

Tillery Reflects On Decade Of Leading PCDC

Looking back on his decade of service to the Phelps County Development Corporation, Ron Tillery said he is most proud of the culture he has helped shape and moving Phelps County higher on the competitive ladder of economic development success.



Ron Tillery

“PCDC enjoys a cohesive, confident, and determined board of directors, a culture that’s critical for success in rural America,” Tillery said. “Establishing that mindset in Phelps County was only possible because of the quality of people here who devoted their time, energy and expertise to our efforts.”

Tillery moved on from his role as PCDC’s executive director at the end of 2025 after a decade of service starting in 2016. Shortly after he arrived in Phelps County, Tillery created the GROW37 brand and launched PCDC’s GO (Growing Opportunities) programs.

“I’m pleased with the momentum created by PCDC’s GO! programs,” Tillery said.

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#GONEWS
#GROW37

Downtown Momentum Builds With CCC, Theater & Gallery

Festoon lighting, a new mural, and the Midtown Sculpture Garden all added new vibrancy to downtown Holdrege in 2025.

And, now in 2026, even more energy is coming to the heart of Holdrege with the addition of Central Community College’s downtown center, the new Crescent Room, and a new Iron Horse Art District gallery at First State Bank.

“For a community our size, these developments are incredibly meaningful,” said PCDC Executive Director Jeff Hofaker. “A college, a movie theater, and an art gallery don’t just beautify our downtown, they stimulate investment, support local businesses, and enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors alike.”

PCDC GO! BUSINESS grants have sparked many of the downtown improvements by providing grants for signs, façade improvements, downtown living spaces and festoon lighting and murals. Private investment and generous local donors have also spurred many of the improvements.

Central Community College

Central Community College’s Holdrege center moved from the Phelps County Ag Center to downtown Holdrege in mid-December, and the first students will arrive in early January. The college is filling the former Great Western Bank space that has sat empty for years.

“This will have an impact on downtown Holdrege,” Holdrege CCC Regional Director Diana Watson said. “We’ll bring both local and out-of-town students to a formerly unoccupied building. We’re also looking forward to expanded opportunities for collaboration with other organizations and businesses.”

Crescent Room

The Crescent Room will open in late January or early February inside the Holdrege Sun Theater and Event Venue. The new, smaller and more intimate theater will feature movies that have been out a week or two to free up space for the larger theater to showcase new releases. It will also create more room for the theater to host parties and community events.

It is named in honor of Holdrege’s original Crescent Theater (1915–1924).



First State Bank President Ted Titus and Iron Horse Arts District Director Cassie Ehrenberg announced the bank’s donation of office and gallery space to the arts district at the bank’s holiday open house.

“The Crescent Room was created to give our community a fresh, mid-size event option in a central, easy-to-access location,” said Jaimee Anderson, Director of Operations for Adjacent Properties.

“From meetings and trainings to birthday parties and graduations, we want to be the space people think of first. We blended modern amenities with touches of the original Crescent Theater to create a unique, stylish setting that can comfortably host approximately 80 to 100 guests.”

Iron Horse Arts Gallery at First State Bank

On Dec. 11, First State Bank announced its donation of an office and its basement community room to house an Iron Horse Arts District director office and gallery.

The arts district, which was certified by the Nebraska Arts Council in January 2024, has been hosting pop-up art galleries featuring area artists each month at various locations in downtown Holdrege. The arts district also spearheaded the creation of “The Mailbox” mural, festoon lighting, a photography contest and downtown events, such as the Iron Horse Festival and Haunted Holdrege historical walking tour.

“We are incredibly grateful to First State Bank for believing in our mission and investing in the creative future of Holdrege,” Iron Horse Arts District Executive Director Cassie Ehrenberg said. “Having a physical home allows us to deepen our impact, create more visibility for local artists, and anchor arts activity right in the heart of our community.”

After some minor renovations, the gallery is expected to open in the spring of 2026.



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From left: James Stewart, Norm Stewart and Corliss Stewart, owners of Rite Way Milk (Katherine Stewart not pictured); Jared Engelbert, PCDC Board President; Kelly Morten and Stacey Johnson, owners of Holdrege's Dairy Queen.

Rite Way Milk, Dairy Queen Inducted into Hall of Fame

Two Holdrege businesses were honored, and guests gleaned expert advice on growing rural economies at the 2025 PCDC Business Hall of Fame Banquet on Thursday, Oct. 30, at the Holdrege Country Club.

Richard Baier, president and CEO of the Nebraska Bankers Association, gave the keynote address to a crowd of nearly 120 guests after they enjoyed a meal catered by The Speakeasy.

Rite Way Milk and Dairy Queen were inducted into the PCDC Hall of Fame at the event.

Honored Businesses

Dairy Queen was selected for the Expansion Champion Award. In 2024, the restaurant moved from 4th Avenue to a new, expanded location at 924 Burlington. The Holdrege Dairy Queen, owned by Kelly Morten and Stacey Johnson, is number one in sales growth this year in its region, which includes 32 stores from York to eastern Colorado.

The second business honored at the banquet was Rite Way Milk, which was named the Legacy Business of the Year.

The company was founded by Carrol (Curly) Geer, and the current owners are Norm and Corliss Stewart and James and Katherine Stewart.

Rite Way Milk has 10 full-time employees and manages pick-up and delivery logistics for five regional dairy processing plants. The Stewarts recently invested in their downtown Holdrege headquarters by creating an Airbnb, named after

Corliss, on the upper level. They also partnered with the Iron Horse Arts District to paint a new iconic mural on the east side of their building.

Keynote Speaker Richard Baier

Baier spoke about planning for growth and the next generation.

He shared lessons learned from 30 years of observing economic development trends:

- Encourage private investment and leadership rather than waiting on government solutions and grants.
- Communities should dream big but also be realistic and understand their numbers.
- Review your region like an outsider.
- Actively seek input from the next generation.
- Be cognizant of trends like AI and remote workers.
- Get engaged at the state level.
- The highest potential exists in tourism and recreation, value-added ag and higher education.

Leadership Transition

PCDC Board President Jared Engelbert introduced new PCDC Executive Director Jeff Hofaker. He officially started on October 1.

"I am extremely humbled to be the new executive director of PCDC," Hofaker said.

Engelbert closed the evening by presenting Ron Tillery with artwork by a Nebraska artist featuring a rocking chair and encouraged him to rest a bit after all the hard work he has dedicated to PCDC and growing 37.

Williams Returns Home to Lead, Grow

Although Brennan Williams left Holdrege to attend college after graduating from HHS in 2017, his heart stayed in his hometown.

As he pursued a degree in agricultural economics with a minor in agronomy at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, the pull of his hometown and the people who shaped him remained strong. Today, he's back in Phelps County with his wife, Kelsey, and two young children, building a career at Ag Service Associates and raising a family in the place that helped raise him.

"When I moved back, I was welcomed by so many of the existing business owners in town," Williams said. "Many of them expressed how great it was to see a young family return to Holdrege after college, vs. moving away."

In college, Williams spent his summers crop scouting and helping with Pioneer Seed work for Blake Johnson in Loomis. It was during those long days in the fields and conversations with local producers that he fully realized he wanted to build his future in Phelps County.

"I loved the people I got to work with in that business, many of which I still work with at Ag Service Associates," he said.

Williams credits his parents, John and Michelle Williams (also both Phelps County natives), as his biggest mentors. When he felt uncertain entering college, they encouraged him to explore every path, whether it led him back to Holdrege or somewhere else.

"They made sure I knew I could do anything, whether it was in Phelps County or elsewhere," he said. "They ultimately helped me see opportunities here in Holdrege and Phelps County



John Williams (left) grew up in Phelps County and purchased Ag Service Associates in 2006. His son, Brennan (right) joined the business in 2021 and is helping further grow the business. (Photo credit: Huyser Photography)

that I hadn't thought of before."

Another strong influence was teacher Jeremy Ham, who is now the HHS principal but was the shop teacher when Williams attended HHS.

Williams spent countless hours in Mr. Ham's classes, taking every cabinetmaking and construction course available.

"I liked his classes because not only did you get to build things, but he taught me life skills like patience, problem solving and how to work with others," Williams said.

Williams' family, along with three other

NEW SERIES THRIVING WHERE THEY STARTED

Holdrege families, purchased and remodeled the Holdrege Sun Theater when he was young, giving him the opportunity to work and be part of making a positive impact in the community.

What Williams enjoys most about living and working in Holdrege today is simple: the people.

"Everyone who I work with, from clients to fellow businesspeople, are amazing," he said. "I feel very fortunate to be part of a community that is so supportive of a young individual like me."

He hopes the next generation will look beyond the obvious career paths and take a deeper look at the opportunities that exist in Phelps County.

In 2025, Ag Service Associates moved to its new expanded location at 1323 Burlington. Williams is helping grow the business and sees future opportunities for others who want to return or relocate. The company is expanding both its local sales team and its statewide agent network, and future growth will also mean new internal support roles.

"Sometimes the best opportunities aren't the big-name ones," he said. "I think too often, young people only allow themselves to see the opportunities that they want to see, when in reality there are opportunities for almost everyone in Phelps County."

Contact Ag Service Associates at (308) 995-6187 or asasupport@asacrop.com.

Water Study Underway as DG Fuels Advances

Behind-the-scenes progress continues on the proposed DG Fuels synthetic aviation fuel (SAF) plant in Phelps County, with key engineering studies underway. Local residents will have an opportunity to learn more and ask questions at a second public town hall meeting scheduled for Jan. 14 at the Phelps County Ag Center.

To better understand the project's potential water use and local impact, Nebraska-based engineering company Olsson has been commissioned to conduct a comprehensive evaluation at the site and surrounding region. The study measures the effect of the proposed operation on groundwater and will result in a detailed Hydrogeologic Evaluation Report, which will be shared with stakeholders.

The study should be completed by the spring of 2026.

The Phelps County plant will produce 193 million gallons of aviation fuel per year using DG Fuels' patented process, which relies on corn residue (stover) or other biomass feedstocks. DG Fuels has already secured commitments from major airlines for 100 percent of the fuel projected to be produced at the Phelps County site.

DG Fuels will pay \$160 per ton premium price for stover to participating farmers within a 75-to-100-mile radius of the Phelps County plant, adding more than \$150 million of new farmer revenue annually to the region.

Momentum for DG Fuels' national portfolio also increased in November when the company announced in a press release the appointment of Korean-based global company SAMSUNG E&A as a major contractor for its inaugural SAF project

in St. James Parish, Louisiana, an \$8 billion development.

According to the press release, SAMSUNG E&A will collaborate with Black & Veatch, which is the contractor for the balance of the project and is the overall integrator of the system's component technologies. The two companies are also having preliminary discussions on potentially extending the relationship for DG Fuels projects in Minnesota and Phelps County, Nebraska.

"We are thrilled to have learned about the positive overall movement of the DG Fuels project," PCDC Executive Director Jeff Hofaker said. "Phelps County residents, farmers, businesses and community leaders are looking forward to hearing updates on the project. PCDC is excited to host the town hall meeting in January to provide more updates and Q & A."

Viking Grind Brews Success at Bertrand School

Students in Bertrand High School's culinary arts classes are learning valuable job skills as they brew delicious lattes and specialty drinks in a new school business called Viking Grind.

It's all part of a hands-on experience created by teacher Shelby Forster to help students learn business and job skills, along with cooking skills.

Growing up, Forster said cooking was a big part of her life. Her family operated a catering business when she was young. In high school, she worked at Shirley K's Coffee Shop in Cambridge, where she learned more about business and how to craft specialty drinks.

Forster has been teaching in Bertrand for four years in various roles, including special education. She was searching for meaningful ways to blend cooking skills with job training when she thought of the coffee shop idea.

The Viking Grind, paired with the slogan "Fuel Your Voyage," aligns well with the Bertrand school's focus on Career Technical Education (CTE).

Viking Grind debuted at the Bertrand Craft Fair in October and has served at other community events, including Hollidazzle and sporting events. It's also open for students after school on Wednesdays and serves drinks to teachers throughout the week. Forster is entertaining the



From left: Culinary arts class students Shelby Schoene, Waylon Olesen, Ashlynn Edgren, Creston Wagner, Evelyn Pelton and teacher Shelby Forster. (Courtesy Photo)

idea of a drive-thru at the school.

The business serves coffee, shakes and smoothies. Their most popular drink has been Caramel Crusade Latte, served hot, iced or blended; and the Vanilla Voyage. For Christmas, students enjoyed inventing new drinks and

naming them — like Santa Cookie Cup and Merry Mints peppermint mocha.

Their best seller has been smoothies, which are made from fruit puree and ice. As of December, they had sold over 300 smoothies with strawberry being the most popular flavor.

Profits from Viking Grind are returned to the culinary arts program to purchase ingredients and supplies. For now, students volunteer their time to "work" at the business, but Forster is hopeful that students would someday be paid for their work or be able to earn scholarships.

Forster said the program is helping students build real customer service skills, everything from difficult conversations when a drink isn't quite right to greeting customers confidently. They're also learning the business side, such as how to make drinks more efficiently and how to decide which products to keep based on sales data.

"A lot of students have never had a job," Forster said. "This gives them that experience. They are navigating conversations, learning how to manage time and work as a team."

Anyone interested in securing the Viking Grind for an event, please contact Forster at the Bertrand school at (308) 472-3427 or email Forster at shelby.forster@bertrandvikings.org.

Tillery Reflects on Decade

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GO! HOME has helped move more than 400 people to Phelps County, contributing to the area's first net population growth in Holdrege for several census cycles. The program also sparked nearly \$30 million in real estate sales across the county while supporting employers who benefit from bringing workers closer to their jobs. The GO! DREAM First Impression Grant program touched nearly 80 downtown buildings across the county, refreshing business districts and building pride.

"Momentum is a powerful force that works like economic gravity and builds internal and external confidence in the market," Tillery said.

Looking ahead, he sees momentum turning into transformation.

"Obviously, DG Fuels and the array of supporting businesses it generates will have a generational scale impact on our region," Tillery said. "Ripples from this \$9 billion plant investment will include a payroll that exceeds \$50 million annually, which will drive increased retail sales, more real estate development, and an exponentially greater property tax valuation for the

county."

He said the greatest beneficiaries will be area farmers who will have a new market for stover, which could deliver more than \$150 million per year to farmers.

"The added income and market stability will buoy the entire regional economy," Tillery said.

Across Nebraska, Tillery said Phelps County is more visible than it was a decade ago and is on the radar of companies and developers searching for investment-ready communities. Tillery credits strong partnerships for much of that progress.

He hopes more people understand that PCDC isn't just that place that has the "free money."

"A successful economic development program builds a culture that accepts growth and change," he said. "The status quo is not a choice; things WILL change. Our job is to define and drive the change that carries our values forward and provides a strong, stable foundation to build on."

If Phelps County citizens want their children to choose to come back home, he believes we must work to make it an attractive option.

"Economic development is not separate or apart from the community," he said. "This is my home,

our home, and the goal is to broadly improve conditions."

He advises new PCDC Executive Director, Jeff Hofaker, and the PCDC staff and board going forward to "be fearless."

"Don't get bogged down by minority interests, but recognize the value of dissenting opinions," he said. "Don't take it personally."

As he steps into his next chapter, Tillery isn't slowing down. He has already begun working with partners developing a new venture called NebraskaGSD (Get Stuff Done). The company will help small, underserved Nebraska towns build viable economic development programs, leveraging private investment to strengthen the state's rural backbone.

Though his professional role at PCDC has ended, Tillery isn't going far.

"Holdrege is my home, and I look forward to remaining involved in things that improve its quality of life," he said.

He is ready to support PCDC when asked while staying out of the way to let Hofaker lead.

"He's very capable and will be a great leader," Tillery said.

Dahlgren Opens Counseling Office at Holdrege's SCAR

Bailey Dahlgren, a provisionally licensed mental health counselor, has started seeing clients from her new office at South Central Area Recovery, 307 East Ave. in Holdrege.

SCAR recently started two new resources – financial counseling assistance and an on-site counselor – to help those recovering from their own addiction or a family member's addiction.



Bailey Dahlgren

SCAR is a nonprofit organization formed to provide a safe environment, education and support for those dealing with or touched by addiction and those who have suffered traumatic life-altering events.

Dahlgren has rented one of SCAR's counseling spaces. She works

with children and families through Midwest Encouragement and Counseling in Kearney and Holdrege. She earned her master's degree in clinical Mental Health Counseling from the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Before entering the mental health field, Dahlgren spent five years as a teacher and gained a deep understanding of the academic, emotional, and developmental needs of children.

SCAR's new Aid Fund awards up to \$1,500 grants per person for individuals with low income or no health insurance for services like counseling, sober living, alcohol education and substance abuse evaluations.

Purcella Hired as Manager at Holdrege's Bruce Furniture

Jessica Purcella stepped into her new role as manager of Holdrege's Bruce Furniture store on July 7. Before joining Bruce Furniture, she worked four years at the Eagles Club and another four years at Holdrege Elementary School.



Jessica Purcella

Purcella grew up in Gibbon and Iowa and has also lived in Kearney. She graduated from high school in VanHorne, Iowa, and has some college education in accounting,

math and art education.

She serves on the Holdrege Area Chamber of

Foy Launches New Holdrege Accounting Business

Longtime Holdrege resident Lauren Foy saw a need for accounting services in the area and decided to do something about it.

In October, she opened A & L Complete Accounting Services at 118 West 11th Ave.



Lauren Foy

Foy is working toward completing an associate's degree in accounting at Central Community College in Holdrege. She will graduate in the spring of 2026 and plans to take a year off and then pursue a bachelor's degree in accounting and eventually her CPA license.

Her current services include being a tax accountant, payroll, bookkeeping, cost-volume-profit analysis, and incremental analysis, pricing and budgeting for companies. She serves farms, small and large businesses, individuals, and non-profits.

Foy said what makes her unique is her background in hospitality management. She worked as a general manager for more than three years for Choice Hotels in Salina, Kan.

"I have taken that hospitality skill and made my lobby into a warm, comfortable place where they can bring their kids, and come talk to me while the kids play," she said. "I know that taxes can be stressful in any situation, and I am here to make that stress go away."

Foy also has 25 years of experience cleaning and caring for disabled veterans and their families, terminally ill patients and seniors. She will close her accounting office at least one day a week to continue those services.

PCDC has assisted Foy in her start-up with a sign grant.

"I am excited to have a business in Holdrege, as I have made it my home for the last 26 years," Foy said. "It is a great place to raise a family, and the school system is second to none!"

For more information, contact Foy at (308) 991-1825.

Commerce board of directors, where she is treasurer-elect and is also a member of the Holdrege Eagles Club.

Her family includes a 19-year-old daughter, two dogs, a cat, and a grandmother who also lives with her.

When she's not working, she enjoys reading, creating art (music, painting, drawing, etc.), puzzles, Nintendo Switch, playing fetch with her dogs and spending time with her grandma.

Former Police Officer Begins New Role in Nebraska Extension

Christopher (Chris) Termunde is a new



Chris Termunde

Extension Instructor for Phelps, Harlan, Gosper, and Furnas Counties.

Before moving to Holdrege in October, Termunde served as a police officer in South Georgia.

"I have always loved being a service to my community, and this

position in Nebraska Extension allows me to continue that service in a different way," he said.

Termunde earned a bachelor's degree in environmental horticulture with a concentration in Turf Science from Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Tifton, Ga. He is working toward a master's degree in plant pathology from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in the spring of 2026.

Termunde has been closely studying corn diseases, especially crown rot. He plans to broaden his field to include soybean and forage crop diseases and agronomics. His long-term goals include helping standardize the calculation of carbon credits and advance standardized, science-based carbon-credit calculations and help ensure that companies are required to use fair and consistent methods when buying credits.

"I am also interested in helping find agronomic opportunities and economic opportunities for the farmers of my area," he said.

When he is not working, Termunde enjoys building computers and reading. He is also an avid gun collector and marksman and is looking forward to competing in three-gun events. He enjoys staying active in community life and is looking for groups where he can contribute.

Childcare Center Expanding to Ag Center

A new daycare center will open in early 2026 at the Phelps County Ag Society in the space formerly occupied by Central Community College.

Kiddie Cove Family Childcare Center, owned and operated by Kendra Yanez, will provide care for up to 65 children in space on the east side of the Ag Center, 1308 Second St.

Central Community College's Holdrege center vacated the space in mid-December as it relocated to its new downtown Holdrege location.

Phelps County Ag Society President Chadd Jacobson said once the Ag Society learned CCC would be moving, they started seeking a new tenant. John Poppert, a board member with the Holdrege Area Early Childhood Partnership (HAACP), reached out about using the space for childcare to help meet the community's childcare needs. PCDC is one of the community supporters for HAACP.

Yanez, who currently operates an in-home daycare, toured the space and saw its potential.

"The Ag Society has been great to work with, and we are grateful for this partnership to help fill a need for childcare in the community," Yanez said.

Yanez has contracted with Melroy Construction to renovate the former college space into a modern childcare center. The project includes adding bathrooms, a laundry area, and other upgrades. An outdoor fenced-in playground area will also be added. She is hoping for a February 1 open date.

Yanez plans to employ a staff of 10. Several key positions are already filled, including an assistant childcare director with 14 years of experience, a head cook, and a head infant instructor. Yanez brings 7 years of experience in the childcare field, including work in childcare centers and operating her in-home daycare, Kiddie Cove.

Originally from San Antonio, Yanez moved to Holdrege in 2012. She is married to Richard Yanez, and they have two children, ages nine and four.

To prepare for the expansion, Yanez is



Kendra Yanez (back left) currently operates an in-home daycare with help from her assistant, Melanie Sandoval (back right). Kendra is opening a new center at the Phelps County Ag Center in early 2026 that will care for up to 65 children.

completing business management and workforce environment trainings. She has also worked with the Holdrege Area Early Childhood Partnership for additional support and is being mentored by Amber Push, director of the Young Believers childcare center in Holdrege.

Meanwhile, the Phelps County Ag Society is upgrading the fire alarm system in the entire building to meet childcare regulations and improve overall safety for all events in the publicly owned facility. The upgrades are funded by a \$45,000 grant from the Phelps Memorial Hospital Foundation and \$50,000 in county funds.

The ag center is also home to the local Department of Water, Energy and Environment office, the Phelps County driver's license examining station and the Phelps County

Extension office. The exhibit hall and community rooms are rented most every week for events, auctions, meetings, weddings, and other community gatherings. The Ag Society also often offers the facility at no cost for medical benefit fundraisers, post-prom parties and other community needs.

The new childcare center already has a waiting list as it filled all of its infant spots (6 weeks to 18 months), but still has openings for 18 months to 12 years.

Yanez said her childcare philosophy centers on the importance of play and allowing children to explore and learn naturally.

For more information about Kiddie Cove Family Childcare Center, contact Yanez at (308) 991-9194 or email her at kiddiecove@gmail.com.

North Park Animal Hospital Under New Ownership



Dr. Brandon Beebout

Drs. Brandon and Paola Beebout have purchased Holdrege's North Park Animal Hospital, 1625 Burlington St., from Dr. Larry Marshall. The Beebouts own and operate Beebout Veterinary Clinic in Kearney, which also includes Happy Tails Pet Lodge and the Hilltop Pet Location.

Dr. Brandon Beebout, who is originally from Ainsworth, said he was approached by Dr. Marshall about purchasing the Holdrege clinic. Being from a small town, he realizes the value of small-town relationships and businesses and wants help to keep the animal clinic open in Holdrege.

Dr. Melissa Drain will remain on staff four days a week at the clinic. Instead of "relief" veterinarians, Dr. Beebout hired Dr. Lacey Warning to work one day a week and as needed

at the Holdrege location to create more consistency of care. Dr. Beebout will also serve clients at times in the Holdrege location. Toni Huss of Minden is the new general manager.

In addition to paint, lighting, and furniture updates, North Park Animal Hospital will now have an ultrasound machine on site, plus access to many additional services in Kearney. In addition to orthoscopic surgery, the Beebouts offer endoscopy, regenerative medicine, laser treatments, soft-tissue surgery, therapy and more. Dr. Beebout specializes in ACL repairs in small animals, performing more than 100 operations a year.

The Beebouts employ 53 staff in all of their locations. Boarding services will continue as usual at North Park Animal Hospital. For more information, call (308) 995-2419.

308 Bakery Opens in Former Dairy Queen

Sweet treats are making a comeback at 224 4th Ave., the former home of Holdrege's Dairy Queen.

Elm Creek native and recent Hastings College graduate Whitney Bauer is opening the 308 Bakery in the old DQ "barn" in January.

"I'm excited to share my love for baking with the community and have a space where people feel welcome to enjoy a sweet treat," she said.

Bauer began baking as a child in 4-H and has always loved sharing homemade treats with family and friends. Some of her sweetest memories come from baking alongside her grandmother, RoseMarie "Tootie" Florell of Holdrege, who passed away in May.

In high school, Bauer worked at the Central Mercantile bakery in Kearney for four years. She then started her own mobile baking business in college.

She graduated from Hastings College in 2025 with a degree in business administration and minors in accounting and marketing, and now she's taking the plunge into full-time creative entrepreneurship.

"When the opportunity to be in Holdrege came about, I knew this community would be welcoming and supportive," Bauer said.

She said it has been a family affair to renovate the former DQ space from a cooking kitchen into a baking kitchen. For now, they are mainly focusing on interior renovations.

308 Bakery's menu will consist of cookies,



Whitney Bauer has had a passion for baking since she was a child. She is opening the 308 Bakery in the former Dairy Queen location on Fourth Avenue in Holdrege.

cakes, dessert bars, breads and truffles and will change based on the seasons and holidays. So far, her customer favorites are cinnamon rolls, rye bread, and monster cookie bars. She will also bake custom cakes for birthdays, weddings and other special events. The 308 Bakery will serve drinks, including coffee and bottled drinks, with tea and lemonade available in the summer.

Bauer applied for and received a PCDC GO!

Sparkle grant to help fund Christmas lights at her new location in December.

"I hoped the lights on the bakery would show the community that 308 Bakery is excited to join the community and that everyone is invited in when we are open to enjoy sweet treats together," she said.

To place a custom order from 308 Bakery, contact Bauer at (308) 222-0532.

Klein's Custom Leather Finds New Home in Holdrege

A new leather shop is opening in Holdrege thanks to a tip from a Holdrege resident and assistance from PCDC.

Ken Klein was in the process of purchasing a leather shop in Kearney when the building he was planning to rent was sold.

Klein, who lives in Eustis, told a Holdrege customer who stopped in for a boot repair that he was looking for a new location. That customer told Klein that Holdrege would love to support his business and connected Klein with Ron Tillery, PCDC's executive director at the time.

"I said if I couldn't find anything I could afford, I would move it back to my house," Klein said. "But, PCDC really put forth the effort to show me how much they wanted me in town."

Tillery contacted Klein and helped him find a location for his business in Holdrege after being alerted to the opportunity. He believes Klein's business will flourish in Phelps County.

Klein's Custom Leather & Repair is now located at 118 West 11th Avenue in Holdrege,

which is just west of Nebraskaland Tire.

Klein grew up in the leather business as his parents owned a store in Lexington for many years. For the past 20 years, Klein had been doing leather repair work as a hobby business while he worked full-time as a trucker.

Klein's main work involves repairing horse saddles and cowboy boots, but he also repairs anything leather, including purses and women's and men's shoes. He makes custom leather products on request, such as belts and cowboy boots. He also sells leather products in his store, including gloves, cinches, and dog collars.

Klein is grateful for the assistance PCDC provided in finding him a location in Holdrege, which is also a shorter commute for him.

PCDC is also providing assistance through a Business & Franchise Development grant, which will help with renovation or equipment, initial inventory and digital development.

For more information on Klein's Custom Leather & Repair, call (308) 325-4554.





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Phelps County and
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PHELPS COUNTY BUSINESS Journal

PCDC's GO! Sparkle Enhances Holiday Vibes

Phelps County was glowing a little brighter this holiday season thanks to PCDC's new GO! Sparkle program, which offered \$250 matching grants to help downtown businesses enhance their exterior Christmas lighting.

Five businesses, Bridal Isle and Hide-A-Way Salon in Loomis and 308 Bakery, Heritage Agency, and My Fair Lady Fashions and Frills in downtown Holdrege applied for and received grants for the 2025 holiday season.

PCDC launched the GO! Sparkle program to help local businesses elevate the customer experience during the holiday shopping season.

The GO! Sparkle grants, combined with the Holdrege Area Chamber of Commerce's Let It Glow lighting competition helped businesses create warm, welcoming, and memorable storefronts to strengthen both community pride and holiday sales.

Studies show that festive lighting influences store choice, encourages customers to spend more, and



boosts the emotional connection with a brand. For communities like Phelps County, adding sparkle can mean adding economic vitality.

PCDC plans to offer GO! Sparkle grants again in 2026. For more information and to apply for PCDC GO! Business grants, visit www.phelpscountyne.com/business-services or contact Sally Sadd at (308) 995-4148 or at sally@phelpscountyne.com.