



ONLINE EDUCATION OFFERS ALTERNATIVE LEARNING FORMAT

In today's ever-changing world there is a great deal of emphasis on continuing education as well as the need for its growth.

A concept called Massive Open Online Courses or MOOCs came onto the education scene in about 2008 and has been growing in prominence and popularity since that time. A tenet of MOOCs is called "flipping the classroom." This means that the majority of learning happens not with a professor lecturing the students but by giving students access to course materials and having them probe, discuss, and debate issues with fellow learners as well as the professor.

One example of an online education company is Coursera®.

 Coursera® partners with universities and organizations worldwide to offer courses online. The courses are free for anyone to take. According to its website, Coursera® offers more than 400 courses from more than 80 partners. Courses are available in a wide range of topics. Some sample course titles include Health Care for All Through Primary Care, Developing Innovative Ideas for New Companies, Energy 101, Growth to Greatness: Smart Growth for Small Business, Social

Network Analysis, and Introduction to Sustainability.

John Cyr, NCRPC Special Projects Manager, has completed one course through Coursera® and is currently taking two more. The first was "Leading Strategic Innovation in Organizations" offered by Vanderbilt University.

"The courses aren't that easy and typically have a world-wide audience which makes some of the discussion groups difficult to follow," Cyr says. "Most post in English, but grammar varies. It does, however, make for lively and varied discussion."

"...the format enables anyone living in a rural environment to continue their education without the need to travel and lose time from work."

~ John Cyr, NCRPC Special Projects Manager

Cyr says the Vanderbilt course had approximately 10,000 students so people were engaging at all hours of the day and night.

The online course catalog contains ways to search for courses by language or subject category. An introductory video is available for each course to learn more before enrolling. Courses come with five or more video lectures per week, a PDF of all slides, a PDF of all notes,

and access to discussion links. According to Cyr, the lectures are a series of five- to 30-minute videos with an aggregate time each week of one and a half to two hours. Coursera® launched a Signature Track in early 2013, which gives students the opportunity to earn Verified Certificates.

"Personally, I think the model can be very useful," Cyr says. "If one were to point people to those courses that might be relevant to regional discussion, it would be one way to promote collective thought and action on topics of mutual interest and/or concern."

The online learning format offers convenience for those looking for life-long learning opportunities to bolster knowledge that is applied to work or simply to take courses on topics in which they have always had an interest.

"Another positive about Coursera® and others like it is the format enables anyone living in a rural environment to continue their education without the need to travel and lose time from work," Cyr says.

For more information about Coursera®, visit the website at www.coursera.org.

Leadership : NCRPC Executive Board

Chair:

Tim Vandall, City of Ellsworth

Vice Chair:

Frank Ryttych, Republic Co.

Secretary/Treasurer:

Brian Ellert, Mitchell Co.

Executive Board Members:

Jon Blanchard, City of Salina

Karen Brumbaugh, Ottawa Co.

Craig Chamberlin, Dickinson Co.

Tom Claussen, Mitchell Co.

Johnita Crawford, Cloud Co.

Dwight Frost, Jewell Co.

Hannah Furbeck, Saline Co.

Heather Hartman, Mitchell Co. Comm. Dev.

Gerald Huehl, Lincoln Co.

Gary Ouellette, Washington Co.

Kermit Rush, Ellsworth Co.

Sonya Stohs, Marshall Co.

David Thurlow, Clay Co.

Rural Voices Youth Contest Announced



High school seniors in North Central Kansas have a chance to compete for cash awards by submitting an entry in the 2013-2014 Rural Voices Contest. The NCRPC, which sponsors the contest, invites students to enter a written essay or a short video based on the contest theme of "Rural Kansas...An Investment Worth Making." A cash award of \$850 will be made to the winning entry in each media category. The top entries also will receive web-based publication at the *EyeonKansas.org* site. Written entries may be submitted by an individual and video entries may be submitted by an individual or by a team of up to four high school seniors. This is the first year the contest has allowed teams to participate.

Any senior in high school who lives in or attends a school in the 12-county NCRPC service area is eligible to enter the contest — including the counties of Clay, Cloud, Dickinson, Ellsworth, Jewell, Lincoln, Marshall, Mitchell, Ottawa, Republic, Saline and Washington.

The deadline is November 15, 2013. For more information, visit www.eyeonkansas.org and click on the "RuralVoices" link.

NCRPC Executive Board Welcomes Huehl

Gerald Huehl joined the NCRPC Executive Board of Directors in 2013 after being elected to the Lincoln County Board of Commissioners. He is retired from the Kansas Department of Transportation after 28 years on the job as a highway maintenance supervisor. In the past Gerald has worked as a heavy equipment operator, heavy equipment instructor at North Central Kansas Technical College, farmer and small business owner.

He graduated from the North Central Kansas Technical College in Beloit. He served on the KDOT Equipment and Budget Committee



Gerald Huehl

for 10 years and was involved on a P2 KDOT Board of Directors to make KDOT a better work place.

Gerald and his wife, Connie, have four children. In his spare time, Gerald enjoys spending time farming, fishing, serving as a hunting guide and watching youth wrestling. He has seven grandchildren.

Kansas Public Water Supply Loan Fund Available

Kansas public water suppliers now have two opportunities to submit a project to the Kansas Public Water Supply Loan Fund (KPWSLF). Starting last year the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) asked for project submittals two times a year instead of one. The deadlines are mid-to-late May and December.

The KPWSLF is a state revolving loan fund (SRF) program that provides financial assistance in the form of loans to Kansas municipalities, at below market interest rates, for construction of public water supply system infrastructure.

To be eligible a municipality must adopt and implement a Water Conservation Plan. The municipality must then submit to KDHE a project submittal form. The project is

then ranked by KDHE and put on a project priority list, which is part of an Intended Use Plan developed by KDHE. Higher ranking will be given to projects that address the most serious health risks, that are necessary to assure compliance with requirements of the national primary drinking water regulations, and that assist public water supplies most in need.

"Allowing new projects every six months rather than 12 will help KDHE commit funds in a more timely manner," William Carr, KDHE Public Water Supply Loan Fund Program Coordinator, says.

For more information, visit www.kdheks.gov/pws/loan/loanfund.htm. The NCRPC also has staff to assist cities and water districts with preparing applications.

looking ahead : Meetings, Deadlines, and More

Thursday, September 26, 2013

Executive Board Meeting
Concordia City Hall, 2 p.m.

Thursday, October 31, 2013

Executive Board Meeting
Beloit Main Office, 2 p.m.

Remaining FY 2014 Community Development Block Grant Deadlines

Water and Sewer — Sept. 26, 2013
Community Facilities — Oct. 31, 2013
KAN STEP — Feb. 15, 2014
Economic Development — Open Window Jan. 1-Dec. 10, 2013



Contact Us:

North Central Regional Planning Commission (NCRPC)

109 N. Mill Street • PO Box 565
Beloit, KS 67420 • 785-738-2218

www.ncrpc.org

Send newsletter suggestions to
lthielen@nckcn.com.

NCRPC Offers Solutions to Help Address Many Needs

Bridge Data Available on Transportation Site

Persieds meteor showers anyone? They were briefly active across many mid-August skies. So were the flood warnings in much of the region earlier in the month. That helps us realize that this heat and dry period will also pass. In your neighborhood, community, and even in this region, what do you perceive as a concern that does not appear to be on the verge of changing?

Is it a challenge to engage and maintain a solid workforce? How are the local partnerships between high schools, community colleges, technical colleges and employers?

A new 2+2 program is on the verge of beginning in the region between Kansas State University, Cloud County Community College, North Central Technical College and a couple of larger businesses. This promises to aid in retention of valued workers.

Other concerns might be related to start-up business planning or business financing. North Central Regional Planning Commission has references and avenues for addressing these issues. A further worry may be aging infrastructure such as with wastewater treatment, water supply or transportation systems.

Yet another observation might be the lack of quality affordable housing. The NCRPC has been assisting households with various home improvement efforts since 1978.

A new community housing idea worth discussing is one that is gaining traction in a rural part of south central Iowa. A combination of neighborhood revitalization, lot forgiveness, tax abatement on new construction or significant renovation as well as buy local building material bucks help incentivize housing developments. USDA Rural Development, Federal Home

Loan Bank and Community Development Block Grant housing rehabilitation programs can also be used in communities willing to make long-lasting betterments.

The NCRPC will be updating its Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy in the next several months. Please provide your input to staff, to executive board members and participate in various forums later this fall throughout the region. In the mean time, contact the NCRPC if you wish to tackle community concerns such as those listed above or others and staff here will help you seek solutions.



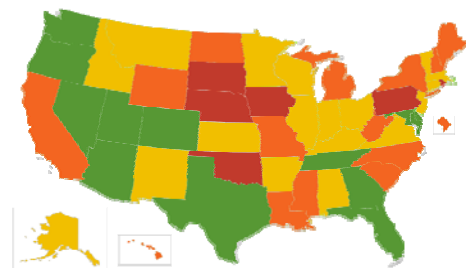
Doug McKinney is NCRPC Executive Director.

According to Transportation for America, more than one in nine (11%) of all bridges is structurally deficient. These are bridges that require significant maintenance, rehabilitation or replacement.

While most bridges are designed to last 50 years before major overhaul or replacement, the average age of an American bridge is well past middle age at 43 years.

Looking ahead in just 10 years, one in four bridges (170,000) will be over 65. At this age it is more likely that a bridge will be deficient.

One feature on the Transportation for America website is the 2013 National Bridge Report. This report is derived from the National Bridge Inventory, a compilation of state-collected data, which is reported to and then published by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). This report shows Kansas being the 25th most deficient state having 10.5% of its bridges being structurally deficient. The interactive link is available at t4america.org/resources/bridges/states/. County-level data is available by clicking on the State of Kansas.



Interactive data on the condition of bridges by state and county is available at the Transportation for America website.

Also on the site is an interactive feature that allows you to locate all the structurally deficient bridges within a 10-mile radius of a specific location. The link is available at t4america.org/resources/bridges/.

Transportation for America is a coalition that works on transportation reform. It is based in Washington DC.

NCRPC to Host Regional Meetings this Fall, Winter

Forums will take place across the region later this fall and winter. The NCRPC is hosting these meetings to have a discussion of wants/needs for the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), to provide an overview of various funding sources available for projects, and to discuss what the NCRPC can do as a planning/development arm for communities and counties. The meeting locations and dates are as follows:

November 14, 2013 — Abilene **January 9, 2014 — Jewell**
November 19, 2013 — Blue Rapids **January 21, 2014 — Lincoln**

The public is invited to attend. More information will be available soon.



North Central Regional Planning Commission

109 N. Mill, PO Box 565
Beloit, KS 67420
785.738.2218
www.ncrpc.org

business updates

A new vehicle service center, Stone's Southside Service, LLC, opened for business in January 2013 in Washington.

The owners, Gary and Danielle Stone, constructed a new building at 1002 B Street, which is conveniently located two blocks south of the junction of K-15 Hwy and U.S. Hwy 36. The couple saw a need for the business between the local commuting traffic and the high level of traffic from both nearby highways. The business offers oil changes, light mechanic services, brake services, exhaust service, engine belt/hose replacement, tire sales, tire repairs, wrecker service and towing service.

Stone's Southside Service, LLC is open six days a week, but offers towing, wrecker, and emergency tire repair 24 hours a day/7 days a week. The business also picks up customer

vehicles at their residence or place of work and returns them without any inconvenience to the customer.

Gary Stone has 35 years experience in tire and vehicle repair including 15 years experience operating his own part-time towing and wrecker business. He most recently worked at a service center located near Hanover. Danielle also assists the business with billing/bookkeeping on a full-time basis.

Business planning services were provided by Linda Sutton, Director of the NCK Small Business Development Center. For more information, contact Linda at 785-243-9913 or visit www.ncksbdc.com.

This project has created three full-time positions and there are plans to



Stone's Southside Service offers many vehicle service options. The business opened in early 2013 in Washington.

create another part-time position. The project was made possible with funding from United Bank & Trust of Washington, the NCRPC Revolving Loan Fund, a StartUp Kansas Loan, and investment by the owners.

For more information about the financing programs used contact Debra Peters, NCRPC Business Finance Director, at 785-738-2218 or dpeters@nckcn.com. To contact the business, call 785-325-2247.