2024 QUARTERS 3 & 4 NEWSLETTER

NCRPC NEWS

An update from the North Central Regional Planning Commission

Two Honored with Lifetime Public Service Awards at NCRPC Fall Event

An evening of networking, dining, and a keynote address culminated in the presentation of the 2024 NCRPC Lifetime Public Service Awards to Darla Bebber of Miltonvale, Kansas, and Don Landoll of Marysville, Kansas. The event took place on October 24 in Salina, Kansas.

The Lifetime Public Service Award was established in 2022 to honor individuals or organizations for their exceptional contributions to the well-being of North Central Kansas over an extended period. Darla Bebber was the Miltonvale City Clerk for 42 years. During that time, she demonstrated a tremendous commitment to public service through her position with the city, and also as a volunteer.

"City Clerks have a key position in a community as a source of information, a hub of connections and also to keep things running smoothly," says Deb Ohlde, NCRPC Assistant Director of Strategic Initiatives, who worked with Bebber on various community projects. "Darla embraced that role and went above and beyond the basics to do it well."

Don Landoll, the founder, owner, and president of Landoll Company, LLC, has long been dedicated to community and public service both locally and regionally.

"Don is always willing to give his time, talent, leadership, and resources to promote the quality of life in rural areas," says Jeff Crist, President of the Marysville Community Foundation. "Additionally, he is responsible for the creation of hundreds of local jobs and career opportunities in North Central Kansas and surrounding areas."

Darla Bebber from Miltonvale, Kansas, was awarded a 2024 NCRPC Lifetime Public Service Award. She is shown with NCRPC Executive Director John Shea (left) and NCRPC Assistant Director of Strategic Initiatives Deb Ohlde (right).

Don Landoll, Marysville, received a NCRPC Lifetime Public Service Award. Presenting the award were NCRPC Executive Director John Shea (left) and Marysville Community Foundation President Jeff Crist (right).

Attendees were also entertained by keynote speaker Aaron Putze, who

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ABOUT US

Our primary service area includes 12 counties and 83 cities in North Central Kansas.

OUR MISSION

Advancing rural Kansas through comprehensive planning and development services.

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If you have a story idea or would like to update your address, email us at: communications@ncrpc.org

Housing Initiative Helps to Address Rural Housing Challenges

Second Year Program Results Show Benefit to Six Kansas Counties

Financial assistance provided through the second year of the NCRPC Housing Initiative enabled the completion of 87 housing rehabilitation projects and the demolition of 55 dilapidated residential structures across six Kansas counties: Cheyenne, Decatur, Gove, Graham, Republic, and Rooks.

The initiative was administered by the North Central Regional Planning Commission through a partnership with the Dane G. Hansen Foundation of Logan, Kansas.

Intended to strengthen housing in communities, the initiative included pilot programs focusing on moderate-income housing rehabilitation and the demolition of dilapidated residential properties.

The Demolition Pilot Program offered reimbursement grants of up to $5,000 per property for removal and cleanup of structures. The Moderate Income Housing Rehabilitation Pilot Program offered reimbursement grants of up to $10,000 to homeowners to complete minor housing upgrades. Households met moderate income guidelines to be eligible to apply.

"The moderate-income housing rehabilitation pilot program was designed to assist homeowners that are many times underserved by other funding programs," said NCRPC Housing Director Keegan Bailey. "There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to addressing housing challenges in rural communities. This initiative was one tool available to assist homeowners."

The most common housing improvements completed with program assistance included upgrades to windows, siding, electrical systems, and HVAC systems.

"We were thrilled with results of year two of the initiative and appreciate the local partners who helped make the program a success in these locations," Bailey said. "Anything we can do to help preserve housing stock or remove dilapidated structures is a win for communities," Bailey said.

Similar pilot programs have also been completed in Cloud, Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Russell, and Smith counties. A third year of the NCRPC Housing Initiative has also launched in six additional Kansas counties, including Logan, Osborne, Ottawa, Phillips, Rawlins, and Sherman, and is currently ongoing. It is anticipated that the initiative will expand to more counties in the Dane G. Hansen Foundation service area in 2025, subject to the availability of funding.

For more information, visit **www.ncrpc.org/housinginitiative**.

Meet the Staff: NCRPC Welcomes Harrison, Augustine

We are pleased to announce the hiring of two new employees.

Kristina Harrison joined the NCRPC part-time in July as Homeland Security Assistant. In this role, she assists the Homeland Security Fiscal Coordinator by working with project managers on each of the regional Homeland Security Councils – ensuring their questions are answered, financial documentation is maintained, and projects are completed according to grant guidance. Kristina holds an Associate's degree in Emergency Management/Homeland Security from Barton County Community College and also works full-time as a 911 dispatcher.

Kristina Harrison

Amanda Augustine rejoined the NCRPC in December as Weatherization Assistant for the Weatherization Assistance Program administered by the NCRPC, which serves 41 counties in North Central and Northwest Kansas. She previously worked at NCRPC from 2014 to 2022, where she held various roles, including that of Weatherization Director. Most recently, Amanda was employed in the agribusiness industry. She earned an associate degree in Applied Science from Salina Area Technical College and a bachelor's degree in Business Management from Tabor College in Hillsboro.

Amanda Augustine

Project Spotlight: Washington County Industrial Park Near Linn

BASE Grant Helps Accelerate Plans for Expansion Project

Around the same time that the current industrial park in Washington County was filled, the Department of Commerce announced a new funding program called Building a Stronger Economy (BASE) Grants.

The Washington County Economic Partnership (WCEP) originally intended to allocate a portion of their budget each year to save for an industrial park project. However, with no available vacancies, an expansion was needed sooner rather than later. WCEP proposed a project to purchase approximately 25 acres of land across the road (Kansas Highway 15) from the existing park and convert it into lots equipped with utilities.

Ultimately, in Spring 2022, the project was awarded a grant of $207,222, with another 25% in matching funds from the Washington County Economic Partnership. The BASE program, authorized by the SPARK Executive Committee, was designed to support infrastructure development that addresses economic development opportunities statewide, with the goal of expanding the state's base of businesses and residents. It is no longer available.

The map shows the expansion location highlighted in yellow, directly across from the original industrial park along KS Highway 15 near Linn. *(Courtesy Photo)*

The project scope included land acquisition, installation of utilities, surveying to subdivide for potential business lots, signage, and project administration. The NCRPC provided planning assistance, grant writing, and project administration.

Does your community have a project idea or need? The NCRPC will be releasing a new project interest form in early 2025. Watch for more details to be released soon.

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT

There are many great things happening in North Central Kansas. Project Spotlight shares stories from communities around the region and how they solved challenges. View more at ***www.ncrpc.org/tag/project-spotlight****.*

Banquet, *From page 1*

shared insights on fostering progress, connections, and growth in rural communities. Putze is an author and speaker who also serves as the Chief Officer of Brand Management and Engagement at the Iowa Soybean Association. Thank you to everyone who joined us for the event!

Aaron Putze pictured at right, delivered the keynote address, sharing stories of inspiration and emphasizing the importance of making personal connections to drive progress.

High School Seniors Invited to Enter Rural Voices Youth Contest

High school seniors in North Central Kansas are once again invited to compete for a chance to win $1,000 by submitting an essay or short video in the Rural Voices Youth Contest. The 2024-2025 contest theme is "Rural Kansas…My Hometown."

Students submitting the top two entries will each receive a cash award of $1,000. The NCRPC has sponsored the contest annually since 2006 in honor of long-time former executive director John Cyr.

Any senior in high school who lives in or attends a school in the 12-county NCRPC service area is eligible to enter.

The deadline to submit an entry is February 3, 2025. For more information, visit **www.ncrpc.org/ruralvoices**.

EVENTS & MORE

Holiday Office Hours Notice
The NCRPC will close at noon on December 24 and will reopen on Thursday, January 2, 2025. We look forward to continuing to serve you in the new year!

Executive Board Meeting
January 30, 2025

State Historic Preservation Office Workshop — North Central Region
March 27, 2025
Save the Date! More information coming in early 2025.

Funding sources and deadlines:
» **www.ncrpc.org/funding**

North Central Regional Planning Commission
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Campground Offers Wide Range of Services for Customers

NCRPC Business Finance Program Assists Dickinson County Business

Before purchasing Walt's Four Seasons Campground and Country Store, LLC in 2020, Walter (Bud) and Kelly McKenzie visited multiple RV parks and lived on-site for 12 months. Their commitment was not just to create a successful business, but one that would benefit the community and region, a commitment that remains unwavering today.

The campground, located six miles east of Abilene, Kansas, at the intersection of I-70 and K-43 Highway, features a Phillips 66 convenience store and 64 campsites. Amenities include a fishing pond, walking trails, a pool, a dog park, mini golf, a playground, and boat/camper storage. Recently, they also added U-Haul rentals to their list of services. Walt's County Store is open daily and offers a full grocery store, 24/7 fuel access, camping supplies, fishing bait, and laundry facilities. Additionally, Walt's features daily meal specials, made-to-order deli sandwiches, pizza, and hamburgers, and is equipped as an event venue and for providing catering for groups and meetings.

Walt's Four Seasons Campground & Country Store LLC, located six miles east of Abilene, Kansas, provides year-round camping and a number of amenities for travelers and local residents. *(Courtesy Photo)*

In 2023, the McKenzie's completed major improvements including the pool and electrical upgrades. A 2024 project helped position the business for continued growth, securing operating capital and inventory purchases. It was made possible through investments by the owners and assistance from Bennington State Bank of Abilene, GROWKS Loan Program-Rural, and the NCK Business Down Payment Assistance Loan Program, offered by NCRPC.

For more information about the NCRPC Business Finance program, visit **www.ncrpc.org/services/business**. To learn more about the business, visit **www.walts4seasonscamp.com**.