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

What can we grow across Kansas? Wheat? Industrial hemp? Wind turbines? How about jobs and businesses? Today we'll meet an organization which is devoted to the growth of entrepreneurship and small businesses across our state. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Last week we met Steve Radley. As a personal project, he produced a film about rural Kansas. His ideas for that film sprang from his work as president and CEO of this organization known as NetWork Kansas.

In 2004, the Kansas Legislature passed the Kansas Economic Growth Act. That law, among other things, established the Kansas Center for Entrepreneurship which now does business as NetWork Kansas.

Steve Radley and his friend Erik Pederson had previously been in business together in Wichita. They experienced the ups and downs of launching and growing successful businesses.

In 2006, Steve Radley was selected as president and CEO of NetWork Kansas. Erik Pederson joined him as vice president for entrepreneurship. They and their team went to work to foster an entrepreneurial environment in Kansas by cultivating resources to start and grow small businesses. NetWork Kansas describes itself as "a statewide network of non-profit business-building resources that help entrepreneurs and small business owners startup and grow successful businesses."

NetWork Kansas quickly recognized that resources to assist small business already existed around the state. One of the first steps was to organize a partner network so that entrepreneurs could be connected to those resources more easily and effectively. A NetWork Kansas portal to those resources can be accessed online or through a toll-free number, 877-521-8600.

That resource data base now includes more than 500 partners. To date, the NetWork Kansas partner network has assisted more than 25,000 entrepreneurs and made more than 50,000 referrals.

NetWork Kansas has multiple loan programs and a venture fund to provide direct financial assistance to small rural businesses. Those programs have provided loans and investments of more than \$40 million to Kansas businesses. Such funds have also been used to leverage additional capital amounting to more than 400 million dollars.

There is a saying that all politics is local. Perhaps all entrepreneurship begins locally as well. Under Erik Pederson's direction, NetWork Kansas launched a program to enhance locally-based support for entrepreneurs in 2007. It was called the Entrepreneurship Community Partnership. Individual communities or counties could apply to be designated as E-Communities which entitled them to funding, training, and other resources.

An E-Community is to establish a local leadership team to oversee a loan fund, engage with resources, and cultivate an entrepreneurial environment. E-Communities can be established in rural areas or in distressed urban areas. To

date, the 63 E-Communities have provided more than \$19.8 million dollars in matching loans and grants to more than 580 businesses.

Through the years, the E-Communities have been located from border to border and corner to corner in Kansas. They have included numerous county-wide E-Communities and even some individual rural towns as small as Alden, population 148 people. Now, that's rural.

During 2019, the Center for Entrepreneurship and specifically its co-founder, Don Macke, joined the Network Kansas team. This new division is called e² Entrepreneurial Ecosystems.

NetWork Kansas has always focused on for-profit businesses in the past. In 2019, the organization branched out, in partnership with the Kansas Health Foundation, to launch the Kansas Community Investment Fund which supported health-related projects of non-profit organizations and local governments.

In order to encourage the next generation of entrepreneurs, NetWork Kansas has supported local community competitions among young aspiring businesspersons with creative ideas. In 2019, the Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge Series engaged 865 students from 48 communities through 40 local competitions. The finals were held at Kansas State. For next year, a projected \$75,000 in prizes will be awarded to the top youth entrepreneurs.

For more information about all these programs, go to www.networkkansas.com.

What can we grow across Kansas? If Steve Radley, Erik Pederson and their team has their way, we will grow successful entrepreneurs, jobs, and small businesses. We commend NetWork Kansas for making a difference by encouraging creative ideas and startup businesses. I encourage them to keep on growing.

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