

Marci Penner – brainstorm 2

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

PowerUps. What are PowerUps? Is that what happens after the electricity has been off? No, according to rural advocate Marci Penner, the term PowerUps refers to a particular demographic category of people in rural Kansas. They are a vitally important part of our rural communities, and they are rural by choice. This is today's Kansas Profile.

Last week we learned about Marci Penner, author and founder of the Kansas Explorers Club, the Kansas Sampler Foundation, and the We Kan! initiative. Marci facilitated a gathering and discussion known as the Big Rural Brainstorm. A central goal of the Big Rural Brainstorm was to engage the group of people she calls PowerUps.

What are PowerUps? PowerUps are young people ages 21 to 39 who, as Marci would say, are rural by choice. These are young persons, often well educated, who have lots of alternatives for locating their homes or careers but who choose to live or work in a rural setting.

This initiative began when Marci noticed that those communities which embraced and engaged their young people seemed to generate more community energy. So, she invited a number of active young people in various rural communities to come together for a meeting to discuss these issues. In keeping with the principles of the Kansas Sampler Foundation, the meeting was held in a truly rural community: The town of Reading, population 231 people. Now, that's rural.

That meeting was the beginning of what is now called the PowerUp movement. The movement is not only about involving young people, it is especially about those people who are choosing to live and work in a rural place.

"The PowerUp movement is about recognizing the value of PowerUps who have made a conscious decision to embrace and enhance the rural communities in which they live," Marci said.

For a lot of these PowerUps, the organization provides a peer support network, kind of like the young professionals organizations in our larger cities.

The PowerUps espouse five principles: To empower, connect, engage, sustain, and enjoy. Specifically, the five goals are to create an environment that helps PowerUps live up to their potential and live their dreams in rural Kansas, to connect PowerUps socially online and/or face to face within communities and across the state, to stimulate all generations with PowerUp leadership in rural communities, to build an inclusive network of peers so as to give PowerUps a collective voice on important community and statewide rural issues, and to help create a quality of life that is desirable to PowerUps.

There are also five core values of PowerUps. PowerUps are positive yet constructive. They are constructive speakers and thoughtful listeners. PowerUps act with purpose. They aim to be proactive and take deliberate steps to sustain the viability of rural communities. PowerUps respect ideals. They respect the ideals of others by remaining neutral in terms of political, religious and social views. PowerUps appreciate history. They appreciate and respect the builders of our communities. Finally, PowerUps believe in supporting locally-owned businesses.

While the goal is to encourage young people who are rural by choice, it is not intended to exclude others. In fact, Marci uses different terms for different age groups. PowerOns are described as empassioned rural citizens age 40+ who choose to support the next generation through listening, mentorship, guidance, and active support of new initiatives. Similarly, Sparks is the term for those younger than 21 who aspire to grow and sustain the rural communities in which they were raised or where they hope to live.

“Everyone has a role as we forge ahead,” Marci said. “The PowerUp movement will be successful if it is supported by those who have come before them and those that will follow.”

For more information, go to www.ruralbychoice.com.

PowerUps. No, that doesn't mean restarting your computer. PowerUps are these vitally important young adults to choose to live in rural Kansas. We commend all those who are making a difference by choosing to live rural.

And there's more. Marci has yet another brainstorm: ERV. Who is ERV? We'll learn the answer to that question next week.

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