

## Marci Penner – Guidebook 2

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

Let's go exploring – not in some far-away land, but right here in Kansas. We now have a new guidebook which can tell us about wonderful communities, sights to see, and great places to eat, within our own state. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Marci Penner and WenDee Rowe are director and assistant director of the Kansas Sampler Foundation and co-authors of The Kansas Guidebook 2 for Explorers.

As we have previously profiled, Marci grew up on her family's farm near Inman. She went to Kansas University and University of Wisconsin and was a guidance counselor back east before returning to Kansas.

Marci's father Mil was a farmer, conservationist, entrepreneur, writer and self-taught photographer. In the 1980s, he published a coffee table photo essay book. Readers admired the pictures and asked, "How do you get to those places?"

This led Mil and Marci to travel around Kansas to develop a guidebook after she returned in 1990. "I asked him a million questions as we traveled," Marci said. "I treasure that time we had together." As they criss-crossed Kansas, the Penners noticed two things: Kansans needed to know more about their own state, and rural communities needed support.

Mil and Marci published three Kansas guidebooks in the early 1990s. They had a book signing party at their farm and invited community representatives to come share about their communities. It went so well that this grew into the annual Kansas Sampler Festival.

In 1993, Marci and Mil founded the Kansas Sampler Foundation. In 2006, WenDee Rowe joined the foundation as assistant director. The Foundation published Marci's books: the Kansas Guidebook for Explorers in 2005 and the 8 Wonders of Kansas Guidebook in 2012. Sadly, Mil Penner passed in 2015. "I feel his presence and support every day," Marci said.

Meanwhile, there was lots of interest in another comprehensive guidebook about the state. In 2012, Marci and WenDee set out to do the research to produce an updated guidebook. Incredibly, they visited every single one of the 626 incorporated towns in Kansas. "It was one of the most enriching experiences I've ever had," WenDee said.

At the 2017 Kansas Sampler Festival, the new book made its debut. The Kansas Guidebook 2 for Explorers was released. This colorful book includes 4,500 attractions, 843 eateries, and more than 1,600 pictures. Featured are 515 incorporated cities in all 105 counties and 97 "unincorporated spots in the road."

The book covers the state in six regions. Counties in each region are listed in alphabetical order as are the cities within each county. Entries include directions, hours, websites and contact numbers for the various attractions. "The book offers 'one-stop shopping' for all there is to see and do in Kansas," WenDee said.

So of all these Kansas places, which one is Marci's favorite? "It changed daily," Marci said. "I see a million places that I love." When pressed, she mentioned such places as Big Basin in southwest Kansas, the Arikaree Breaks in northwest Kansas, the mine lands in southeast Kansas, Courtland in north central, Mt. Sunflower in the far west, and Overland Park botanical gardens in the far east. She also mentioned fun places like

Roller Coaster Hill on the highway south of the rural community of Soldier, population 136 people. Now, that's rural.

"It's great to hear people say, 'The guidebook has given us a reason to start exploring,'" Marci said. "It's really gratifying to hear people learning to love Kansas," she said. With the holidays approaching, this would be a great purchase for anyone who loves Kansas and enjoys seeing new places.

The guidebook is available through the Buy Merchandise tab at [www.kansassampler.org](http://www.kansassampler.org) and also at certain locally-owned bookstores across Kansas which are listed on the website.

Let's go exploring – with a brand new guidebook to help us. We commend Marci Penner and WenDee Rowe for making a difference with their passion for exploring Kansas. As National Geographic photographer Jim Richardson wrote: "Marci and WenDee have sought the soul of Kansas in thousands of places – and revealed it rich and whole. In all the world, I doubt there is another guidebook that unlocks so much unexpected wonder."

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