

# First Impressions



## Erie, KS

K-State Research and Extension

- Erie asked for First Impressions, local extension professionals agreed to be its partner.
- I trained the volunteers about the visit and survey on October 7. Agent Amanda Classen took photos on October 28
- Three visitors visited in October and November.
- Results are presented December 5.
- We hope Erie uses the results for further discussion and action plans.

- **Feedback:**

How does a first-time visitor view my town?

- Evaluate successes,
- Set goals and priorities for next steps.

- **If you don't agree with the observation:**

- *Be curious*, Why does the visitor see it this way?
- Is the observation worth considering?
- What can we do to change it– or the perception?

**Curiosity: A strong desire to know or learn something.**

*-Oxford Living Dictionary*

**Ben Winchester, Senior Research Fellow, U of MN**

***We need to change the narrative about rural.***

- Rural is *changing*, not dying.
- Brain Gain (30-49 year olds moving to rural) is a “new trend” that has been happening since the 70’s.
- People research a number of places before they move to a rural town.
- Rural is in the middle of ***everywhere***. You live one place, work another and play another. With transportation and internet, it’s all accessible to you.

## **Ben Winchester, Senior Research Fellow, U of MN**

- 46% of Kansas households moved between 1995-1999
- In a survey of newcomers to rural areas, the reasons they come are:
  - Simpler pace of life,
  - Safety and security,
  - Affordable housing,
  - Outdoor recreation,
  - Quality schools
  - ***“A job”*** isn't in the top 10 reasons.
- Communities can work together to attract newcomers and create quality of life for everyone.

- “In small towns everyone knows each other.” *false*
- *Get to know each other*, invite them to a newcomers’ meal.
- If you bring 7 people to a 700-citizen town every year in 10 years, you’ll have a 10% increase. It matters! It is a challenge with housing, but it is achievable.
- We are our own worst enemies. We have to monitor our customer service and what we say. It matters.
- Don’t say, “You have to live here twenty years to be an insider.” And don’t act like it either.

- 75% of rural homeowners are Baby Boomers and older. 30% are over 75.
- Housing will be freed up as the baby boomers retire and move closer to medical services.
- Rural communities need retirement housing (not nursing facilities, but maintenance free) to retain seniors.- *Ben Winchester, Senior Research Fellow, University of Minnesota*



*Ben Winchester was our guest on the **First Friday Call**.  
7/12/2024; 3/6/2020; 3/1/2019*

*See the recordings at: <https://bit.ly/ks-first-impressions>*

- 2023 KS Certified Population: 1,019 ↓ 9.58% since 2010
- 2020 U.S. Census: 1,047
- 2010 U.S. Census: 1,127
- Median household income: \$40,962 **\$68,925**
- High school or GED (Age 25+) 91.8% **91.6%**
- At least a B.S. Degree 22.5% **34.4%**
- Median Age: 39 years **37.6 years**
- Persons 65 and Over 29.4% **17.2%**

Blue: Kansas Comparison Data



- Moved since Last Year (2022): 20.9 % 14.6%
- Poverty rate 21.5% 12%  
(% of people below poverty line)

## Race/Ethnicity

White: 83.5%	American Indian: 1.2%
Black: 5.7%	Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander: 0%
Asian: 1.1%	Two or more races: 2.9%
Other: 0%	Hispanic or Latino: 5.6%
Not Hispanic or Latino: 94.4%	

## Website

- It was very easy to get information on Erie from a web search and the information I obtained accurately reflected what I saw in the community. The county government page was accessible, the Chamber Facebook page was active and there was state tourism page that came up easily and linked to a local Erie tourism page – both were helpful in finding information about the town.



- City Website <https://erieks.com/>



[HOME](#) [PAY UTILITIES](#) [GOVERNMENT -](#) [DEPARTMENTS -](#) [COMMUNITY -](#) [CONTACT US](#) [ABOUT US](#)

## Welcome to the City of Erie!

Nestled in the Neosho River Valley, surrounded by the beautiful Osage Cuesta Hills is **Erie, Kansas**. Erie's sense of connection to the past is strong: the city was incorporated in 1869 and has been the county seat of Neosho County since 1872. The quiet, peaceful lifestyle is reminiscent of days gone by, but the conveniences and comforts of technology make it possible to stay connected. Residents enjoy the best of both worlds: Erie's tranquil, rural setting is an easy two-hour drive from getaways like Kansas City, Tulsa, Joplin, Springfield, and the Ozarks via U.S. Highway 59. Residents have access to a wide range of amenities in Erie - the regionally-known Prairie Ridge Golf Course, disc golf, bowling, swimming, restaurants, and shopping, in addition to thriving community organizations, churches, and businesses. Erie's business-friendly atmosphere is a great place for entrepreneurs to thrive in city that celebrates being rural by choice. Come experience the rich history and independent lifestyle that makes Erie, Kansas special.



**The community of Erie was formed when two neighboring towns ("Old Erie" and "Crawfordsville") merged, both groups donating land and combining to establish present-day Erie in 1866 near a lake for which the town is named. Cooperation is in Erie's roots!**

- There was a good list of activities, clubs, churches, etc., but some links were outdated; for instance, the last council notes were from 2022 and the last schedule for Old Soldiers and Sailors was also 2022.

<https://erieks.com/area-info/>

Area Info

Businesses

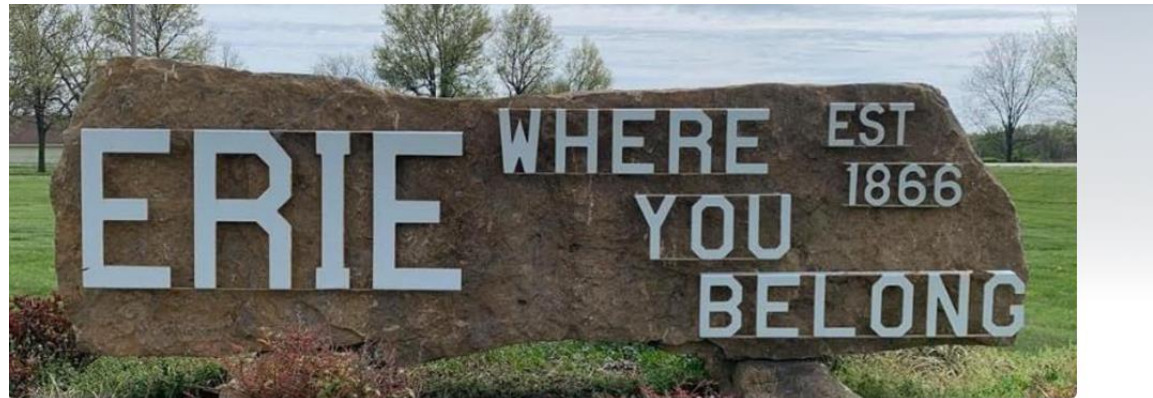
Gallery

Jobs

Landlord Listing

Schools

- **Facebook** <https://www.facebook.com/ErieKSChamber>
- The Chamber Facebook page seems to be well maintained and kept up to date.



## Erie, KS Area Chamber of Commerce

867 likes • 1.1K followers

Message Like

Search

Posts About Mentions Reels Photos Videos More

### Intro

The Erie, Kansas Area Chamber of Commerce strives to promote and support our local area businesses.

- Page · Community Organization
- Erie, KS, United States, Kansas
- eriekansschamber@gmail.com
- eriekansastourism.com
- Always open

### Featured

Erie, KS Area Chamber of Commerce  
November 7 at 9:29 AM

Save the date! The Erie Chamber Christmas Parade will be Wednesday, Dec. 11th at 6 PM!...



Erie, KS Area Chamber of Commerce  
October 16

Our website: [www.ErieKansasTourism.com](http://www.ErieKansasTourism.com)  
We appreciate Richey's Drug...



- Erie presented as a lovely community covering a sizeable area with several notable features including a lovely downtown, lots of different housing categories, multiple government facilities, churches, and nice schools.
- There is a nice sign about Erie on Highway 59, but I entered over the bridge using the detour, and there was not signage to indicate the community.
- There is a nice sign about midway and then a big welcome coming from the south. Nothing directs us to downtown.
- My first impression is that there is a lot more to the community than most will ever note by driving by on the outskirts of the highway. It looks like a nice small town, clean and safe.

# “Five-Minute” Impression







- Erie has a charming, clean downtown with nice sidewalks and beautiful, historic-looking streetlamps with welcome banners featuring local businesses. Downtown also had beautiful large planters that were kept up and multiple benches.
- I visited on a Friday with good weather when schools were not in session and saw kids riding their bikes around town, people walking into the county courthouse, and a few people congregating. A homeless man was sleeping on a bench by the bank, but we walked by him without incident.
- Some buildings were well-maintained, and the sidewalks were clean. I saw a store owner sweeping.









- There were lots of nice benches around downtown as well as trash receptacles. Parking was easy. The sidewalks and crosswalks were nice. There was a nice carwash near downtown. The city and county government facilities were nice, and the extension office was well-marked and looked nice. The museum was well-marked and welcoming. I parked near the county courthouse and visited, walked to the city hall, visited the veterans' memorial space, walked around banks and office spaces, the restaurant, and the two shops I visited.

- There were lots of nice benches around downtown as well as trash receptacles. Parking was easy. The sidewalks and crosswalks were nice. The streetscaping was very nice, and the lighting appeared plentiful after dark.
- There were no fountains, several benches, no restrooms, lots of trash cans, and pretty planters.
- I noticed trash cans, the courthouse and city hall would serve as public restrooms. Parking was accessible. Downtown was comfortable and welcoming.





# Other Retail Shopping Areas

- Dollar General and the grocery store (before it closed) are near the highway. It was easily identifiable, clean and accessible. There was also a larger thrift store which was closed and a barber shop.
- At Pete's they were just there to do their job, nothing more.
- Dollar General employees were very welcoming. The USDA Service Center was also located in this area.

# Other Retail Shopping Areas



# Other Retail Shopping Areas



- *A drive-by is not how industry will find you, check with your local Eco Devo director to make sure your site is listed on LocationOne @ Kansas Department of Commerce.*

## ***Observation:***

- “Entrepreneurs who choose to start their small businesses are responsible for 63 percent of net new jobs created in the United States every year.”
- *Global marketing makes your town accessible to purchases all over the world.*

# Industrial Parks/Commercial

- There is a rail area and multiple ag production areas. It seems like the industrial park would be near the high school.
- I noticed commercial/industrial on the east side. There was the A-lert facility and Beachner Grain.

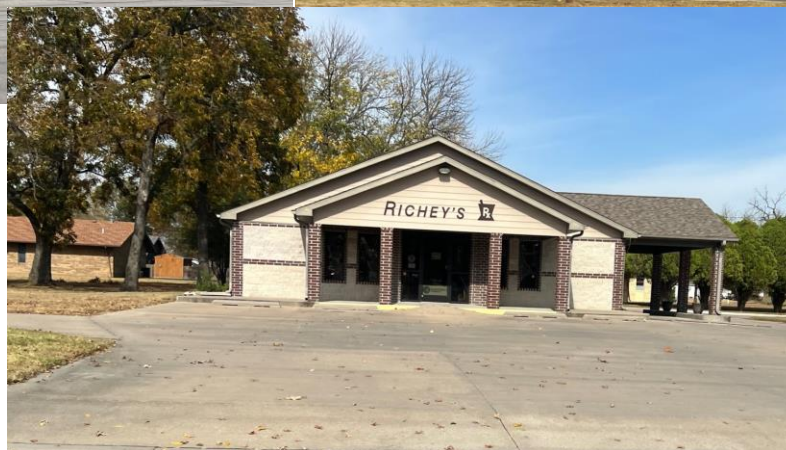


# Industrial Parks/Commercial





- There were multiple well-marked and accessible health clinics. Labette Health near downtown, a pharmacy near downtown, and a Neosho County medical center.
- I also saw EMS services located out by the jail, operated by Neosho Memorial.





- The Guest Home Estates located by the high school seemed large and nice. It seemed like a good facility for the size of town.



- Erie presented a good mix of housing. The homes downtown were well-maintained, there were older, but nice single-family family neighborhoods with large trees surrounding downtown. There were low resource apartment buildings and senior housing that were well marked and maintained.



- There seemed to be a good mix of size/age houses in the community. The newer construction, more expensive houses all seemed to be on the outskirts or outside city limits.
- I saw land donated for a future development.
- There were some homes listed on realtor.com.



- There were apartments, I could not determine if a property was a rental, but the city office gave me a list of six landlords, so that felt promising.
- I couldn't tell what was rental and what was not. I saw two different "housing authority" type of apartment complexes. Occupancy rates appeared high.

<b>DANIELS, RITA</b>	<b>433-1577</b>
<b>GARARD, DIANA</b>	<b>244-5240</b>
<b>*MARSHALL-FRAZIER, JOY</b>	<b>212-2230</b>
<b>*BRIDGET BECKER</b>	<b>212-0617</b>
<b>*NINE, MARK</b>	<b>305-9720</b>
<b>*STEGMAN , ROBERT</b>	<b>244-5331</b>
<b>BUNTIN, CARLA</b>	<b>423-7382</b>
<b>HAS MORE THAN (1) RENTAL *</b>	

Retrieved from internet 11-23-24 <https://erieks.com/landlord-listing/>







		Kansas
• Occupied Housing Units:	572	1.15m
• Owner Occupied:	71%	65.3%
• Renter Occupied:	29%	34.7%
• Vacant Housing Units:	77	124k
- For rent:	16	
- For sale:	0	
- Sold, not occupied:	0	
- Seasonal/recreational:	32	
- All other vacants:	29	
• Average Household Size:	2	2.48

Blue = Kansas Comparison Data  
(Data Source: Census.gov; MySidewalk)



## Kansas

- Average Travel Time to Work: 18 mins 19.6 mins
- Households without a computer\*: 91 (15.9%) 45k (3.8%)
- Households without an internet subscription: 102 (17.8%) 108k (9.2%)

\* Includes smartphones, tablets, other wireless devices

Blue = Kansas Comparison Data  
(Data Source: Census.gov; MySidewalk)

- Kansas Housing Corporation is a resource to find out about housing grants and other tools for homeowners and renters.
- Also has some resources to address homelessness.

<https://kshousingcorp.org/>



- The high school is large and modern. The grade school was also large and older, but well-maintained.
- The elementary school was easy to find, the high school was harder to find, but a nice, newer building.

*Visitor-submitted photo  
of the book mural at the  
grade school*





- The Erie public school website was easily found and contains a lot of great information for new families and friendly photos. This is a really great school website. <https://usd101.com/>

*The front page has a beautiful 2:49 panoramic video of all the schools.*



*Retrieved from internet 11-23-24*

## About Us



### A Place to Aim for Excellence



In 2021, KSDE named Erie High School a Challenge Award Winner. According to KSDE, "The Challenge Awards recognize schools for outstanding achievements and uncommon accomplishments based on Kansas math and reading assessment results".

“Potential Students”  
are an audience for  
your website.

This is Mound City, MO:

- “Why choose us” info on home page.



## ABOUT US

Why Us

### Graduation Rate

100%

### Technology Ratio

Computer to Student Ratio: 1:1

### Teacher Ratio

1:9 Teacher to Student Ratio

### Career Ed. Programs

Agriculture Education, Business Education, Family Consumer Sciences and Human Services



## Comments:

- I do not know about affordability, but the childcare center looked welcoming and large. The city office reported there were also in-home childcare providers, but they didn't have a list.
- The new facility is located downtown. Not sure about the rates.

## Neosho County Data:

- **Extent Desired Capacity meets Potential Childcare need**      **58%**
- Contact [ks.childcareaware.org](https://ks.childcareaware.org) to access local childcare specialists.  
785-823-3343

Source <https://ks.childcareaware.org/data-research/> Retrieved from internet 9/17 /2024





- Erie has a lot of well-maintained churches in a variety of denominations. The Erie Federated Church appeared particularly large and active in the community.
- I noticed a number of churches, with signs around town for the churches.





- Multiple city organizations were observed as having signage or storefronts downtown: Masonic Lodge and American Legion were particularly well-marked.
- I asked at City Hall and they couldn't name many. What I did find was from my online search.
- City Hall mentioned Mainstreet Memories group who does the Old Soldiers and Sailors reunion. I didn't see other evidence of civic activity.

- The website has a list: <https://erieks.com/area-info/>
- *It would be nice to have contact information or addresses.*

Clubs & Organizations	
American Legion Post 102	+
Beantown Boosters	+
Beta Sigma Phi	+
Erie Community Foundation	+
Mainstreet Memories	+
Masonic Lodge	+
MemErie Historical Society	+
Red Hat Society	+
Sons of the American Legion (S.A.L.)	+



- Street signage was adequate, and many neighborhoods had sidewalks. I did not visit during dark, but there seemed adequate streetlights. I did not notice deliberate landscaping other than downtown, but single-family homes were a mix of people who really kept up landscaping and fairly bare but clean yards.
- Most of the streets seemed normal for a rural southeast Kansas town. Fourth Street was newly paved and possibly widened. I did not see a lot of potholes; it seems like the streets are well-maintained.

- Nice people. They had some information out front, but a town guide would be nice. They couldn't tell me a whole lot.
- The first impression was that the city hall worker was very busy and didn't want to take a lot of time to visit. However, once she warmed up, I got some information about civic groups, landlords in town, etc.





# Fire, EMS and Police Services

- Saw the Fire Department and county jail; saw the police driving around.



Welcome to Kansas Insurance Department Home Contact Us

**Kansas Insurance Commissioner**  
**Vicki Schmidt**



**Kansas Insurance Department**  
420 SW 9th Street  
Topeka, Kansas 66612-1678  
Consumer Hotline: 800-432-2484 (KS only)  
[Email Us](#) | Phone: 785-296-3071

**> The Department**

**> Auto/Home**

**> Health/Life**

**> Insurance Fraud & Education**

**> Producer/Agency Services**

**> Company Services**

**> Other Services**

HOME : ISO

## ISO Public Protection Classification

Most U.S. insurers of home and business properties use Insurance Services Office's (ISO) Property Protection Classification (PPC) in calculating premiums. In general, the price of insurance in a community with a good PPC is lower than in a community with a poor PPC, assuming all other factors are equal.

**PPC Program:** <https://www.isomitigation.com/program-works/how-the-ppc-program-works.html>

A community's PPC depends on:

1. Emergency communications systems, including facilities for the public to report fires, staffing, training, certification of telecommunicators, and facilities for dispatching fire departments
2. The fire department, including equipment, staffing, training, and geographic deployment of fire companies
3. The water supply system, including the inspection and flow testing of hydrants and a careful evaluation of



# Fire, EMS and Police Services

- The law enforcement center was large and clearly marked. The woman at the hardware/flea market mentioned that police protection was known as a great resource in Erie when I spoke to her about the homeless man I saw. I did not notice the fire facilities.



- There was a well-marked library that looked welcoming.
- The library was a nice building.
- The library looked busy, however I didn't actually see any signage. It looks like maybe they started to repaint the sign, but it wasn't done yet.



- The swimming pool is older, but nice. The recreation center was clearly marked, the city ballfields were adequate. The Dinosaur Park and playground park were charming.
- A nice ballpark and city park. It could use more equipment.
- The ballparks located east of town looked like they were well kept but nothing fancy. An upgrade of those facilities might be nice, as I would imagine out-of-town folks coming for recreational ball during the summer. Dinosaur Park is a very unique feature of Erie. It was locked up and open by appointment during winter hours. I noticed one small directional sign toward the park on Fourth Street, but I would encourage larger signage for visitors.



Swimming Pool,  
*visitor photo*



Public Restrooms at Park





Dinosaur Park

## Well-Known for an attraction or event?

- The “Old Sailors and Settlers” event is promoted in a few places, and the town seems to be proud that it is the “oldest” celebration of its kind. The dinosaur park is also promoted and well-maintained.
- Old Soldiers and Sailors, there is a big sign about it. Their nickname is Beantown.
- The entrance sign mentioned old sailors and soldiers’ reunion. I asked about that at City Hall, and it was explained as their city festival held in July and includes a rodeo.





## Natural or built features that can draw people?

- The high school is large and modern, I could see regional events being successful here. The history museum is well-marked, but I did not visit.
- A museum was there and the Dino Park.



**Recreation options on website.** <https://erieks.com/area-info/>

*Contact information would be helpful.*

## Recreation

View the Erie Recreation Commission Activities Calendar

Baseball/Softball	+
Basketball	+
CNC Bowling Lanes	+
Disc Golf	+
Erie Public Swimming Pool	+
Flag Football	+
Football	+
Prairie Ridge Golf Course	+
Soccer	+
Swim Team	+
Volleyball	+

## Visitor's Center

- The city hall acts as the visitor center.
- There is an active Chamber of Commerce, but no building.

## What would bring you back?

- Nothing in particular, just one restaurant. There are nice community services, but not destinations.
- A bowling alley is fairly unusual now, others may drive regionally to bowl.



# Most Positive Observations

- Erie really is a charming community that appears to have many of the services you need in a small town and a thriving church/civic membership community. The town was clean, and the downtown was maintained. You can tell that effort has been made to put a good face forward and to take care of what they have. There are a lot of housing options and school facilities and law enforcement are particularly strong.
- I found proud, friendly people. Main street is probably pretty in the spring and summer.

# Most Positive Observations

- I visited the cemetery east of town. It was well kept, which typically tells me a lot about community. If a town doesn't take care of their cemetery they tend to slack on many other things in the community. Kudos to Erie for the positive experience. Most of the town really seemed clean. Yards were picked up. Porches decorated for fall. The proximity to larger towns such as Parsons and Chanute are good for livability as a bedroom community. So many things are located downtown. I believe the courthouse, funeral home, and Erie Locker are three key things that bring out-of-town people to the community. More retail options downtown may keep people there longer when visiting.

# Biggest Obstacles/Challenges

- The emphasis on history, both online and within town, makes this sleepy town seem a little “stuck in the past” instead of energized. To me, it felt like there is a solid group of people who care about this town, but that these people are probably all older (60+) and concerned with keeping things up, but also maintaining a focus on the past rather than trying new things or presenting art, activities or events for younger families. This is not entirely bad; it feels traditional and “homey” but that may make it hard to break into for an outsider who doesn’t already have connections to the community. The downtown is really nice and wayfinding signs from the highway and other main pathways through town would be nice. I thought I had been to Erie before traveling down Hwy 59 and visiting places near there, and I never would have ventured into the downtown without a reason to – signage promoting the downtown, holiday parades, events, etc. might add energy to this nice place.



# Biggest Obstacles/Challenges

- No signage to Main Street. Lack of housing. No draw from the highway. There is nothing to do once you venture off.
- Currently I would say that the bridge being out is a huge hinderance. I would imagine that typically, there is a lot of highway traffic, but the bridge out has slowed much of that. Otherwise, I imagine it is difficult to keep retail/restaurants open with proximity to other, larger towns.

## What will you remember?

- I will remember how much the town seemed built for families and the people seemed to care about children. I brought along my 10-year-old daughter on this visit, and this instantly helped develop a relationship with everyone I met that day. The woman at Dollar General advised me that my cold medicine was in the bag my daughter was carrying and to be careful about that. The facilities seem to ensure there are places for local children to play sports and have recreation. The businesses did not mind children congregating on their bikes outside of their doors. It was a very family-friendly community.
- The homeless guy on Main Street and nowhere to eat or shop.

## What will you remember?

- There is so much more to Erie than what someone sees when they pass through on the highway. The farther you get into town, the more you come across. From downtown to the jail, school, etc., this community has many amenities for a small town. You can get groceries, get your hair cut, do your banking, and even visit your local doctor without leaving the community. I will also remember some businesses unique to a town the size of Erie such as the bowling alley and motel. I could have missed a cafe, but one thing I will remember is that it's not a town in which I would plan on getting breakfast except for Pete's on the highway. 😊

- Way finder Signs from the highway to downtown.
- Find a volunteer to continue the website enhancements.
- Would a newcomer feel welcomed in Erie?  
Get to know each other!

**NO ONE CAN DO EVERYTHING,  
BUT EVERYONE CAN DO SOMETHING.**

**Thank you to our volunteer visitors.**

## **Set Next Steps:**

- Start talking! Find ways to discuss what you heard in small groups of every kind.

Contact me if you need resources or have questions:

**Nancy Daniels**

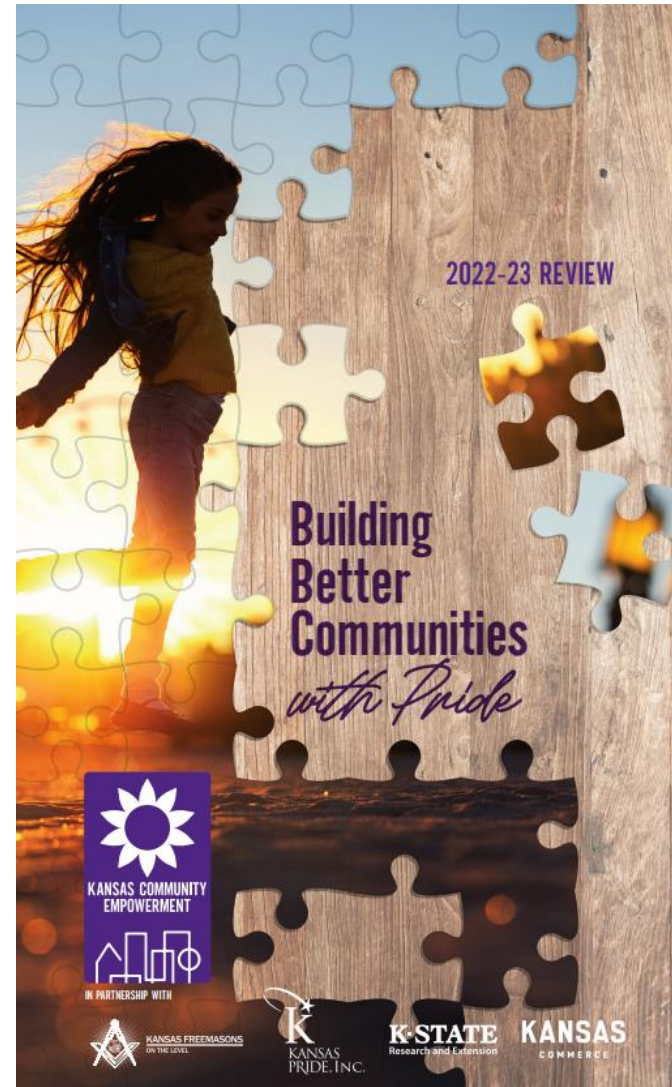
**Community Vitality Specialist, K-State Research and Extension**

**[nkdaniels@ksu.edu](mailto:nkdaniels@ksu.edu)**

## Kansas Community Empowerment

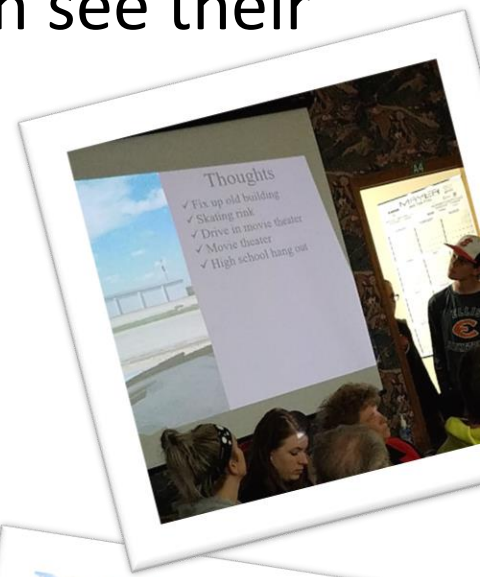
<http://kce.k-state.edu>

- Local communities identify what they would like to preserve, create, or improve for their future and volunteers pull together to create their ideal community future.



## Youth Community Perceptions <https://bit.ly/ks-ycp>

- Youth-Based Community Assessment.
- Gives communities insights on how youth see their community.
- Creates opportunities for youth voices in the community.
- Allows youth to become involved in local government and community process



## Grant Writing Classes and Support

### Contact

[KSRECV@ksu.edu](mailto:KSRECV@ksu.edu)

to participate.



- 1 ONLINE GRANT WRITING CLASSES**  
Class alum reported receiving more than \$52 million in successful grants. 
- 2 A PROFESSIONAL LEVEL GRANT DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT COURSE**  
An 8-week course dedicated to helping you complete a fundable proposal. 
- 3 A LIST OF CONTRACT GRANT WRITERS**  
Professionals willing and ready to write grants on a contract basis.
- 4 SUPPORT FOR KANSAS COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT COMMUNITIES**  
Excellent resources for those wanting to bring more to their communities.
- 5 ONE-ON-ONE SUPPORT BY K-STATE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION PROFESSIONALS**  
Our professionals are prepared to help you find grants and review your grant proposals.

For more information email [KSRECV@k-state.edu](mailto:KSRECV@k-state.edu).



## Small Business and Community Development

- **First Friday e-Calls 9:30-10:30 am**

*Connecting small businesses and communities with the resources to make them successful.*

– Register here: <https://ksre-learn.com/ecall>

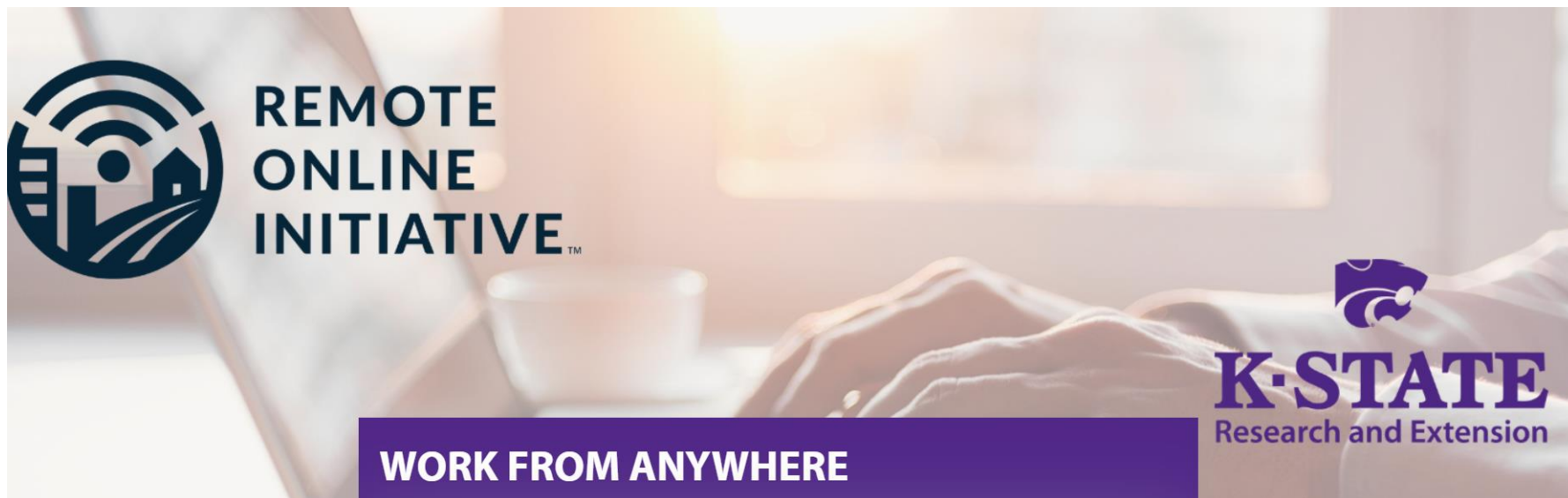
– Previous calls are recorded at

<https://ksre-learn.com/entrepreneurship>

- Now people have a choice, and millions of them are planning to move.
- **“The pivot to remote work is the biggest, fastest transformation of the labor market since the World War II mobilization.”**
- **Major cities will see the biggest out-migration:** 20.6% of those planning to move are currently based in a major city.
- **People are seeking less expensive housing:** Altogether, **more than half** (52.5%) are planning to move to a house that is significantly more affordable than their current home.
- **People are moving beyond regular commute distances:** 54.7% of people are moving over two hours away or more from their current location, which is beyond daily or even weekly commuting distances for most.

UpWork October, 2020 <https://www.upwork.com/press/releases/economist-report-remote-workers-on-the-move>, retrieved from Internet 12-12-20, UpWork October, 2020

- Kansas Remote Online Initiative
  - Certified Remote Work Professional
  - Certified Remote Work Leader
- *Certification in 4-weeks*
- Monthly Classes: <https://kansasremotework.com/>



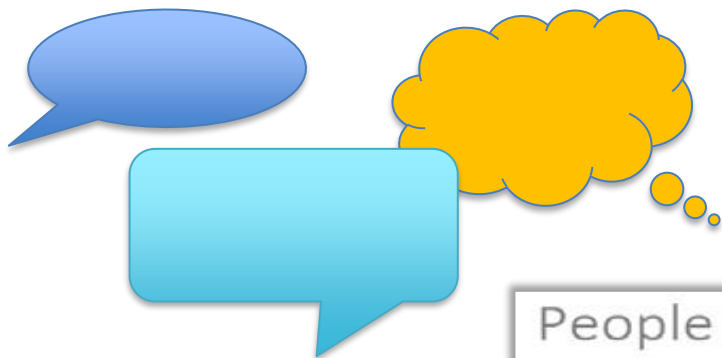
## Rural Grocery/KS Healthy Food Initiative

- **Goal:** Increase access to affordable, healthy food and to improve the health and economic development of Kansans and their communities.
- Technical assistance and financing to develop new or renovate fresh food retail in underserved communities throughout Kansas.

<http://kansashealthyfood.org/>



## What did you hear?



## What will we do?



People move in the direction of their conversations

