



# NCRPC NEWS

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## Youth Entrepreneurship Contests Provide Participants with Real-World Experience

Empowering students to develop an idea and solve a problem through entrepreneurship might help spark the entrepreneurial pipeline in communities. That possibility is reason enough for several to host local contests for students.

Clay County will host its fifth youth entrepreneurship contest in December. According to Clay County Economic Development Group Executive Director Lori Huber, the process is valuable.

“The contest gives students an opportunity to think about work differently,” Huber said. “Even if they do not go on to have their own business, this can make them a better employee because they have an understanding of how a business works.”

Republic County will host its fourth local youth entrepreneurship competition in March. According to Republic County Economic Development Executive Director Luke Mahin, hosting the event each year has many benefits.

“For most of the students, this is the first time in their lives they are given permission to dream of a future where they are working and living in Republic County. This is their

opportunity to solve a problem through entrepreneurship with a product or service, sometimes both,” Mahin said. “At a minimum, it helps them become better citizens learning the value of our local economy, budgeting, communication, and leadership.”



2019 Republic County Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge Winners. Photo courtesy of Republic County Economic Development

Lincoln County will also host a local competition in March — the third that Lincoln County Economic Development Foundation Executive Director Kelly Larson has organized.

“The more students who are exposed to entrepreneurship now improves our chances they will become business owners in the future,” Larson said.

These local events encourage students to prepare an executive summary/business plan, a 4-minute presentation, and a trade show booth.

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## EXECUTIVE BOARD

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## ABOUT US

### Our Mission

Advancing rural Kansas through comprehensive planning and development services.

### Our Vision

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

### Contact Us

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# Input Encouraged for Census, Kansas Framework for Growth

The U.S. Census provides vital information about our nation and about the people who live, work and utilize the resources herein.

The 2020 Census will count all residents once and in their accurate locales. It is used to determine the seats Kansas can have in the U.S. House of Representatives, how our state legislative districts are drawn and the important appropriation of Federal funding.

There are several ways to be counted. For the first time, in 2020 the U.S. Census Bureau will accept responses online. Responding by mail, by telephone, and by meeting with a local Census representative will also be options. A postcard is to be provided to every household. From there the choice to securely complete the process is easy. Also for the first time, the Census will be available in



Doug McKinney has been NCRPC Executive Director since 2008.

13 languages spoken in Kansas and it will be in a large print and braille form.

I am willing to talk with any local official about the process and how much the Census matters to their towns. More information, including

personalized profiles for cities to help tell the story of how population data affects their local community, is also available at [kansascounts.org](http://kansascounts.org).

Another important opportunity for your input is with the Kansas Governor's office and the Kansas Department of Commerce Framework



Image courtesy of [U.S. Census Bureau](http://U.S. Census Bureau).

for Growth. In late October, an official forum for North Central Kansas was held in Russell with about 40 persons engaged in providing solid and unique approaches to a comprehensive growth strategy. Let's face it. Kansas is behind in attracting new residents, in promoting the state and in workforce development. Not since 1986 has there been a solid strategy for development in the Sunflower State. Your input is encouraged at [kansasgrowth.com](http://kansasgrowth.com). ■

## Young Entrepreneurs

Because Clay, Lincoln and Republic counties are all designated NetWork Kansas E-Communities, their local events are part of the NetWork Kansas Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge (YEC) Series. During the 2018-2019 academic year, 865 students competed in 40 local competitions.

The top team or alternate from each YEC Series local competition qualifies to compete at the Kansas Entrepreneurship Challenge at Kansas State University. Students can also apply to earn a wildcard spot. In April 2019, four student entrepreneurs/teams from North Central Kansas received awards at the state competition.

Planning a successful local-level youth competition takes time.

"My advice is to start small and know that it can take time to grow,"

Huber said. "Building connections with schools and partnerships with teachers is important."

Event organizers agree that the ideas and businesses showcased at the local competitions are impressive.

"I've been shocked to see in our third year how many existing businesses are competing," Mahin said. "Two of our three state KEC qualifiers were already making real sales in the county. Bomb Creations was selling products at the Depot Market and Otter Creek Farms purchased a downtown building in Republic and is looking to remove a blighted home near her garden for expansion. These businesses are already making a real-world impact with their prize money."

Communities that are not part of the E-Community partnership can participate in the YEC Series, but are

required to pay a \$1,500 sanction application fee. To help offset the cost, communities in the region may apply for up to \$750 in grant assistance from the NCK Rural Business Development Initiative that NCRPC manages. ■

### 2019 Kansas Entrepreneurship Challenge Winners from the Region

#### Existing Business Division:

Honorable mention — Julia Rieger, Clay Center Community Middle School, Clay Center, for jBev Studio & Design

#### Agriculture Division:

Honorable mention — Cassandra Aleshire and Elizabeth Huskey, Lincoln High School, Lincoln, for Aleshire Farms  
Honorable mention — Jena Kunc and Dylan White, Republic County High School, Belleville, for Otter Creek Farms

#### Open Division:

Grand prize — Cassie Stickler, Pike Valley High School, Scandia, for The Bomb Lip Balm

# New Business Signage Pilot Program Recently Launched in Dickinson County

A new program that is designed to assist businesses with improving or replacing signs on commercial buildings is now available in Dickinson County.

The pilot project of the Dickinson County Economic Development Corporation Business Signage Program is designed to provide an affordable funding/financing option for signage on commercial buildings to improve the functionality, structural integrity and aesthetics of signs in commercial areas. The program offers a maximum loan of \$2,000 at 0% interest.

NCRPC is partnering with Dickinson County Economic Development Corporation to provide the program. The NCRPC Business Finance Program is providing funding for the program.

“We are pleased to partner with Dickinson County Economic Development Corporation to offer this pilot program,” NCRPC Business Finance Director Debra Peters said.

According to Dickinson County Economic Development Corporation Executive Director Chuck Scott, business signage is an important part of a business’s marketing strategy.

“Signage is often one of the first impressions people have of a business,” Scott said. “By assisting businesses with this key part of their



A new pilot program in Dickinson County seeks to offer an affordable funding option for signage on commercial buildings. The picture above is an example of the preferred, but not required, “blade” type signage.

marketing strategy, the hope is businesses will be more visible and will be able to expand their customer base and grow. We look forward to talking with our businesses about how this new program might assist their business.”

The new “Abilene Forward” initiative helped inspire the program’s start. Abilene Forward is a grassroots effort intended to bring Abilene downtown business and commercial property owners together for ongoing needs such as signage, historical district promotion and beautification.

Applications for the business signage program are now being accepted on a first come, first served basis. The program will be evaluated in October 2020 to review demand and impact to determine if it will be renewed. ■

## NEWS BRIEFS

### Ryser Joins NCRPC Staff

North Central Regional Planning Commission is pleased to announce that Kendra Ryser has joined the staff as weatherization assistant. In this role, Kendra will provide support for the weatherization assistance program administered by the NCRPC,

which includes 41 counties in North Central and Northwest Kansas, and be a first point of contact for clients.



Kendra Ryser

Kendra brings business experience to the NCRPC. She grew up near Beloit and attended Emporia State University and Vernon’s Kansas School of Cosmetology. Upon returning to the area, she owned and operated a salon for five years. She has worked the past seven years in banking at Solomon Valley Bank in Beloit. Kendra and her husband, Justin, have two children. ■

### McKinney to Step Down

NCRPC Executive Director Doug McKinney has announced plans to step down from his position effective April 1, 2020. McKinney began with the organization in 1986 and has been Executive Director since 2008. To ensure a smooth transition, a search process is currently underway and is being led by the NCRPC Executive Board. ■

## UPCOMING EVENTS AND DEADLINES

### Thursday, December 5, 2019

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

### Find more on the web »

Events: [www.ncrpc.org/news/events](http://www.ncrpc.org/news/events)  
Funding sources and deadlines:  
[www.ncrpc.org/funding](http://www.ncrpc.org/funding)

### Holiday Office Hours

The NCRPC offices will be closed December 25-January 1. Normal business hours will resume Thursday, January 2, 2020.

Thank you for your support this year. We look forward to continuing to serve you in the new year!



## North Central Regional Planning Commission

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# Former College Athlete Creates Business for Aspiring Athletes

Former University of Kansas and Salina Central running back Jake Sharp has a passion for helping athletes and individuals achieve success. His business, Sharp Performance, LLC, gives him the opportunity to do just that.

Sharp Performance owns and operates two gyms in North Central Kansas. The Concordia location at 117 W. 6th Street is primarily a family gym. The Salina location at 131 S. Santa Fe is a performance training business specializing in training high school athletics for the collegiate level. The Salina gym relocated to its new downtown location in February 2019. The Concordia and Salina gyms both offer 24-hour access to platinum members with trainers available during regular business hours.

The business hosts annual events for young athletes including the Top Prospect Camp, High School Football Combine and a basketball clinic.

Sharp had 8 years of experience in the industry including 5 years as a strength/conditioning coach at Pratt High School before starting Sharp Performance, LLC in January 2017.

The recent move to downtown Salina allowed for the purchase of additional gym equipment. The relocation project was made possible with investment by the owner as well as funding from a bank and the NCK -Four Rivers Business Down Payment Assistance Loan Program.

For more information about the financing programs used, contact NCRPC Business Finance Director Debra Peters at 785-738-2218 or visit



Courtesy Photo

Sharp Performance specializes in working with young athletes at its Salina location.

[www.ncrpc.org/services/business](http://www.ncrpc.org/services/business). For more information about the business, visit [www.sharp-performance.com](http://www.sharp-performance.com). ■