

## Darin Miller – Iron Clad Coworking

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

Iron clad. The term suggests something that is certain and stable. It is also the name of an innovative place which is now providing shared space for Kansas entrepreneurs to work and grow. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Darin Miller is the founder and owner of Iron Clad Coworking in Wamego and Manhattan. Darin grew up near Newton. He went to school at Berean Academy in the rural community of Elbing, population 229 people. Now, that's rural.

As a student, he competed at the state cross country meet at Wamego. "I could see that Wamego was a community with a winning attitude," Darin said. He studied mechanical engineering, worked at Cessna in Wichita, and then happened to come to Wamego for a project at Caterpillar. He and his wife decided to stay.

Darin noticed a change in the way corporate life operated. "Managers said they didn't have enough room (for employees' offices) but at any given time, a third of the people were out working on projects elsewhere," he said. Technology was making it possible for people to work without being confined to a particular office. "Entrepreneurs were using coffee shops and libraries, but those didn't work for some business purposes," Darin said.

"I did some research and came across the concept of coworking," Darin said. Essentially, this meant that several businesses could share a single location as needed. Coworking spaces were being created on the east and west coast.

Darin decided to open a coworking space in Wamego. He and his wife bought the former Duckwall's building in Wamego, opened it up and refurbished it. It now has the look of an upscale, casual urban office space while preserving the stone walls and historic feel.

"It was the largest closed building in downtown so the space needed to be filled," Darin said. He also appreciated the history of the building.

"In the 1800s, this building was the site of the Iron Clad hardware store and lumberyard," Darin said. "It was owned by a Civil War veteran. At the time, being iron clad was the leading technology of the day," he said. After all, it was iron clad Civil War ships which dominated sea battles.

"We also wanted to fit with the Wizard of Oz theme in downtown Wamego," Darin said. "We used the Tin Man as a symbol. Just like him, we care about the heart," he said.

Iron Clad Coworking became the name of his coworking space which opened in May 2016. "It's like a fitness center for office people," Darin said. "You buy a membership and then you use it whenever you want." For example, Iron Clad Coworking makes it possible for a start-up business to have a brick-and-mortar address without all the costs of taxes and utilities.

Iron Clad has conference space where a member can meet with clients when needed. Members have access 24/7. There are tables, chairs, large

screen televisions, and excellent wi-fi, plus cabinets where private material can be secured. WTC, the local telecommunications company, provides high capacity Internet access which rivals or exceeds that in urban settings.

Iron Clad's event space has other uses as well. It can be booked for professional or social events. In 2017, Iron Clad opened a second location in downtown Manhattan. Iron Clad also joined the Proximity Coworking Network so Iron Clad members have access to similar spaces in locations across the nation and beyond.

"People are looking for flexible work in the shared economy," Darin said. "My wife grew up in San Jose," he said. "She was in the Silicon Valley. Now we're in the Silicon Prairie. It is possible to have a world-class company, right here in the Midwest," he said.

For more information, see [www.ironcladcoworking.com](http://www.ironcladcoworking.com).

Iron Clad. It was the name of a historic business in downtown Wamego, and now it is an innovative space for business in 2019. We commend Darin Miller for making a difference by pioneering the coworking concept in small-town Kansas. Rural communities need more innovation, and that guarantee is iron clad.

And there's more. Darin helped pioneer another initiative to support entrepreneurs. We'll learn about that next week.

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