

## Zea Sun Plans \$90 Million Local Project

Sunflower processing facility Zea Sun announced at PCDC's Annual Meeting that it plans to launch its business in Holdrege.

Zea Sun will make an initial \$90 million investment into the Holdrege project. An exact location will be announced at a later date.



The company produces high-protein ingredients from sunflower seeds for use in beverages, nutrition bars, plant-based dairy and other food products. The proteins derived from sunflower provide a clean, naturally sweet and neutral taste and a high level of functionality.

PCDC Executive Director Ron Tillery said construction on the facility will take at least 18 months before it becomes operational. Once open, Zea Sun will employ a staff of about 50 people consisting mostly of technicians, chemists and scientists.

Eventually, the company may encourage sunflower production in central and southwest Nebraska, and they will contract with farmers to grow the crop. Tillery said sunflowers are a good short-season dryland crop.



#GONEWS  
#GROW37

## LOCAL COMPANY EXPANDING

## Industrial Park Set to Welcome First Major Project

A new fertilizer plant is poised to be the first project in PCDC's Iron Horse Business & Industry Park.

Tye Marquardt, operating as Iron Horse Ag LLC, has signed an agreement to purchase 18 acres from PCDC to build the fertilizer plant. It will be operated by Nebraskaland Aviation.

"This is a large project for us, the largest in our history," Marquardt said. "We are highly confident that this will become a successful segment of our business and contribute to the continued success of our community. We are thrilled to have the rail access that Iron Horse allows and are excited to kick off the development of this great addition to Phelps County."

The project, which is expected to cost more than \$12 million, is awaiting final approval by the Holdrege City Council and is pending approval of tax-increment financing.

Nebraskaland Aviation provides aerial application services to farmers along with ground liquid custom applications, dry fertilizer custom applications, and chemical and fertilizer sales to growers.

Nebraskaland's current fertilizer facility houses 600 tons of dry storage. The new facility will hold 6,665 tons of dry storage and will occupy nearly 40,000 square feet on the 18-acre plot.

"This new facility will meet the needs of our customers' dry fertilizer requirements and allow us to build custom liquid products unique to the needs of local growers," Marquardt said.

Initially, Marquardt said the new plant will require two full-time managers, one for liquid fertilizer and one for dry fertilizer. In the first five years, 15 additional full or part-time employees will be hired to fully staff the supply chain.

The new plant will sit on the southeast portion of PCDC's Iron Horse Business & Industry Park. Nearly 90 acres of land will still be available for other projects.

The Nebraska Department of Transportation awarded PCDC a \$400,000 grant to construct roads inside the industrial park.

"Paying for the infrastructure has been a big obstacle," PCDC Executive Director Ron Tillery said. "Companies don't want to locate somewhere and then have to deal with infrastructure and road development. Having the roads complete will pave an easier path for future developments."

The grant and proceeds from the sale of the property will fund the estimated \$1.3 million road construction costs. If more money is needed, PCDC will use reserves or borrow money. The City of Holdrege will oversee the infrastructure development.

"PCDC and the city of Holdrege have been very pleasant to work with," Marquardt said. "I would encourage any business to consider Iron Horse Business & Industry Park for expansion. It is refreshing to have local support for this facility that, unlike national chains and mega-retailers, keeps tax dollars and employment at home in Phelps County."



Fertilizer Plant Rendering  
provided by Nebraskaland Aviation.



### Phelps County Business Journal

Published quarterly and distributed to all businesses and residential addresses in Phelps County plus decision makers and leaders throughout the state and nation.

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# Annual Meeting Highlights PCDC's Role in Feeding & Fueling America

Phelps County is Feeding and Fueling America was the theme for PCDC's Annual Investors Meeting at the Holdrege Country Club.

With the announcement of two new multi-million dollar projects, Phelps County is on the verge of a major economic boom that puts the county at the forefront of the bioeconomy movement.

PCDC outgoing Board President Shane Westcott announced two new Phelps County projects that will bring more than \$100 million in new investment to the county. Nebraskaland Aviation plans to build a more than \$12 million fertilizer plant in the Iron Horse Business & Industry Park, and Zea Sun, a sunflower processing plant, will invest \$90 million in its new facility in Phelps County.



Shane Westcott

These projects are in addition to the \$5.5 billion DG Fuels sustainable aviation fuel plant that was announced in August.

"Growth and new activity are occurring countywide," PCDC Executive Director Ron Tillery said. "Phelps County's visibility and reputation are growing so it shouldn't come as a surprise when more projects arrive at our door."

Westcott praised Phelps County's leadership in agriculture and economic development.

"Phelps County is not only a leader in agriculture and farm practices, but we're leading a revolution in rural industrialization," he said. "Adding value to what we produce will benefit every business and every family in our region."

Westcott gave an overview of PCDC milestones in the past year:

- Strategic focus on the BioEconomy
- Completed infrastructure development for Northern Meadows where five new homes are under construction
- Rural Workforce Housing grant helped build the first of three homes in Bertrand

- GO! HOME grants helped 20 new families purchase homes (\$3.5 million in total real estate sales)

- PCDC grants assisted in improving 11 downtown building facades

- Three new downtown apartments created with PCDC assistance

- PCDC helped 15 news businesses start or expand

- 14 High-Demand Jobs Scholarships awarded

- Financial sponsor for Janssen Auto Tech and CNA programs

The keynote address was given by Julie Bushell, President of GSD, LLC., coordinator for DG Fuels and founder of the Nebraska



Jared Englebert

BioEconomy Initiative.

PCDC President Shane Westcott unofficially passed the gavel to Jared Englebert, vice president at First State Bank in Holdrege. Englebert will serve as PCDC's Board President for the next two years, pending official approval by the board on April 14.

Englebert was also re-elected to another four-year term along with the following directors: Janet Boehler, Legacy Purpose LLC; Grant Ericksen, Principal Financial Group; Phil Hinrichs, Farm Bureau Financial Services; Jeff Moon, Ag West Land Brokers; Doug Stevenson, Olsson Associates; and Shane Westcott, 3W Farms LLC.

Englebert outlined PCDC's goals for 2025 including:

- Advancing DG Fuels, ZEA Sun and Nebraskaland Aviation projects
- Preparing for the impact of the new projects on housing, daycare and other services
- Pursuing retail diversification
- Supporting existing business growth and expansion
- Adding vitality to all Phelps County communities

# DG Fuels Bets Big on Phelps County

## Darcy's Vision Merges Innovation, Sustainability & Growth

DG Fuels Owner Mike Darcy's Beverly Hills childhood was nothing like growing up in Phelps County's vast oceans of corn. But his belief in the value of a dollar and not letting anything go to waste matches the values of many Phelps County residents.

His innovative process of changing cornfield waste into sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) will transform the local economy, support energy independence for the country, and create a cleaner environment for the world.

DG Fuels announced in August its plans to build a \$5 billion SAF facility in Phelps County.

"Phelps County is at the heart of America's efficient, undervalued bioeconomy," Darcy said. "I need to go where the feedstock is, and it's a great place to add value to the nation's farmers who the country relies on for energy and food security."

### A Heart for Innovation

Darcy's parents, Gene and Frankie, lived an exciting lifestyle and owned several businesses in entertainment, retail, communications, shipping and marketing. One of their early companies, Darcy Advertising Agency, specialized in securing movie stars to appear in radio and television commercials. Their friends included Kirk Douglas, John Cassavetes, Paul Newman, and Ronald Reagan.

Darcy was born with a serious heart condition that prevented him from participating in many activities with friends his age.

"Like many such children," Darcy said, "I read a lot, stayed at home, matured quickly and listened to the amazing people around me, which included German synthetic fuel scientists that my father had extracted from Europe" during his time serving in World War II. From them, young Darcy learned about the Fischer-Tropsch process and water electrolysis, which are both technologies that can be used to turn biomass into fuel.

At age 9, with the help of Ronald Reagan, Darcy was accepted into the prestigious Palo Alto Military Academy adjacent to Stanford University. He thrived at the school's physics programs for advanced students. He attended several other elite schools, including the Army Navy Military



Darcy said the aviation industry needs SAF. Although he loves the idea of electric or hydrogen-fueled aircraft, it would require a major scientific breakthrough to increase flight times beyond 30 minutes.

**"Any biofuel process brings dollars and jobs back to the United States, and that means something to me."** — DG Fuels Founder Mike Darcy

Academy in Carlsbad, Calif., for high school. However, due to his parents' declining health, he was forced to take over the family business in his teens and didn't graduate from high school or college.

"I learned through a natural affinity for sciences and experience," Darcy said.

After selling several of his family's businesses, he worked in shipping where he had many connections from his parents' ocean liner memorabilia business.

"It's there that I learned the value of efficiency and not letting anything go to waste," Darcy said. "Nothing was treated as a waste. Everything can have value if you can just identify it."

### Turning Waste into Fuel

In Darcy's shipping career, he worked with military commercial dual-use transactions and technology development. The ships and heavy equipment he worked with were used commercially but had to be rapidly adaptable to military use if needed.

"A large cruise ship program uses over 340 megawatts of power generation in each ship," Darcy said. "That's the engines of six Boeing 777 aircraft in one ship. This was a gigantic power requirement intended to push a large cruise ship or auxiliary amphibious support vessel through the water at 50 knots. This program needed a predictable, stable-priced power system. That was the original genesis of DG Fuels — a drop-in jet fuel that required no engine changes but was not petroleum-derived."

Darcy said the DG Fuels system is an aggressive effort to efficiently use what others call waste.

"DG Fuels calls biogenic carbon monoxide and

carbon dioxide from agricultural waste high-value-carbon feedstock," Darcy said.

The patented process is the brainchild of Darcy and several other people with specific knowledge in various fields.

"I wanted to develop a stable-priced, drop-in jet fuel for gas turbine engines, not necessarily green fuel," he said. "It just so happened that when you separate carbon feedstock from petroleum, it has a much more stable production price. It doesn't take much effort to make it basically zero carbon emission by using hydrogen from other methods."

Darcy said the aviation industry needs SAF. Although he loves the idea of electric or hydrogen-fueled aircraft, it would require a major scientific breakthrough to increase flight times beyond 30 minutes.

"Any biofuel process brings dollars and jobs back to the United States, and that means something to me," Darcy said.

### Giving Back to Communities

In addition to Phelps County, DG Fuels is planning several plants around the country to turn biomass into SAF. Its first project in Louisiana will turn sugar cane trash and plant waste into SAF. As part of its projects, DG Fuels commits millions of dollars to community programs and philanthropic organizations addressing quality of life.

"It only requires executives to listen to communities to make sure they are involved and are beneficiaries of the long-term benefits of energy production," Darcy said. "It only makes sense to be a good neighbor when developing our facilities. That's what we strive to create within any community we choose to establish a DG Fuels facility."



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# PCDC Supports Downtown Improvements

## Mural & Festoon Lighting Create More Vibrancy Downtown

Downtown Holdrege is shining brighter with the addition of festoon lighting and another mural, thanks in part to PCDC grants.

"These projects help people fall in love with their community," PCDC Executive Director Ron Tillery said. "When they do, they want to stay. We retain residents. They are proud of where they are."

The Iron Horse Arts District spearheaded an initiative to install festoon lighting on four blocks of downtown Holdrege on East and West avenues between 3rd and 5th Avenues. The goal is to enhance the vibrancy of the area, making it a more inviting destination for both residents and visitors.

"I think the lights will transform downtown," said Cassie Ehrenberg of the Iron Horse Arts District. "They create a sense of excitement, drawing people in. Our goal is to make the area more vibrant, encouraging people to linger, explore, and support local businesses."



Photo courtesy Phelps Co. Visitors Committee (Aaron Henderson)

PCDC, a key partner in establishing the Iron Horse Arts District, contributed financial backing for the lighting project through a grant. Other funds for the project came from give2Grow donations, downtown businesses, Holdrege Rotary Club, and a grant from the Phelps County Visitors Committee.

Greg Belgium, Sr. Operations Manager at IES Electrical, and Brian Brinkman and City of Holdrege staff have been instrumental in making

the lighting project a reality.

PCDC has also awarded a grant to the Holdrege Eagles Club for a new mural on the north side of its building at 223 West Ave.

Mark Beam, treasurer for the local Eagles chapter, said they have hired Holdrege native Amy Stevenson to paint the mural, which will feature an American flag and an eagle.

Beam said the Eagle's Club mural was inspired by the Iron Horse Arts

District's "Mailbox" mural, which was painted last fall.

"I just absolutely loved watching the mural going up on the Riteway building," Beam said.

Stevenson expects to begin painting the mural in May. She will be assisted by her former art student Hallie J. Snyder and Bertrand art teacher Scott Schwarz.

"I am so thrilled and honored to have the opportunity to create the largest mural and work of art in my life and in my hometown of Holdrege that I dearly love," said Stevenson, a 1991 Holdrege High School graduate.

The mural, along with other upcoming Eagles Club projects, will honor the memory of Jacob Kimberly, a veteran and Eagles member who died in a motorcycle accident in July 2024.

The Eagles mural is funded by the PCDC grant, a Phelps County Visitors Committee grant and Eagles club donors.

# City Plans Next Project As Ballfields Near Completion

The City of Holdrege plans to wrap up the new baseball field project this summer and has started planning for a new project – revitalizing the historic City Auditorium.

Holdrege Mayor Jim Liffri said a grand opening for the new baseball complex on 18th Avenue is not yet known.

"It depends on how well the grass comes in," Liffri said. "If we could get a wet spring, that could help."

City of Holdrege crews will finish the fields as weather permits this spring. Work remaining to be completed includes installing scoreboards, which are ordered; concrete work around the concession stand; pouring a sidewalk from the concession stand to the parking lot; building roofs over the dugouts; purchasing and installing bleachers; and seeding grass in the areas between the ballfields and on the outside of the fences.

As the field nears completion, Liffri said the City is offering area businesses and individuals a chance to sponsor a field or advertise on the

new scoreboards. Anyone interested in donating or naming a field is encouraged to contact City Administrator Chris Rector.

The new complex features four fields with dugouts, batting cages, and a modern concession stand at the center. Construction on the project began seven years ago. Liffri stated that future projects won't be drawn out over many years.

"It's kind of become a joke, and that's not good," Liffri said. "I think the people of Holdrege need something better than that."

PCDC has designated \$75,000 per year to the project through 2032, the entire 15 years of the current LB840 economic development plan.

### City Auditorium

With the baseball fields nearing completion, the City of Holdrege is looking toward enhancements to the historic downtown City Auditorium. The City applied for a planning grant from Nebraska's Civic and Community Center Financing Fund (CCCCF) to

identify areas of concern for the structure.

"If we get the grant, they will survey the auditorium and give us their recommendation," Liffri said. "The important part about this first grant is that if we get that, it will qualify us for construction grants or bigger grants to fund things on that list."

Possible renovations may include adding air conditioning; restroom and catering kitchen renovations; stage improvements; electrical upgrades; and general aesthetics.

The City is working with the Nebraska Prairie Museum on possible historic designations for the auditorium, which was constructed in 1916. It was once a major stop for big-name entertainers due to its proximity to the railroad.

"The history of the auditorium is amazing," Liffri said. "Its use has fallen off a great deal in the past couple of decades, but that building is still in pretty good shape. I think it will be well worth the investment."

# Bertrand Launches Career Pathways

## New Superintendent Brings Career Model to Bertrand Schools

Bertrand's new superintendent, Nicole LeClaire, is introducing Career Pathways at Bertrand Community School to help students gain the skills and knowledge needed for future careers or higher education.

"I just really want to open up opportunities for the kids," she said. "Not everyone is going to college, but everyone at some point will need a job. We want to give them employment skills and industry skills to excel in the future."

LeClaire, who served in the Navy for 12 years, most recently served as the 7-12 principal at Kenesaw where she was instrumental in getting the Career Technical Education (CTE) programming started. Prior to Kenesaw, LeClaire was the Law & Public Safety Instructor at Grand Island Senior High, where she was first introduced to a successful Career Pathways learning model and credits that year for launching her interest in CTE.



**Nicole LeClaire**

LeClaire is proud of the success of the CTE implementation at Kenesaw; however, she also learned a lot and is taking both the successes and the lessons with her to create an even better program for Bertrand students.

This school year, she is working with the existing schedule and implementing small changes. She was excited to introduce Career Pathways to 7-12 grade students at a recent Hometown Career Fair hosted by the Bertrand Area Community Fund. Next year, students will complete career interest surveys at the beginning of the year to develop a structured pathway for each student.

Starting in the 2025-26 school year, Bertrand will begin their CTE programming with the two most prevalent industries in the future job market: Agriculture and Skilled Technical Sciences (Trades). Over the next three years, as student interest and offerings expand, LeClaire hopes to be able to implement all six of the Nebraska recommended career pathways which are:



Phelps Memorial Health Center's Imaging Department was one of the participants of Bertrand's Hometown Career Fair in February. Lindsay Holt (left) and Hannah Jasa visit with Bertrand 7th Grader Blake Schoene about careers in health care.

1. Agricultural, Food, and Natural Resources
2. Business, Marketing, and Management
3. Human Sciences and Education
4. Health Sciences
5. Skilled and Technical Sciences
6. Communication and Information Systems

Each pathway consists of three consecutive courses: an introductory class, an intermediate course, and a capstone experience. To enhance real-world connections, Bertrand will implement job shadowing, industry field trips, learning lunches, and work-based learning experiences. During the capstone year, students may take dual-credit courses, earn industry-recognized certifications, and gain hands-on training through work experiences.

For example, students in the Skilled and Technical Sciences pathway might start with an introductory shop course, progress to specific training in welding or woods or construction, and then take dual-credit courses at Central Community College (CCC) or work with local businesses in their senior year. "By their senior year, students will have the opportunity to spend part of their day working in their chosen field instead of sitting in elective classes that may not

align with their future goals," LeClaire said.

Each student will graduate with a concentration or certificate in a pathway. For example, students interested in marketing or IT may earn Google or Microsoft certificates. Students interested in nursing may complete a CNA certification.

The transition to Career Pathways has been met with enthusiasm from staff and the broader Bertrand community. The school board has prioritized updating the shop area to support technical education.

"My shop teacher is very excited about the opportunities this opens up," LeClaire said.

One of the most common concerns about career pathways is whether students will be locked into a career choice too early. LeClaire reassures parents and students that pathways offer flexibility. "We're not taking anything away; quite the opposite, really. Career pathways add to the student experience. Students will still have to take the required courses for graduation, this just provides more structure and meaningful career opportunities within their elective courses. And if they decide they don't like a field, at a minimum, it will save them money in college by avoiding unnecessary coursework."



## O'Brien Takes Helm as City/County Attorney

Corey O'Brien began 2025 with a new chapter, stepping into the role of Phelps County Attorney and Holdrege City Attorney.

He is originally from Florissant, Mo., and earned his B.A. in Political Science from the University of Missouri in 1994 before obtaining his Juris Doctorate from Creighton University School of Law in 1997.



Corey O'Brien

His legal career began in Omaha at the Douglas County Attorney's Office, where he served as a deputy county attorney from 1997 to 2003. From there, he joined the Nebraska Attorney General's Office in Lincoln, where he spent 21 years as a criminal prosecutor, handling some of the state's most serious

and high-profile cases.

"I spent an inordinate amount of time traveling and living out of a hotel while handling extremely stressful and difficult criminal matters," O'Brien said. "I was interested in coming to Holdrege to continue the work I love but without the constant travel and time away from home."

O'Brien and his wife, Deb, have been married for 13 years. She recently began a job at CoverWise Insurance in Holdrege.

O'Brien said he is looking forward to the opportunity to serve the legal needs and public safety interests of the wonderful people in Phelps County and Holdrege and being involved in the community.

"As someone who has spent such a large part of their career traveling, I have not felt grounded to one particular community for a very long time and am very much hoping that Holdrege and Phelps County will become a permanent 'home' for my wife and I," he said. "Thus far, we could not be any happier with the decision we made to come here and have been overwhelmed by the welcome we have received and not even remotely being treated as an outsider."

When he's not working, O'Brien enjoys golf and hiking; is an avid sports fan of just about all professional and collegiate sports; enjoys cultural activities such as plays, musicals and concerts; non-work related travel and movies.

## New YMCA Sports Director Previously Served at Y Volunteer

Aarron Emperato is the new Sports Director at the Don Sjogren Community YMCA.

Before working at the YMCA, Emperato was a supply technician for the U.S. Army's TACOM FMX at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. He was born in upstate New York and as part of a military family also lived in Missouri, Texas and Germany.



Aarron Emperato

He has volunteered for the Armed Services YMCA in Fort Leonard in Wood, Mo., for the past 11 years coaching youth basketball and football and organizing food drives for military families in need. He also officiates varsity football and softball games.

"Sports have been a major part of my life

and to get a job revolving around sports is a blessing," he said. "Our team here at the YMCA is awesome, and I am just happy I was able to find a workplace like this."

Emperato earned an associate's degree from Ozark Technical Community College in Missouri and a bachelor's degree in business administration from Missouri State University.

He and his girlfriend, Kaylee, have a 5-year-old son, Kacen, who recently started school in Holdrege. When he's not working, Emperato enjoys exercise, playing basketball and video games, and watching sports.

## First State Bank Holdrege Hires New Loan Officer

Ethan Leidig is a new loan officer at First State Bank in Holdrege. He is originally from Carleton, Neb., and previously worked for Cargill.

He graduated from Kansas State University with a bachelor's degree in agribusiness and a minor in agronomy.



Ethan Leidig

"I was drawn to Holdrege because it is an area that is deeply rooted in agriculture and is close to home," Leidig said. "The First State Bank seemed like a great fit because I have been around agriculture my entire life, and the bank provides me the opportunity to continue to be involved in agriculture by providing support for farmers."

When he's not working, Leidig enjoys being outdoors, fishing, and watching college sports, especially the Texas Longhorns.

## 37 Smokehouse Opens in Holdrege

Holdrege's food scene just got a whole lot smokier with the opening of 37 Smokehouse, a new specialty barbecue restaurant at 614 W. 4th Ave. Owned and managed by Barbi Jensen and her team, the restaurant is already drawing a loyal following from both Holdrege and surrounding communities.

With a background in running sports bars in the Denver and Boulder markets, Jensen has long been passionate about hospitality. Locally, she and her family have been serving up mouthwatering smoked meats for years through Braxton's Smokehouse, a

popular food trailer known for its catering services. The catering trailer will continue its services separately from 37 Smokehouse.

Jensen said the beef brisket is by far the best seller, often paired with homemade sides including mac and cheese, Grandma Barb's potato salad and homemade desserts. The ribeye steak sandwich and burgers—whether it's a smashburger or a classic bacon cheeseburger, have also been popular.

Plans are in place to add craft beer and wine on tap, enhancing the smokehouse experience. There will always be a \$10 lunch special, making it an affordable option.



# Larsen Brothers Purchase Holdrege Ace Hardware

Holdrege brothers Andrew and Adam Larsen are the new owners of Holdrege's Ace Hardware.

They officially purchased the business from previous owners Dan and Cindy Svoboda on January 1, and they are enjoying the opportunity to continue a legacy in the community they love.

"I feel like Holdrege is a special place for us," Andrew said. "We grew up here, and this gives us an opportunity to stay here."

Both Adam and Andrew started work at Holdrege's Ace Hardware in high school. Adam started as a sophomore in 2012 after being recommended by his high school shop teacher. Andrew started a few years later in 2014.

Adam left Holdrege after graduation in 2014 and returned to the store in 2020. Andrew has worked steadily at the store for more than 10 years now.

"Dan and Cindy were always good to us," Andrew said. "That's what kept us around."

The Svobodas had been in the hardware business in Holdrege for 29 years after purchasing the Coast to Coast store in downtown Holdrege. They moved to the current location at 205 W. 4th Ave. in 1999 and switched from True



Adam, left, and Andrew Larsen are the new owners of Holdrege's Ace Hardware. (Courtesy photo)

Value to Ace Hardware in 2013.

The Svobodas approached the brothers about purchasing the business in 2020. Adam and Andrew said they have always worked well together and "think alike" so it was a good plan.

With mentorship from the Svobodas and their dad (Ray Larsen who owns Larsen Auto Repair), they were ready to tackle business ownership. They also enrolled in a few business classes at Central Community College.

Adam now handles the accounting and

business side, while Andrew manages inventory and human resources.

"We've also had a lot of support from our friends and customers," Andrew said. "We kind of grew up in the store, and many of the customers come in and shake my hand and say congratulations."

The store employs 12 staff members, including Adam and Andrew.

"The employees we have here are next to none," Andrew said. "We definitely couldn't do this without them."

Adam encourages other potential young entrepreneurs in the community to look for opportunities.

"You can't be afraid to learn things," he said. "There are businesses in town that won't be around in five years, and a young person could go in there have a chance to learn and become a business owner themselves."

The Larsens are planning a Grand Re-Opening Celebration May 2-4 with specials and giveaways. They are also planning some new inventory this spring, including ag-related equipment and fishing supplies including poles, lures and fishing line.

## PCDC Supports Launch of The Hive & Adorn Lighting

Two new businesses are opening in Holdrege thanks in part to grant support from PCDC.

The Hive, a health drink store, will open June 1 at 502 4th Ave., and Adorn Lighting, a seasonal light business, is already preparing for a busy holiday season.

The Hive is owned by Molly and Paul Jensen of Minden. Molly is a registered nurse and Paul is a plumber. They started delivering Herbalife teas and protein shakes to area towns and found that Holdrege residents were most excited about their venture.

With PCDC's help, they are renovating their rented space next to the Holdrege Area Chamber of Commerce into a health drink cafe. Once complete, the space will have seating and Wi-Fi in a fun relaxing atmosphere. In addition to loaded teas and protein shakes, they will also offer weight-loss plans and other services. They will also continue drink deliveries.

PCDC assisted The Hive with a sign grant and a business and franchise grant. Visit

The Hive on Facebook or Instagram for more information.

Adorn Lighting is a new business started by young entrepreneurs Aaron Tavenner and Samantha Roach. They started offering a Christmas light decorating service in 2024 and decorated 18 houses in multiple counties. With that success, they decided to make it an official business.

They install holiday lighting, remove it after the holidays, and store it for customers. They also install permanent landscape lighting.

Aaron is just 21 years old and also works at a Funk area farm, where the work slows down enough in the winter to tackle the lighting business.

The business is located at Aaron's house on Water Avenue in Holdrege.

PCDC has assisted the business with several grants, including initial inventory, facility buildout, and digital development. For more information, visit Adorn Lighting Solutions on Facebook or call Aaron at 308-627-1427 for more information.

## KUVR Moves to New Location

After more than six decades at its 4th Avenue location, KUVR Radio has found a new home in downtown Holdrege at 423 East Avenue.

"The new location gives us a better space with additional studios, offices and a conference room outfitted with the latest technology that will allow us to continue to grow and to better serve our listeners, clients and community," said Steve Albertsen, Operations Manager for KUVR.

The decision to relocate had been under discussion for several months before KUVR found the East Avenue space. The station had operated from the 4th Avenue location since 1958. However, time had taken its toll on the structure, with aging infrastructure and limited space prompting the need for change.

Renovations to the new space include fresh paint, updated lighting, modern furniture, and brand-new studio equipment. Plans are also in place to install a bright new exterior sign, further enhancing the station's visibility.

The former 4th Avenue building is now available for new ownership.



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## PHELPS COUNTY BUSINESS Journal

### Tillery Selected as Priceless Pick

PCDC Board President Shane Westcott selected PCDC Executive Director Ron Tillery for this year's President's Priceless Pick award.

The award is dedicated to people whose efforts have made a significant impact on local economic development efforts.

"It was an easy decision for everything that Ron has done for the betterment of Phelps County," Westcott said.

Tillery has served as the PCDC Executive Director for nine years. In that time, he has started many new initiatives including the GO! DREAM, GO! BUSINESS, GO! HOME, and GO! WORK programs.

This past year, Tillery spent much of his July vacation working to secure the new \$5.5 billion DG Fuels project for Phelps County.

Other past major PCDC accomplishments include spearheading efforts to bring the new Cobblestone Hotel to Holdrege, securing rural workforce housing grants that resulted in two new subdivisions, and ensuring the Phelps County is a great development partner by building and maintaining relationships with decision-makers on a local, state, and federal level.

The Nebraska Economic Developers Association honored Tillery as the Professional of the Year in the community category in 2023.

