

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

From scholarships to strategies, from volunteers to entrepreneurs, from rural health care to community betterment: All those elements are being supported by the Dane G. Hansen Foundation which is investing deeply and strategically in northwest Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Betsy Wearing is coordinator of programs, communications, and new initiatives for the Dane G. Hansen Foundation. Betsy was a long-time director of the Greater Salina Community Foundation before joining Hansen.

Last week we learned about successful entrepreneur Dane Hansen. His estate plan provided part of his assets for a foundation in his hometown of Logan to benefit northwest Kansas. A group of excellent trustees have grown those assets through the years.

For decades, the Hansen Foundation has been known for the scholarships it provides to students in northwest Kansas. There are several categories of these renewable college scholarships which can provide a student up to \$10,000 per year. Last year 280 total scholarships were made available.

"To get the top level scholarships, the students have to interview with our committee," Betsy said. Such a process can be nerve-wracking, but is helpful later in life. "The trustees are aware that there are lots of ways to be successful, so we offer career and technical education scholarships and community college transfer scholarships as well," Betsy said.

In addition to scholarships, the foundation is taking some new approaches to assisting northwest Kansas communities and businesses. In 2015, the Hansen Foundation launched a new partnership with K-State Research and Extension to support a community vitality specialist in the region. Nadine Sigle of Osborne now fills that position. She helps communities in various ways, assisting them in participating in such community betterment programs as Kansas PRIDE and First Impressions.

In 2016, the Hansen Foundation launched another initiative for entrepreneurs, businesses, and economic development. It's called the Northwest Kansas Economic Innovation Center, Inc. Located in historic downtown Norton, the EICI works on such strategies as succession planning and other ways to create an environment that will attract entrepreneurs and encourage economic health. Scott Sproul, former Norton County economic development director, is President and CEO of EICI.

In addition to these initiatives to build the capacity of communities and businesses in northwest Kansas, the Hansen Foundation is also making funds directly available to these communities. The foundation has helped support and even create community foundations across the region. Every county in northwest Kansas now has some sort of community foundation or philanthropic organization through which funds can flow for community betterment.

The Hansen Foundation has made a huge commitment to these foundations. "We've provided \$100,000 per county in the last two years," Betsy said. These dollars were for individual counties to re-grant for local projects. Grant review committees are made up of local residents.

The foundation has also worked to encourage local giving. In March 2015, the foundation offered to match donations to each community foundation, dollar for dollar, up to \$50,000 in endowed unrestricted funds. That initiative resulted in more than \$1 million in local donations in northwest Kansas.

The community foundations, in turn, can then support local projects for the good of local citizens. These have included such projects as renovating senior centers, repairing swimming pools, reroofing buildings or fixing up city parks. “In the first two years, many of the dollars were used to take care of a lot of deferred maintenance in community infrastructure,” Betsy said. “With a lot of that done, now we can look forward,” Betsy said. “Now we are asking communities to think strategically about how to use these funds to benefit their future.”

Meanwhile, the Hansen Foundation continues its own grant-making process for worthy purposes in northwest Kansas. Recent grants range from support for the KU School of Medicine in Salina to the preservation of a unique, historic jail in the rural community of Lebanon, population 296 people. Now, that’s rural.

For more information, see www.danehansenfoundation.org.

From scholarships to strategies, from volunteers to entrepreneurs: Many community betterment initiatives are being launched to make a difference in northwest Kansas, thanks to the Dane G. Hansen Foundation of Logan. Just like a building, it all begins with a strong foundation.

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