrege, CRA, Cobblestone Hotels and builders, local bankers, the Holdrege Hotel Group and others.

The hotel will be built on the site of the former Washington School on Burlington Street just west of the new Washington Square apartments. The 45-room two-story hotel will include a lobby, meeting room, exercise room and breakfast and hospitality area.

The Cobblestone Hotel brand has 148 hotels open or under construction in 27 states. Cobblestone executives attended the local groundbreaking.

The Holdrege project started after PCDC commissioned a study that showed the need for a new hotel in Holdrege. The study estimated that



Community leaders and Cobblestone Hotel representatives turned the first dirt during the Cobblestone Hotel groundbreaking ceremony on Oct. 2. The new hotel is being constructed at 8th and Burlington on the busy Highway 183 corridor in Holdrege.

a new hotel would generate close to \$900,000 annually in hotel room fees and will boost sales at area retail stores and restaurants.

Mayor Doug Young said that many hotels in Holdrege have closed over the decades and haven’t been replaced.

The local hotel is owned by Holdrege Hotel Group

LLC. Mike Kalb, managing partner for the hotel group, congratulated the community for working together to make this hotel become a reality.

“This a celebration of the community,” Kalb said during the groundbreaking. “From an investor standpoint, we want to be a great community partner and a great neighbor.”

Study Shows Livestock Boost Local Economy By \$616 Million

Livestock production creates a \$616 million economic impact and is responsible for providing all or part of 1,500 jobs in Phelps County, according to a recent study.

While local economic development officials always knew Phelps County had a strong agricultural sector, the study shows a broader picture and the breadth of the county’s production, and it provides guidance for future development.

“We are well positioned to add diversity of production as well as expand what we have,” said Ron Tillery, Phelps County Development Corporation’s Executive Director. “We need to be prepared for it and plan for it. This information gives us something to start with.”

Nebraska Public Power District Economist Brian Williams, Ph.D., prepared the study based on figures recently released in the 2017 Census of Agriculture.

The report showed that livestock production, mainly cattle, has an overall \$616,054,519 economic

impact in Phelps County.

The report also provided additional details on business sectors that are impacted by the industry, including medical care, retail and utilities. It showed that livestock production has a \$7.6 million economic impact on the local hospital, a \$2.5 million impact on restaurants and a \$1.6 million impact on motor vehicle sales and parts dealers.

According to the ag census statistics, Phelps County sold \$578.2 million in agricultural products (crops and livestock) in 2017. This averaged out to \$1.5 million per farm, which ranks Phelps County first among Nebraska’s 93 counties for per farm value of products sold. Of the \$578.2 million in agricultural sales in 2017, livestock generated \$406 million.

The report estimated 428 employees in Phelps County are directly employed in raising livestock. An additional 964 employees are indirectly employed to support livestock production resulting in a 1,498 jobs benefiting from livestock production in Phelps County.

Local ag producer and PCDC Board Member Reed McClymont said he was not surprised by the report’s findings, and he always knew Phelps County ranked high in ag production. He said that a key to future growth is focusing on these strengths.

“I think the report shows that we’ve got a livestock mentality in Phelps County in addition to having a lot of top-notch grain operations, so we need to, in my opinion, play on those strengths,” McClymont said. “Hopefully, we can attract some other livestock businesses to the county.”

Tillery said these numbers demonstrate to livestock-related processing companies the scope of the industry in our county and region. He agreed that growth should be encouraged in this area of local expertise.

“We should play to our strengths when it comes to economic development,” Tillery said. “We should do whatever we can to improve conditions that affect existing or future operations including the regulatory environment.”

BOOSTING RETAIL RECRUITMENT

Retail Strategies Provides New Tools For Growth

Helping fill the space formerly occupied by Shopko is just one of the reasons behind PCDC's new partnership with Retail Strategies, a nationwide data, marketing and recruitment firm.

"Retail Strategies can run customized reports on demand and provide information to us that was not available in the past," said PCDC's Executive Director Ron Tillery.

Retail Strategies, based in Birmingham, Ala., works with communities across the United States to help with national franchise recruitment. They work with both large and small communities, including area towns like McCook.

In addition to helping recruit new business, Retail Strategies will also partner with PCDC to provide data and marketing services to help existing local businesses expand or give entrepreneurs the information they need to make start-up decisions and obtain financing.

Christopher Bontrager, portfolio director for Retail Strategies, said 60 percent of jobs in a community come from local growth instead of new business, so encouraging growth among existing businesses will also be an important part of his work in Phelps County.

Bontrager visited Phelps County in late August to meet with PCDC staff, business leaders and community volunteers. He toured the community to log all potential available business sites from buildings to green spaces and took note of existing businesses. From his tour and with community input, he will compile and create a



PCDC leaders are hoping a new partnership with Retail Strategies will help find a tenant for the space previously occupied by Shopko Hometown on Highway 183 in Holdrege.

recruitment plan that will identify businesses that would be a good fit for the area.

Retail Strategies staff also attend trade shows monthly around the country and will now include Phelps County among the towns it promotes to retailers looking to expand.

On a local level, Bontrager said he can create reports that show current and past customer buying patterns and trends. Tillery said he hopes that data can provide the necessary information to recruit a new business to fill the former Shopko space.

"In replacing Shopko, we have limited options," Tillery said. "I've been in touch with

about every general merchandise store that does business in our region. We are hoping Retail Strategies can help us more."

PCDC staff would like to encourage anyone who may want to start their own general merchandise store or other businesses to visit with the PCDC staff about options.

"The more remote the community, the higher the concentration of locally homegrown businesses," said Carley Bruning, PCDC's Director of Business Services. PCDC can help with business plans and has gap financing loans and other financial tools available for new business owners.

Holdrege's Largest Employer Creates Another 35 New Jobs

BD, a leading global medical technology company, announced in early October the creation of 35 new jobs at its Holdrege facility. The additions bring BD's employment in Holdrege to more than 650 people and nearly 3,200 in Nebraska overall.

"BD is firmly committed to its four manufacturing sites throughout Nebraska," said Stuart Rogers, Holdrege Plant Manager at BD. "This expansion in Holdrege comes less than

a year after the company invested significantly in its Nebraska facilities, adding 300 new jobs statewide. BD is currently the largest employer in Phelps County and has been a dedicated member of the Holdrege community since 1966. We look forward to bringing new talent to our dedicated team."

The Holdrege manufacturing plant is one of the largest producers of insulin syringes worldwide, making more than two billion per year

for the management of diabetes. New product lines added at the plant will manufacture general use syringes, which can be used for a wide range of medical applications.

"The addition of new product lines and new positions further strengthens BD's future in Holdrege and Phelps County," said Ron Tillery, PCDC executive director. "Their confidence in the Holdrege facility should motivate us to be proactive in supporting the company and its employees."

PCDC Partners With City for Community Certification

Updated Study Keeps Phelps County Ahead In Recruitment Efforts

Holdrege will once again be listed among 40 Nebraska communities as an Economic Development Certified Community.

This gives Holdrege and Phelps County an advantage when it comes to recruiting and expanding businesses in the area.

“Not every Nebraska community is certified as economic development ready,” PCDC Executive Director Ron Tillery said. “This recognition shows that we can respond professionally, accurately and timely to requests for information from site selectors.”

It also shows collaboration and partnerships between local economic development efforts and the city, which is an important consideration for site selectors.

PCDC staff have been working on the renewal process since December, compiling information on recent accomplishments and successes and reviewing details on the website, ensuring that all links work and that it provides the facts and information that potential new businesses are seeking.



Holdrege received its recertification as an Economic Development Certified Community thanks to a partnership between PCDC and the City of Holdrege. The certification renewal was presented at the Sept. 3 City Council meeting. From left: Holdrege Mayor Doug Young, PCDC Director of Administrative Services Stacy Pafford, PCDC Executive Director Ron Tillery and PCDC Director of Business Services, Carley Bruning.

After a thorough review, the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED) renewed the city’s certification and recognized PCDC and city staff at a City Council meeting in early September.

Holdrege was recognized for its ongoing business growth, workforce housing efforts and investment recruitment strategies.

Holdrege is one of 40 Nebraska communities to earn EDCC status in the program — which is sponsored by the Nebraska Diplomats and administered by DED — since its establishment by State officials in 2005.

EDCC was created to recognize communities for their preparedness to attract new industries and grow existing businesses.

New Leadership Holdrege Class Now Taking Applications

Developing the next generation of community leaders is one of the goals behind the new Leadership Holdrege program that begins in December.

“We want to prepare the next generation of leaders to serve and encourage people who come through this program to seek out leadership opportunities, either elected or volunteer based opportunities in our community,” said Ron Tillery, PCDC Executive Director.

The Holdrege Area Chamber of Commerce’s education committee is leading the project with help from area partners, including the Phelps County Development Corporation and Central Community College. In addition to providing staff assistance, PCDC will also be a sponsor for the



new program. Other sponsors include Nebraska Public Power District and Central Nebraska Public Power & Irrigation District.

The six-month program (December 2019-May 2020) will include monthly one-day training sessions and a two-day retreat. The six sessions are: Gallup Strength Finders day/retreat in Grand Island; government, including a mock city council activity; education and community

investment; industry and agriculture; natural resources, including a Central Nebraska Public Power & Irrigation District water tour; and economic development, medical and business, including lunch etiquette.

The class will include speakers from the community and from across the state.

The Leadership Holdrege program will accept applications through October 25, and 12 participants will be selected. Tuition is \$800, and participants’ employers must give their permission for the individual to participate to ensure attendance.

Applications are available on the Holdrege Area Chamber of Commerce website at www.holdregechamber.com/leadership-holdrege.

DOWNTOWN NEWS

Renovations and Relocations Improve West Avenue

The owners of The Screen Machine purchased the building at 405 West Ave. (former location of The Drawer) for their growing business.

Holdrege natives Aubri and Dustin Nantkes were planning an October move to the new location and were working with the Phelps County Development Corporation on DREAM grants to help fund interior and exterior renovations.

"I love Holdrege, and I love the downtown of Holdrege, and I want to be in the middle of it," Aubri said. "I'm just really excited about that."

Aubri and Dustin bought The Screen Machine in November 2017 after its former owner Ray Ruybalid died unexpectedly. They have kept Ray's dream alive and have grown beyond their expectations.

Aubri said they printed more than 2,500 shirts in June, and they need more space for their inventory and new equipment. An automatic screen printing machine is scheduled to arrive in November to help speed up the printing process. Their work has expanded beyond Holdrege to areas of Kansas and South Dakota, and Aubri said she is looking forward to expanded business opportunities with the foot traffic and more visible location in downtown Holdrege as opposed to their current location at 1515 E. Highway 6.

Aubri said she's doing research about the building's history and hopes to preserve that history while updating the interior and exterior look.

"We are going to give it a good modern industrial look and hardwood floors and bring back the old look of the building," Aubri said. "I'm hoping to get as much done as I can in the next few months before winter hits."

Aubri said she's also looking into ideas for the upper level of the building as possible event space or renting to another business owner.

The Drawer Moves To New Location Next Door

The Drawer Consignment Shop in downtown Holdrege has moved next door to a new location at 405 West Ave.

Owner Denise Swanson said the move took place after its previous location at 409 sold to The



A portion of West Avenue is changing with the recent painting of the old opera house to gray and black. The improvement was part of a PCDC DREAM grant received by its owners, Great ST8 Properties. In addition, The Drawer moved into the lower level of the opera house. The Screen Machine owners purchased the building to the north of the opera house and are planning to move their business downtown in October and make renovations to the building.

Screen Machine. She opened at the new location in early September.

The new location has a more modern, updated look that feels more like a boutique than a consignment store. Swanson said because the new location is slightly smaller, she is limiting the products she consigns to only the highest quality items. Cosigners will now have a 10-item limit instead of 25.

The Drawer is a consignment shop that has offered brand name clothing, furniture, home decor and more in Holdrege since 2003.

Montheys Open Yoga Studio in Downtown Holdrege

Stephanie Monthey and her daughters, Grace and Shelby, opened The Studio at 716 4th Ave. in downtown Holdrege in July.

They specialize in offering "holy" yoga classes that include Scripture readings from the Bible. They also offer Ballet Barre classes taught by Shelby.

Classes are offered Mondays-Thursdays and Saturdays at various times throughout the day.

For a schedule or more information, visit The Studio on Facebook or call (308) 991-8412.

Local Boutique Expands to Second Location in Elkhorn

The 308 Boutique in downtown Holdrege recently expanded to a second location in Elkhorn.

Owner Erin Sandy said that she had been wanting to expand the store to another area and found a great partner in manager Leah Leonard, who lives in Elkhorn.

The 308 Elkhorn celebrated its grand opening Sept. 13 and 14. It is located at 725 N. 210th St. and will be open 7 days a week.

Sandy said the second location will double the 308 inventory, offering all customers a wider selection of clothing. The core 308 brand will be similar in the new store, and new lines of clothing will be introduced there as well.

Jessica Kraus Hired As Holdrege Chamber Director

The Holdrege Area Chamber of Commerce has named Jessica Kraus as its new executive director.



Jessica Kraus

Kraus, who had served on the chamber's board of directors for more than a year, began her new position July 1.

She and her husband, Mark, moved to Holdrege from California in 2014. They started the Lost Way Brewery in downtown Holdrege in

2017 along with her sister-in-law and brother-in-law, Kimberly and Jason Hines.

Kraus is originally from New Mexico and graduated from New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, NM, in 2011 with a degree in business.

She and Mark have two young daughters, Olivia, 5; and Ilyse, 2.

Real Estate Connection Adds Mark Kraus to Local Sales Team

Mark Kraus is the newest Realtor at Holdrege's Real Estate Connection.



Mark Kraus

Kraus grew up in Clarkston, Mich., and after graduating from Western Michigan University, he joined the U.S. Marine Corps.

Kraus and his wife, Jessica, moved to Holdrege from California in 2014 and opened Lost Way Brewery in

downtown Holdrege in 2017, along with his sister and brother-in-law, Kimberly and Jason Hines.

He also has held operational leadership roles in various industries.

Kraus is a board member of the Phelps County Visitor's Committee, president-elect of Holdrege Rotary Club 1488 and the vice president of the Nebraska Craft Brewer's Guild.

He and Jessica have two young daughters, Olivia, 5; and Ilyse, 2.

Eustis Native Now Leads Local Great Western Bank

Eustis native Gary Buehner recently returned to the area as Market President of Great Western Bank in Holdrege.

Buehner started his banking career in his hometown, where he worked for more than 30 years at what is now Waypoint Bank.



Gary Buehner

He then worked at Farmers and Merchants Bank in Kearney as senior vice president and branch manager. Most recently, he served as the Market President at Great

Western Bank in Norfolk.

Buehner graduated high school in Eustis and earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Kearney State College. While working in Eustis, he also continued to help on the family farm after hours.

Buehner's past community service activities include church, Lion's club, chambers of commerce, ag society, Sertoma and Rotary.

"I look forward to being part of and active in the Holdrege community," he said.

Buehner has three grown children who are married and two grandchildren.

Matt Simpson Begins Work As Local Edward Jones Advisor

Matt Simpson has started work as an Edward Jones Financial Advisor in Holdrege.



Matt Simpson

Simpson, originally from Kearney, has lived in Holdrege since January 2017 and previously worked as a commercial/agricultural lender at Great Western Bank in Holdrege. He began his career with Edward Jones in December 2018 and

became a licensed Financial Advisor in April 2019.

Prior to moving to Holdrege, Simpson and his wife, Morgan, lived overseas for three years and worked in the United Arab Emirates.

"Our time overseas was incredible, but we always considered Nebraska home," the Kearney native said. "I have appreciated the community of Holdrege for welcoming me and my family. It amazes me the number of community members who go out of their way to welcome newcomers to the area."

Simpson and Morgan have two children, Grant, 2 ½; and Noah, 7 months.

Simpson's community involvements include serving on boards of the Holdrege Development Corporation and the Phelps/Harlan County CASA. He also is a Holdrege Area Chamber of Commerce Ambassador and a TeamMates mentor.

Simpson is currently working from the Steve Allen Edward Jones office at 416 West Ave. and will be looking to open a new office in the near future.

Janssen Auto Expands With Second North Platte Location

Janssen Auto has expanded with the recent purchase of its eighth dealership.

Dave Janssen and his business partner and brother, Dan, and their father, Lee, announced an agreement to purchase the North Platte Buick GMC dealership in September.

Janssen Auto Group now owns eight dealerships, including three in Holdrege, two in North Platte, and single locations in McCook, York and Larned, Kansas. Franchises now include Ford, Chevrolet, Buick, GMC, Chrysler, Jeep, Dodge, Ram and Honda.

Janssen Auto Group began in 1971 when Lee purchased the Chrysler Plymouth Imperial dealership in McCook.

Terry Kuenle of North Platte will be a partner in the new dealership and will run the day-to-day operations.

In Holdrege, Janssens own and operate Janssen & Sons Ford, Janssen Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram and Lee Janssen Chevrolet.

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New CSI Lab Begins Tour of Area Schools

The new school year brought new opportunities for area students thanks to the Phelps County Development Corporation and area businesses.

The Educational Service Unit No. 11's Create, Solve and Innovate (CSI) lab made its first stop at Axtell, where students were eager to experience hands-on learning with fun tools like a vinyl cutter, 3D printer and virtual reality cameras.

The lab will make two-week stops at 13 schools throughout the year, allowing students the opportunity to learn and explore skills that are needed in future careers in the area and beyond. It will be in Holdrege Nov. 11-22, Loomis Dec. 2-12 and Bertrand Jan. 13-24.

The lab was made possible through donations from PCDC, Allmand Bros., BD, Landmark Implement and the Phelps County Community Foundation, all of Holdrege and Royal Engineered Composites of Minden.



Axtell students were the first to experience the new CSI lab. Photo courtesy Darla Steinbrink, Axtell Middle School Science.