

Phelps County Business Journal

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER HIGHLIGHTING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN PHELPS COUNTY, NEBRASKA



reVISION Program Helps Schools With Job Training

Helping employers fill high-demand jobs in Phelps County is one of the goals of PCDC. That's why the organization sponsored a recent Rotary program to introduce community members to a statewide program that is helping counties around the state with similar goals.

More than 87 school districts across Nebraska are participating in the reVISION program, which provides a strategic approach for schools to analyze their current career education system and make adjustments to more effectively prepare students for college and careers.

reVISION provides a unique opportunity to bring understanding, new energy and commitment to career and technical education as a vital education, workforce and economic development strategy.

Learn more on the NE Department of Education website.

MANUFACTURING NEWS

Joining Forces For A Stronger Future

New Partnership Focuses on Manufacturers' Shared Concerns, Goals

A new regional manufacturing partnership aims to leverage the power of cooperation to solve some of the industry's toughest issues and work together to accomplish shared goals.

The Central Nebraska Manufacturing Area Sector Partnership has joined together all sizes of regional manufacturers to tackle together the issues they all face.

Brian Deakin, Human Resources Manager at BD Holdrege, helped organize the group and is excited about the opportunities that may evolve.

"It's really being thoughtful about where we invest our time and resources and efforts to be the most effective," Deakin said. "I can see this really being a game changer for who we are and what we do here."

Deakin said he sees central Nebraska as a "hub of economic opportunity." Yet, manufacturers in the region all face the same problems.

"We can't find enough people and qualified people," he said. "It does no good for us to sit here and steal people away from each other. We need to work together to motivate families to move here."

Deakin said representatives from 25 manufacturers, including BD and Allmand Bros., attended the first meeting in mid-August at the Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center near Wood River.

The group identified four priority areas that they will focus their efforts on resolving or improving:



Local manufacturers, including Allmand Bros. (pictured above) and BD, are part of a new regional manufacturing partnership aimed at working together to accomplish shared goals.

1. Transportation. Deakin said Nebraska is located in a great central location for distributing products around the country. However, when associates travel to central Nebraska for business meetings, finding air and ground transportation can be difficult.

"For someone to travel here for a day's meeting, you sometimes have to plan three days," Deakin said.

With the large group of manufacturers joining forces, they may be able to influence regional decisions about airlines or other transportation issues.

2. Branding the Central Nebraska Region. Deakin said he is passionate about promoting central Nebraska as a great place to live and work.

"I'm passionate about keeping our kids home and giving them great opportunities and growing our area out here, not just our economies but our communities with families," Deakin said.

Deakin said local students often graduate from high school and college

and then pursue careers in other parts of the country.

"We want kids in high school to realize they don't have to go to Baltimore or Boston or LA or Silicon Valley to pursue a great-paying, great career using your education," Deakin said. "You can do what you love, but you can do it right here at home. And, you don't have to invest everything you make into your housing. Your cost of living is so much better here."

3. Partnering With Schools. Deakin cited great examples of partnerships in Grand Island with the Career Pathways Institute and in Kearney with Central Community College's new campus. These programs allow high school students to learn skills for high-demand local jobs during school.

"We want to make that available to employers in the entire area," Deakin said.

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PCDC's New GO! Home Grants Attract New County Residents

At least two Phelps County employees have recently purchased homes in the county thanks to the new GO! Home down-payment assistance program initiated by PCDC.

The program is designed to encourage commuters or renters to purchase homes in the county. A 2016 study showed that more than 47 percent of employees in Phelps County commute to work from other counties. This program is intended to encourage some of those commuters to become full-time Phelps County residents with the help of a down-payment assistance grant.

PCDC will match up to \$2,500 that a local employer pays to an employee to help purchase a home. All new residents who are employed by Phelps County businesses are eligible. Residents who have been renting for a year or less may also qualify.

The program launched in June and has already yielded results.

Crystal Edson, accountant at Woods & Durham since December 2016, purchased a Holdrege home in September with help from the program. Her employer contributed \$2,500 toward the down payment, and PCDC matched that for a total of \$5,000 toward the purchase of her home.

"It gave me a broader range of houses to shop for," she said of the program.

Edson has four children (in preschool, third and eighth grades and one in college) and had been commuting to work in Holdrege from Kearney.

Her children enrolled in school in Holdrege this fall, and she said they are enjoying the smaller school atmosphere. She is looking forward to a shorter commute.

"I will have more time with my kids," she said. "It will be easier to make it to their activities. I like small towns better than big towns. I don't have to worry about what my kids are doing after school."

"It's a good investment for us. We want to encourage families to put down their roots here and raise their families here."

— Brian Deakin,
Human Resources Manager, BD

Jeff Wheeler, partner in charge at the Holdrege Woods & Durham office, said the down-payment assistance program is a great incentive that will have a positive influence on the local economy because each new resident infuses money into the area by shopping locally, registering vehicles in the county, etc.

"I think it's a very worthwhile endeavor on PCDC's part and good for the employer and employee," Wheeler said. "Our business is centered around the time of year when weather isn't always great. If we have someone here that is 10 blocks away instead of 30 miles away, it's a lot better for us and for them."

Brian Deakin, Human Resources Manager at BD in Holdrege, said BD has committed \$25,000 to help 10 employees purchase homes in the county this first year. PCDC will match that commitment using LB840 sales tax funds.

"To encourage folks to move into the area is a wonderful opportunity for us," Deakin said.

One BD employee has already purchased a home in the county, and more applications are pending from BD employees.

"It's a good investment for us," Deakin said. "We want to encourage families to put down roots here and raise their families here."

Brewster Field Adding Another Hangar

Airport Supports Development in Tourism, Health Care, Agriculture & Manufacturing

Construction began last month on a new hangar at the Holdrege Airport, and work will begin soon on repaving the entrance road.

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

Holdrege Airport Authority Chairwoman Dorothy Anderson said activities at the airport bring many dollars into the community.

More than 2,800 people traveled to the airport in 2017 (through August) to experience sky diving with Skydive Atlas based at the airport.

"People drive in, they buy fuel, they do grocery shopping," she said. "We feel like for every jump, they might be adding at least \$30 to the local economy or more if they decide to stay overnight in a hotel."

Anderson said at least four physicians or surgeons fly in each week to see patients here.

"That helps our local residents so that they don't have to drive somewhere else for specialized medical care," she said. "And, we have people driving into the community from all over to see that doctor, which also provides economic benefit to the town."

Local manufacturers and businesses, such as Briggs & Stratton and Central Nebraska Public Power & Irrigation District, regularly use



A new hangar and road repairs are planned at the Holdrege Airport this fall.

the airport to fly in business associates.

The airport houses planes for two local aerial fertilizer and chemical application businesses (Nebraskaland Aviation and Wells Flying Service) to support the agricultural community.

Operations at the city airport are funded through federal and city funds, hangar rentals and fuel sales. The budget for 2017 is \$1,185,915. The airport contracts with Holdrege Aviation (Dan Powers, Tye Marquardt and Todd Garrelts) to manage the airport, including the office and the repair shop. They provide jobs for four full-time employees, including an office manager and aviation repair workers. They are currently searching to hire another Air Frame and Power Plant Mechanic to help with the

inspections and repair work in the busy shop.

Dorothy said the airport houses 37 planes and 1 helicopter in its current hangars and has a hangar waiting list for four more planes. Thanks to federal grant, the Airport Authority decided to construct another three-plane hangar. Work began on the \$800,000 project in September with TL Sund as the general contractor and is expected to be completed in the spring of 2018. Federal funds will pay for 90 percent of the cost.

The road paving project does not yet have a start date, but Dorothy said they are hoping to tie that in with the hangar construction project. Other upcoming work includes seal coating the runways and improving the taxi ways.

Manufacturing Partnership

Continued from Page 1

He envisions sending Phelps County students to these training programs to learn robotics or other career trades while still in high school.

"What we are finding is a lot of two-year degree trades are making more than four-year degree careers right out of college," Deakin said. "Partnerships help create this good pipeline where business and education are working together to create job-ready kids."

4. Training. This initiative involves continued education and training opportunities for current employees.

"I've got 700 people working here, and we are always bringing in new technology," Deakin said. "How can I upscale my current work force with educational partnerships?"

The manufacturing representatives at the initial August meeting volunteered to lead or serve in one of the four areas. Deakin will lead the Branding Task Force.

Deakin said he is excited about the opportunities for area communities that will grow from this regional partnership.

"I know the potential is there, not just for me as a business leader, but for our communities as well," Deakin said. "It's one thing I do love about central Nebraska. Out here, it's not just about the business. It's about the community. It's about the opportunities and the legacy we will leave for our kids and grandkids and the generations that will live here for years to come."

Job Opportunities Abundant in Phelps County

Employers & PCDC offer incentives to attract quality workers in high-demand careers

Students or anyone looking for good-paying future jobs that don't require racking up college debt may be surprised to discover many opportunities in Phelps County.

For the past several months, PCDC has been highlighting these high-demand jobs in its monthly e-newsletters. (To see the entire articles online, visit www.phelpscountyne.com.)

In addition to incentives offers by employers, PCDC awards scholarships each year to students who are planning to study in these high-demand fields.

Diesel, ag or automotive technicians: This past summer, area employers had at least nine job openings for positions such as automotive or agricultural technicians and diesel mechanics. And, the demand is so high that employers are paying for education, tools and certifications to recruit workers.

Interested students can earn associates degrees without racking up college debt and snag a high-paying guaranteed job right out of college as local employers are paying as much as \$45,000 a year starting wages. Those salaries can rise to near \$100,000 in a few short years for mechanics or technicians who are efficient and good at their work.

Some of these local jobs can be found at Janssen & Sons Auto, Titan Machinery, Landmark Implement and South Central Diesel.

Many of these employers offer a student-loan reimbursement program

allowing students to gain an education essentially for free.

Nursing: With two major long-term care facilities, a regional hospital and two medical clinics in Holdrege, the demand for quality nursing staff continues to grow and provides a great career path for those interested in serving those who are sick, aging or in need of any medical care.

Daniel Wojtalewicz, senior vice president of human resources at Phelps Memorial Health Center, said an aging Baby Boomer population is causing some of the shortages nationwide in nursing.

"As those Baby Boomers retire, and they worked as nurses and aides, that creates a natural shortage. And we just have a smaller pool to replace them," he said. "And on the flip side, now that they are retiring, they are entering the medical facilities for care, and now there's an influx of patients that are coming in."

To help in the recruitment of nursing staff, local facilities provide scholarships, training reimbursement and sign-on bonuses for Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs), Medication Aides, Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) and Registered Nurses (RNs).

Construction Trades: Building someone's dream home or kitchen or helping restore air conditioning on a sweltering summer day is a rewarding accomplishment. It's something that local contractors get to be a part of every day in jobs that provide flexibility and allow them to combine creative and problem-solving skills.

However, it's difficult to find skilled construction workers, plumbers and heating and air contractors in Phelps County and across the nation. Local contractors are all seeking qualified help, and these jobs are available without amassing a mountain of college debt.

Wendell Connell, co-owner at Edgren Building, said he would hire trustworthy workers who are good problem solvers without any post high-school education at about \$15 an hour. Employees with an associates degree or some experience would make more, and the most skilled and experienced workers could earn more than \$30 an hour.



Levi Woodring earned a PCDC high-demand job scholarship to train for a high-demand job at Titan Machinery.



RN Lori Fuller, Nursing Leader Miki Nichols, EMT Rob Johnston work in high-demand jobs at Phelps Memorial Health Center. The hospital offers tuition reimbursement to help recruit quality medical staff.



Boe Barnett, left, and Michael DeJonge work on a home remodeling project near Oxford for Skiles Construction. Both young men graduated from Holdrege High School and returned to Phelps County to work.

PCDC Goal: Advocate For Local Contractors

New Builders Bureau Offers Opportunities to Connect & Win Business

Several new local construction projects have started thanks to PCDC initiatives, and it is hoped that these and other future projects will bring opportunities for local contractors, subcontractors and vendors.

PCDC Executive Director Ron Tillery said there will be some bumps in the road along the way to building these opportunities, but PCDC's ultimate goal is to be a strong advocate for local businesses. One way of accomplishing that goal is through the new PCDC Builder's Bureau.

The Phelps County Development Corporation launched the PCDC Builders Bureau in late 2016 to expand opportunities for local contractors.

"Our thought was we wanted to help local subcontractors develop the capacity to be able to exploit contracting opportunities when they occurred," Tillery said. "We didn't have a specific project in mind when we began that process. We just knew that in order for work to flow out into the subcontractor and vendor community in our county, we needed a way to communicate with them better and a way to alert them to projects."

One goal of the PCDC Builders Bureau is to create a comprehensive list with accurate contact information for subcontractors and vendors and then use that list to alert them to bidding opportunities for projects by outside developers or architects or PCDC projects.

Another goal of the bureau is to educate local contractors on business trends and to help them build relationships with job creators in the region.

"One of the things I hope we can accomplish with the PCDC Builders Bureau is to conduct forums, meetings or seminars that help our subs develop relationships with general contractors so they can get to know each other and understand how each one communicates and their areas of specialty," Tillery said. "The better they know each other, they better chances they have to win a job."

Tillery plans to offer regular meetings starting this fall that will include presentations by regional developers or contractors.



The groundwork is under way at the new Washington Square Apartments. PCDC initiated this project that is now under development by Flat River Enterprises. PCDC is hoping to cultivate many more building projects in Phelps County in the next five years.

One concern expressed by local subcontractors, Tillery said, has been that outside developers always work with the same subcontractors.

"It's human nature to work with people you know and trust, that we know are going to deliver the product we need," Tillery said.

He is hoping the Builders Bureau will help local subcontractors improve relationships with regional developers.

Tillery said 44 companies have registered for the PCDC Builders Bureau. That number includes contractors or suppliers that are PCDC investors or those who paid the \$50 annual Builders Bureau fee. That list of companies was sent to the general contractor for the Washington Square project back in February.

"We encouraged in writing and verbally multiple times that the developer provide opportunities to local subs to the point where they were saying, 'We got the message!'" Tillery said.

Later, PCDC provided the contractor (BD Construction based in Kearney) with another list that included every subcontractor and supplier that they were aware of, even if they weren't a Builders Bureau member.

"We understand this is a nice project and is important to the community, and we wanted to

give everyone in the community a shot at it," Tillery said.

Tillery said PCDC cannot require that companies use a Phelps County subcontractor because that would constitute bid rigging, which is illegal.

"What we can do is aggressively advocate for them, but we can't require it," Tillery said. "We are trying to grow the pie, we are not trying to divvy it up. We want to make the pie bigger. This particular project isn't the only one that is at issue. The whole market is getting bigger and better."

Tillery said he has fielded many questions from local subcontractors about chances to bid and participate in new construction projects, particularly the Washington Square apartments. He encourages anyone with concerns about the bidding process and opportunities to visit him.

"We are open to feedback," Tillery said. "The door is open."

He encourages anyone with concerns or questions about upcoming projects and bidding opportunities to join Builders Bureau and to come and visit with him.

"We are advocating for local contractors, and we want to hear their feedback," Tillery said. "I want people to come talk to me and work with us to help generate more business for the market."

Woods & Durham Hires Accountant

Crystal Edson began work in December as an accountant/CPA for Woods & Durham in downtown Holdrege.

Crystal prepares individual, corporate, partnership and trust tax returns, payroll and information tax returns, prepares monthly payroll tax deposits and offers IRS audit support and data entry.



Crystal Edson

She is originally from Farnam and graduated from Chadron State College with a bachelor of arts degree and then earned a master of science degree in Family Financial Planning from

the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

She has 10 years of experience in public accounting working with a wide range of business entities and individuals with unique financial situations. She has worked as a staff accountant at small to medium-sized public accounting firms in Idaho and North Platte and most recently worked at Tillotson Enterprises, Inc., in Kearney prior to accepting her new position in Holdrege. She hopes to eventually become a certified financial planner and personal financial specialist.

Crystal lives in Holdrege and has four children, Brennan, 21; Hunter, 13; Christophe, 9; and Darianna, 4.

Outside of work, she enjoys watching her children's activities (soccer, 4-H and orchestra), gardening, reading, cooking and listening to music.

Hunt New Director at Christian Homes

Cherlyn Hunt began work Aug. 1 as the new Executive Director at Christian Homes. She replaces Don Bakke, who retired Sept. 30 after serving as director for 29 years at the long-term care facility.



Cherlyn Hunt

Cherlyn is originally from Pierce, Nebraska, and graduated from the University of Nebraska at Kearney. She and her husband, Chad, live in Elm Creek. They have two children, Darrin, who is a senior at Elm

Creek High School, and Denise, a seventh grader.

Cherlyn began her career at age 15 as a dietary aide in the local nursing home. She became a nursing assistant at age 16 and continued in that job until she graduated with a bachelor's degree in dietetics. She worked as a Dietary Manager and earned her Nursing Home Administration license in 2008. She later earned a master's degree in Health Care Administration and has worked as a nursing home administrator for 10 years.

When she is not working, she likes to watch her kids' activities, camp, fish, hunt, bicycle, scrapbook and bake.

Accounting Firm Moves To New Location

Woods & Durham moved to a new expanded location at the end of September.

Jeff Wheeler, partner in charge at the Holdrege Woods & Durham office, said the firm purchased the former Educational Service Unit building at the corner of East and Third Avenues in downtown Holdrege. The company has sold its former building at 419 East Ave.

Woods & Durham converted the large open space of its new location into seven offices, a conference room and a reception area. The move will allow the company to grow its staff to meet current demands for its services, increase efficiency and work flow, and it will make the business more accessible for its clients. The natural light provided by the many windows in the new location will make the environment brighter for staff and clients.

Wheeler said the Woods & Durham staff now includes four CPAs, two paraprofessionals and a receptionist. They intend to add at least one more CPA.

Woods & Durham specializes in tax services, financial and estate planning, general accounting services and management advisory services. It is a regional firm with headquarters in Salina, Kan., and has three locations in Kansas in addition to the Holdrege and Oxford, Neb., offices.

First Impression Grants Awarded to Four Phelps County Businesses

Four Phelps County businesses will be sprucing up their store fronts thanks to PCDC's new First Impression Grants.

Firefly Landscaping/Country Partners Coop building in Loomis, Great ST8 Properties in Holdrege and Lost Way Brewery in Holdrege are the most recent recipients of the \$1,000 grants. Real Estate Connection in Holdrege was the first recipient of the grant, and work began this month on its project.

The First Impressions Grant offers up to \$1,000 for exterior updates to any Phelps County business if the project would result in improving the community's first impression. The grant funds must be used for materials only and may be used for windows, paint,

awnings, masonry or minor exterior repairs and lighting.

The projects receiving grants so far are:

- Real Estate Connection, 421 East Ave., replacing window and siding and shake shingles on front exterior.
- Firefly Landscaping/Country Partners Coop, Commercial Street, Loomis – Painting exterior of building gray with white trim.
- Great ST8 Properties, LLC, West Avenue, Holdrege – Replacing torn awning.
- Lost Way Brewery, 613 3rd Ave., Holdrege – Repairing holes in masonry, tuck and point work on cracks, rebuilding upper northwest corner of building and other masonry work on joints and missing brick.



Great ST8 Properties will use the First Impression Grant to repair an awning.

For more information about the First Impression Grants, please contact Carley or Ron at PCDC 995-4148 or visit the website and search First Impressions Grants.

PCDC Seeks Investors for Cobblestone Hotel

A new 45-room hotel could give travelers and business clients a new local lodging option as early as 2018.

PCDC Executive Director Ron Tillery said he is negotiating with the Cobblestone Hotel to build new accommodations in Holdrege. PCDC is seeking local investors to help make the project a reality.

Several possible locations for the hotel have been identified, but no final decision has been made.

Tillery said an updated hotel study completed in March 2017 indicated a need for a 45-room hotel.

"The Rodeway Inn has a very high occupancy rate, and that is one of the reasons we need another hotel," Tillery said.

In addition to the study, Tillery said he has heard from local business owners who have said that their out-of-town business associates often have to stay in Kearney.

"We have a lot of business travelers staying at a regional hotel and then driving over," Tillery said. "We want to capture some of that business here in Phelps County."

Also, Tillery said the proposed ball-field complex has the potential to draw even more out-of-town visitors, and the area needs to be ready to house



The Holdrege Cobblestone Hotel would be similar to this hotel. (Courtesy photo)

those visitors.

After interviewing several hotel chains, the Cobblestone group seemed like the best match for Phelps County.

The Cobblestone Hotel will cater to business clients and will have a nice exercise room but no swimming pool. Tillery said Cobblestone offers mid-to-upper tier hotel rooms that would be comparable to a Hilton Hotel but not as expensive.

The Wisconsin-based group has seen a need for this type of hotel throughout the Midwest and has recently constructed hotels in McCook, Cambridge and Broken Bow. The Holdrege

location would be its 78th hotel.

Preliminary discussions with potential investors have been conducted. PCDC is seeking a local investment of \$1.3 million, and local investors have already committed 50 percent of the funds needed. Others interested in investing are encouraged to contact Tillery.

"It's important to have a local investment base to ensure that the hotel is successful," Tillery said.

Tillery said PCDC is hoping to finalize investor commitments by the end of 2017 and then break ground on the hotel in 2018.

City Takes Action On Construction of New Ball Fields

Although no dirt has been moved yet, behind-the-scenes work is progressing on a new youth baseball complex in northwest Holdrege.

Brian Grupe, Senior Engineer at Olsson Associates, said grading plans are complete for the project, and the City of Holdrege plans to seek bids for the grading work in October.

The four-field baseball/softball complex will be constructed east of the Holdrege Elementary School on land that was gifted by the Phelps County Community Foundation.

The grading work could begin this fall or more likely next spring, depending on the selected contractor's availability. Construction will be done in phases and will be scheduled as the design process progresses. The fields are not likely to be completed in time for the 2018 baseball/softball season.

Holdrege City Administrator Bob Rager said he has been collecting ideas and touring baseball complexes as he attends conferences around the state. He has visited Broken Bow's new complex and fields in Aurora, York and Hastings. He has gleaned ideas from Hastings City Administrator Joe Patterson, who is also a former parks and recreation director and is the president of the Nebraska Softball Association.

Rager said he will schedule public meetings on the project sometime this winter to give area residents a chance to give their input and ideas before plans are finalized.

The total cost of the complex is estimated at \$2 million. The Phelps County Development Corporation has budgeted just over \$1 million in LB840 city sales tax funds to be directed to the project. The city recently approved issuing

bonds for the complex.

"I think the voters said loud and clear that this is a community enhancement that is important to them," Tillery said about the November 2015 vote that continues the collection of city sales tax funds for economic development for another 15 years.

This project fits in the Community Preparedness and Quality of Life strategy that PCDC developed as part of its five-year plan.

"The baseball field is an important amenity to ensure we capture as many employees as residents as we can," Tillery said.

Rager said other funds for the project will come from grants, possible fund raising and from the city's general fund. City crews will do some of the work, including the concrete work and installing water and sewer lines.

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PROGRESS ON THE PRAIRIE

Holdrege Breaks Ground on Housing Project

Instead of welcoming students back to school in August, the site of the former Washington School welcomed shovels and construction workers as they started to build the new 18-unit Washington Square apartments.

More than 50 people attended the Aug. 29 ground breaking. The project is expected to meet the need for more rental homes for the local workforce. The town-home apartments are the first phase of three developments planned for the property.

Flat River Enterprises is the developer for the \$2.25 million project. PCDC is providing assistance to the project through LB840 sales-tax funds as it meets the objective of creating workforce housing to help area employers find and retain employees. Several employers have already asked Flat River Enterprises to reserve units for future use.



Ron Tillery, Doug Stevenson, Mike Kalb, Mayor Doug Young, Michelle High and Kyle Anderson overturned the first dirt on the new Washington Square Apartments on Aug. 29.