



NCRPC NEWS

A publication of the North Central Regional Planning Commission

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www.ncrpc.org

KAN STEP Continues to be a Solution for Many Communities in the Region

Local participation, sweat equity, and a sense of ownership help make the KAN STEP program a unique solution for many small, rural communities that may lack the financial resources to address water system or community facilities needs on their own.



The Esbon RFD #3 Fire Station KAN STEP project was completed in 2013 and includes space for training and storage.

The KAN STEP program is administered by the Kansas

Department of Commerce Small Cities Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program. To be eligible for funding, applicants must be cities with a population of less than 2,500 or counties on behalf of fire or water districts.

The program is competitive and pre-applications are accepted twice a year — August 15 and February 15. The Department of Commerce makes site visits approximately two months after pre-applications are reviewed and, if the project is deemed feasible, the community will then be asked to submit a full application with an architect or engineer's cost estimates and designs.

Grant funds are used for professional services and materials, while volunteers provide labor and donate equipment. The maximum grant amount is \$300,000 or \$2,000

per beneficiary. The program is designed to benefit low- and moderate-income (LMI) persons and applicants must meet a 51% LMI requirement.

The KAN STEP program has funded 87 projects that would have retail costs totaling more than \$39 million. Volunteers have donated more than \$17 million in labor and equipment for a cost reduction of 43.8% of retail cost.

The Kansas Rural Water Association (KRWA) is contracted to provide inspection services and technical assistance for the program. That contract was developed by the Department of Commerce after the first project in Formoso in 2000. KRWA General Manager Elmer Ronnebaum says KRWA is invested in helping KAN STEP projects thrive.

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ABOUT US

Our Mission

Advancing rural Kansas through comprehensive planning and development services.

Our Vision

By 2024, communities in rural Kansas will favor choices that embrace innovation, increase prosperity and demonstrate resilience.

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New Economic Development Ideas Often Start Small

In early August, on behalf of North Central Regional Planning Commission, NCKCN and you, our stakeholders, I participated in an organizational peer review conducted by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) near their downtown Denver offices. Much of the oral and written presentation I provided and the ideas shared there by other regional directors bolstered what we have done and are already doing. The NCRPC received a lot of reinforcement and encouragement for the strategies it has deployed for neighborhoods, communities and the region to work together to keep up with an ever-changing world, legislative dictates, and economic challenges tossed our direction.

As an area chamber director recently stated, focusing on the positive changes can be the sunshine amongst the cloudy skies we often experience. An example of bright light on a grand scale is in Denver's



Doug McKinney has been NCRPC Executive Director since 2008.

western downtown area. While there I had the opportunity to join a group tour of Galvanize, an exploding technology training site not far from the EDA offices.

Galvanize is more than a school. It is a place for short-term interaction and idea generation that enables the curious to become entrepreneurs. Airbnb is just one of their dozens of customers. Often, big-time entrepreneurs and employees from afar are there to learn new angles to hone their service offering skills.

Do you have a shared space where persons can gather and work on impact building collaboration?

Lightning bolts are often too much energy at once. Simple sparks can be invigorating enough to generate a small fire for furthering ideas leading to a new economic development success and community betterment.

Do you have some positive changes happening in your town, county and area of Kansas amidst this time of concern and sluggishness? Think back to the sparks that ignited new ideas. Look at area examples of home-grown investments producing results in Haddam, Abilene, Washington, Clay Center, Longford, Jewell, Linn, Belleville, Holyrood, Salina, Wilson, Miltonvale, Sylvan Grove, Marysville, Chapman, Tipton, Minneapolis and beyond. Fruit is just beginning to ripen in many of these places. The time is now to plant seeds for the future. By the way, the flight to Denver from Salina via newly engaged Great Lakes Airlines was smooth, quick and inexpensive and saved six hours of driving each way. ■

KAN STEP Program

(Continued from page 1)

"A big benefit of the KAN STEP program is that since the projects are completed with local participation, the community truly feels a sense of ownership," Ronnebaum says.

Projects that are eligible include water systems and community facilities such as community centers, fire stations, libraries or a combination.

KAN STEP projects require a "sparkplug"—or a person to keep the project moving forward. NCRPC Community Development Representative Emily Benedick says this is a vital role for success.

"Most importantly, the sparkplug helps keep a steady supply of volunteers excited and interested in the project at hand," Benedick says.

An adequate number of passionate and skilled volunteers is essential to project success as well. After a series of community meetings, a core committee is formed. It is typically made up of local volunteer contractors, plumbers, electricians and more, as necessary, who have some expertise in an area.

"It is vitally important that everyone stay involved and committed to the project throughout," Benedick says.

A map on the KRWA website shows KAN STEP project locations across the state.



A KAN STEP project is helping volunteers renovate an old school building in Navarre that is used as a community center. This photo was taken at a March 2016 fundraiser in the building.

To learn more about the program, visit krwa.net/technical-assistance/kan-step or contact the NCRPC to discuss your project ideas with community development representatives Emily Benedick or Nichole McDaniel at 785-738-2218.

October 30 Marks Weatherization Day

October 30 is recognized as Weatherization Day, marking an annual opportunity to bring attention to the fact that low income households spend a disproportionate percentage of their annual incomes on home energy bills.

According to the Kansas Housing Resources Corporation website, low-income families pay an average of 18% of their annual income for energy, compared with 5% for other households annually.

The Weatherization Assistance Program improves energy efficiency of income eligible households by

conducting a comprehensive home assessment, which includes repair or replacement of heating systems, insulation and caulking.

Over its 40 year history, the Weatherization Assistance Program has weatherized more than 7.4 million homes. The NCRPC administers the program for 35 counties in North Central and Northwest Kansas. Since the NCRPC began providing these services in 1979, nearly 14,350 homes have received assistance. To learn more about the program or how to apply, visit www.ncrpc.org/services/housing/weatherization/.

NCRPC Banquet Set for November 3

Mark your calendar and plan to attend the 2016 NCRPC Banquet on Thursday, November 3 in Abilene at the Eisenhower Presidential Library.

The banquet is open to the public and will begin with a social hour at 5:15 p.m. followed by dinner at 6 p.m. and the keynote address immediately following. Dr. Ron Trewyn, National Bio and Agro-defense Facility, or NBAF, Liaison will be the featured speaker for the event.

This banquet marks the 44th Anniversary of the NCRPC. The bi-annual event is also hosted on behalf of the Planning Commission's not-for-profit affiliate, North Central Kansas Community Network (NCKCN).

The cost to attend is \$10 per person. Call the NCRPC at 785-738-2218 or email ncrpc@nckcn.com by October 27 to make your reservation. For more information, visit www.ncrpc.org/news/events. ■

NEWS BRIEFS

Rural Voices Contest Open to High School Seniors

High school seniors in North Central Kansas are invited to compete for cash awards by submitting a written essay or short video in the 2016-2017 Rural Voices Youth Contest. The theme is "Rural Kansas...Why it Matters."



The top entry in each category will be recognized with a cash award of \$850. The NCRPC sponsors the contest and has awarded more than \$17,000 to high school seniors from around the region since launching the contest in 2006.

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. The contest deadline is November 15. Visit www.ncrpc.org/ruralvoices for more information. ■

Community Clean-Up Grants Available

The Dane G. Hansen Foundation is partnering with eligible community foundations to provide community clean-up grants. The maximum grant amount is \$20,000 for a county-wide clean-up day. If applying for an individual community clean-up day, grants will be considered at a lesser amount. Funding is available in each of the counties in the Dane G. Hansen Foundation service area. In the NCRPC service area, eligible counties include: Cloud, Ellsworth, Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Ottawa, Republic, and Saline. Applications are accepted until June 1, 2017. ■

UPCOMING EVENTS AND DEADLINES

Thursday, September 29, 2016

Thursday, December 1, 2016

NCRPC Executive Board Meetings
Beloit Office, 2 p.m.

Remaining FY 2017 CDBG

Funding Deadlines

Water and Sewer - Sept. 30, 2016
Community Facilities - Nov. 1, 2016
Special Activity - Nov. 1, 2016
KAN STEP - Feb. 15, 2017
Economic Development - Open

Window from Jan 1-Dec. 10, 2016

Contact the NCRPC for more information or visit

www.kansascommerce.com/cdbg.

Thursday, November 3, 2016

NCRPC Banquet, Abilene
Eisenhower Presidential Library
5:15 p.m. Social
6 p.m. Dinner & Keynote Speaker
www.ncrpc.org/news/events/

Wednesday, November 9, 2016

Live Well Saline County Coalition
Development Workshop
Bicentennial Center, Salina
10 a.m.—3 p.m.

For a full list of upcoming events, visit www.ncrpc.org/news/events/. A list of funding sources and deadlines are available at www.ncrpc.org/funding/.



North Central
Regional Planning Commission

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Business Expands, Makes Use of Vacant Abilene Building

Thunder Struck, Inc. needed a larger facility to expand its business — and they found it in Abilene in the former Duckwall-Alco Corporate offices and warehouse located at 401 E. Cottage. The business started operating at the new location in October 2015.

The business manufactures heavy-duty grille guards, front-end replacements, and rear bumpers for full size and heavy-duty pickup models. Products are marketed through the business' website and through an extensive dealer network primarily located in the Central and North Central United States. The business also offers a line of products for fire and rescue equipment.

Casen and Virginia Brown and Dale Jones own the business. Casen is



Courtesy Photo

Thunder Struck, Inc. specializes in truck accessories and fire/rescue equipment.

President and manages day-to-day operations, Virginia is Secretary/Treasurer and bookkeeper, and Dale is Vice President and production manager. Thunder Struck, Inc. incorporated in January 2008 and began production in March 2008.

The business was previously located in Salina. The move resulted

in a more than 500% increase in available manufacturing space. In addition, there is now room for on-site sandblasting and power coating — a job that previously had to be outsourced due to space constraints. The business now has 22 employees.

The project was made possible with funding from Central National Bank, NCRPC Revolving Loan Fund, NCK Rural Business Development Initiative Loan Program, NCK Business Development Loan Fund, 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 email dpeters@nckcn.com. For more information about the business, visit www.thunderstruckbumpers.com. ■