

Liz Sosa – part 2

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

What do we do with our equipment after the electricity has temporarily been off? The answer is, we power up. Today in the conclusion of a two-part series, we'll learn about a remarkable young woman who is giving leadership in various ways across the state – including a group known as PowerUps. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Liz Sosa is a young professional in Garden City, Kansas. As we learned last week, she grew up at Hugoton and is manager of a small business in Garden City. She also plays several other roles, professionally and as a volunteer. All of these might be described as community spirit or civic engagement.

"I learned it from my parents," Liz said. "My dad was a speech pathologist and my mother is a high school English teacher. They were both civically engaged." They were deeply involved in clubs, activities, church and community. "My parents set the example early on," Liz said.

For Liz, her first big civic undertaking was when a friend of hers was hired to work on the Main Street program in Garden City. Liz got involved as a volunteer and ultimately served as vice chair of the board.

Liz later got involved with a group called Public Square Communities which we have previously profiled. Founded by Terry Woodbury, this organization seeks to rebuild communities by connecting leaders through dialogue and action. The Public Square process involves people from four sectors: business, education, government and human services.

Liz became a community facilitator for the Public Square process in 2011. Terry Woodbury retired as CEO and is now a project advisor. In September 2013, Liz was named Chief Executive Officer for Public Square Communities. Jeanette Siemens of Pratt serves as Chief Operating Officer and Liz Hendricks of Howard serves as Chief Financial Officer.

Liz Sosa maintains her volunteer activities as well. In 2011, Liz graduated from the Leadership Kansas program. In 2012, she served as local program chair for the Garden City Leadership Kansas session. In 2013 she became the state program chair, and will serve again in 2014. Wow.

Several years previously, Garden City hosted the annual Kansas Sampler Festival. Wendee LaPlant from the Garden City CVB did such a good job of working with the festival that she ultimately became assistant director to Marci Penner at the Kansas Sampler Foundation.

Marci and Wendee care deeply about rural Kansas. They started brainstorming about how to involve young citizens and the future of the state. All too often, young people are not asked to be involved in the leadership of rural communities or are invited as a token voice of youth.

In June 2009, Marci Penner convened a meeting of young people to discuss this topic. What followed might best be described not as a formal organization but as a movement, a gathering of young people now called PowerUps. These are young people who are described as rural by choice. In other words, they have lots of alternatives for locating their homes or careers but choose to live or work in a rural setting.

For example, PowerUps are found in rural communities such as Wamego, population 4,220; Eureka, population 2,940; Clearwater, population 2,173; Alma, population 785; Claflin, population 691; and Lucas, population 427 people. Now, that's rural.

As we have previously profiled, PowerUps are persons ages 21 to 39. Rural persons age 40 and up are called Power Ons. Sparks are those people younger than 21 who aspire to be Power Ups.

Liz Sosa is active in the PowerUp movement. In fact, she is the PowerUps liaison with the Kansas Sampler Foundation. For more information about these organizations, go to www.publicsquarecommunities.com and www.ruralbychoice.com.

So what do we do with our equipment after the electricity has temporarily been off? We power up. In other words, we restart our equipment and bring it back up to operating strength. In a similar sense, our communities can make a fresh start by engaging the ideas and creativity of our young people. We commend Liz Sosa and all those involved with the PowerUps for making a difference with their involvement. These PowerUps can generate a lot of energy.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.