

BUSINESS CONNECTIONS

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Cooking Up New Business Ideas

Northeast Kansas Enterprise Facilitation helps entrepreneurs and business owners succeed.

BUSINESS CONNECTIONS

“If you don’t think outside of the box, you may just get stuck inside of a cubicle.” This quote by acclaimed American poet and novelist, Eric Vance Walton, seems to belong in this issue of *Business Connections*, since we’re celebrating the creativity of small businesses in our service area.

On page 3, we remind you that **Everyone Wins When You Buy Local**. Small businesses are the heart of a community, and Rainbow Communications encourages you to support them whenever possible.

You’ll find a **Business Spotlight on Northeast Kansas Enterprise Facilitation (NEKEF)** on pages 4 and 5. This nonprofit organization provides a wealth of resources for aspiring entrepreneurs and existing business owners, helping them “think outside of the box” to successfully manage their product/service, marketing, and financial management. Check out NEKEF if you need a fresh perspective on your business challenges.

Is Your Business Frozen in Time? We ask this question on page 6, where you’ll pick up ideas for fostering creative thinking and exploring new ways of doing things at your business. In page 7’s **Returning to Your Roots**, you’ll meet Hiawatha native Nancy Parks Wright. She and her husband own Wright’s Eclectibles and are wonderful examples of how unconventional career moves (and living arrangements) can pay off.

Remember, Rainbow Communications is here to provide the solutions you need to grow your business. Let us know how we can help.

Sincerely,
Rainbow Communications
Sales Department



L to R: Julie Bergman, Sales Representative; Amiee DeFore, Technology Solutions Clerk; Angie Kreider, Sales Account Manager, and Jerad Enneking, Sales Representative



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Editorial and Circulation Contact:
Stacy Simmer,
628 Oregon St.,
Hiawatha, KS 66434
800-892-0163

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Contact: Stacy Simmer,
628 Oregon St.,
Hiawatha, KS 66434
800-892-0163

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Postmaster send changes to:
Stacy Simmer
Rainbow Communications
628 Oregon St.
Hiawatha, KS 66434





Everyone Wins When You **Buy Local**

Each time you choose where to purchase goods or services, you have a powerful opportunity to make a difference in this community. When you choose local businesses and locally produced goods and services, you're reinvesting money right here and helping to create a stronger local economy. Here are some of the top reasons to buy local:

Greater Economic Vitality

Studies show that the percentage of revenue that gets recirculated back into the local economy increases by as much as 35 percent when shoppers choose independent (versus chain) establishments.

More and Better Jobs

While national retailers bring jobs to local communities, more jobs are lost due to the closing of smaller establishments that can't compete. In some areas, locally owned businesses provide better wages and benefits than national chains.

Protection of Unique Culture

Local one-of-a-kind businesses reflect each community's unique culture and character, increasing tourism success.

Improved Product Selection

A multitude of small businesses, each selecting products based on the needs of local customers rather than a national sales plan, results in a broader range of product choices.

Environmental Benefits

Big-box stores and other national retailers usually require large undeveloped land to accommodate their needs. Buying local means shopping closer to home, which means less sprawl and habitat loss along with reduced driving and dependence on oil.

Increased Support for Community Groups

Local non-profit organizations receive more support from smaller, locally owned business owners than they do from national companies.

Efficient Use of Taxes

Local businesses typically require a much smaller infrastructure investment compared to nationally owned stores, making for more efficient use of public services.

While it may not always be possible to buy what you need from a local business, take a moment before you shop to think local first.

A BIG TRIBUTE TO SMALL BUSINESSES

National Small Business Week is the first week in May, sponsored by the U.S. Small Business Administration. It's a great reminder to think about how much small businesses add to our local communities in terms of jobs, unique products, personal service, and much more.

Rainbow Communications encourages you to shop local, spend local, eat local, and enjoy local. If you own a small business, we congratulate you and wish you much success. Contact us for the updated communications services your small business needs to reach its big goals.



Northeast Kansas Enterprise Facilitation

This organization is growing communities one entrepreneur at a time



NEKEF Facilitator Teresa McAnerney

If you're thinking about starting a new business or need help growing the business you already have, there's a tremendous resource you should know about. Northeast Kansas Enterprise Facilitation (NEKEF) is a nonprofit organization that provides free, confidential business coaching to aspiring entrepreneurs and existing business owners in Atchison, Brown, Doniphan, Jackson, and Nemaha counties.

Bringing Lots of Experience to the Table

NEKEF has a Community Resource Board made up of more than 60 volunteers who care passionately about the success and sustainability of our rural Northeast Kansas region. These volunteers include farmers, bankers, attorneys, web developers, graphic designers, marketers, financial managers, successful entrepreneurs, economic development specialists, and more.

Facilitator Teresa McAnerney meets with the Board monthly and asks its members for assistance with specific issues facing clients. The Board brainstorms resources and possibilities to offer clients so they can successfully resolve the issues. The Board also monitors the progress of the project through monthly reports on client activities including the number of new or expanded businesses, and new or retained jobs.

McAnerney notes, "When I meet with NEKEF clients, we discuss their ideas and begin to assess where they currently

are and where they ultimately want to be. We begin to knock down the roadblocks that stand between them and their goals."

Examples of NEKEF services include assistance with the following:

- Compliance issues
- Licenses
- Business plan preparation
- Financial forecasting
- Zoning
- Marketing plans
- Resources for legal, marketing, and financial management

Trinity of Management

"NEKEF is a grassroots program with a person-centered approach. We work with entrepreneurs one on one, helping them get things done at their own pace. We believe the 'trinity of management' is crucial for the success of a business. The three elements a business needs to have equally covered are product/service, marketing, and financial management," she explains.

In addition to the wealth of information and experience offered by the Board, NEKEF has access to other community resources. McAnerney says, “We work together with economic development and other community development groups. Additional resources include our financial administrator, Glacial Hills RC&D; a business incubator in Wetmore that offers offices at a low cost; and the Glacial Hills Business Resource Center in Sabetha, which is a large building with rental offices, a meeting room, and overnight stay capabilities.”

Rainbow Communications has been an integral part of business development in our region.”

—TERESA MCANERNEY, FACILITATOR, NORTHEAST KANSAS ENTERPRISE FACILITATION

She adds, “Food entrepreneurs have unique resources. The Glacial Hills Business Resource Center has kitchen facilities available for rent, and there’s also a freestanding Glacial Hills Food Center in Horton. These centers offer entrepreneurs a fully stocked, professional kitchen where they can pursue taking a product from farm to the retail market. NEKEF also has a relationship with the Kansas State Food Science Program headed by Dr. Fadi Aramouni, a specialist who literally ‘wrote the book’ on marketing food creations. NEKEF has taken several clients to visit with Dr. Armaouni, and he helps them perfect recipes, configure nutritional facts for proper and compliant labeling, and register products with a UPC code so they can go on the shelves of national chains.”

Technology Levels the Playing Field

Today’s entrepreneurs need more than a great idea to start and maintain a business. They also need the right technology to make it all happen. McAnerney notes, “Rainbow Communications has been an integral part of business development in our region. Without our high-

speed Internet connections, the rural regions in Northeast Kansas would be isolated. The services provided by Rainbow Communications create a level playing field for entrepreneurship. For example, many millennials are coming back to our region because, thanks to the Internet, they can live in a small town but sell globally! Rural businesses just don’t have the foot traffic enjoyed by large cities, so marketing digitally allows them to reach several thousand potential customers with the stroke of a key.”

To discuss receiving the free and confidential services of NEKEF, contact Facilitator Teresa McAnerney at 785-364-0583 or tm@nekef.org. This program depends on municipal and private funding, so if you wish to support entrepreneurial enhancement in our region, visit www.nekef.org and press the “support” button.



ENTREPRENEURSHIP ACADEMY INSPIRES LOCAL STUDENTS

Do you know a high school student interested in starting a business someday? The road from dreams to reality could start with the Northeast Kansas Entrepreneurship Academy. This four-day learning experience will be held June 19-22 at the Highland Community College. It’s open to high school students who have completed the 9th grade and live in Atchison, Brown, Donipam, Jackson, Jefferson, Marshall, Nemaha, Osage, or rural Shawnee County.

Participating students get a real-life look at the business world through activities including:

- Visits to local businesses
- Networking with area business leaders
- Preparing a business plan
- Discovering financial resources available
- Discussing marketing, public relations, financial management, teambuilding, business etiquette, market research, and more

Students also have the opportunity to compete for cash prizes.

The Northeast Kansas Entrepreneurship Academy has received positive feedback from past graduates. As one one put it, “This helped me to realize my hobby can become my livelihood!”

For more information on the Northeast Kansas Entrepreneurship Academy, contact Teresa McAnerney at 785-364-0583 or tm@nekef.org.



Is Your Business Frozen in Time?

To stay relevant, make sure you warm up to new opportunities

It's impressive to be a longstanding business in the community. Keep in mind, however, that holding on too tightly to traditions from the past may be hurting your business in the present. Why? Because blindly following tradition causes us to turn off our brains and can get in the way of critical thinking, imagination, and innovation.

Think about these questions: Do you handle tasks a certain way simply because that's the way you've always done them? Are you using outdated computer or communications technology? Do you still have the same marketing materials or merchandising displays from five years ago?

To avoid freezing up with a reluctance to change, make a conscious effort to stay open to new ideas. Encourage your employees to look for better and faster ways to do their jobs and serve your customers. Join a local business or community group to hear inspiring speakers and network with new people. Expand your knowledge by studying the success stories of businesses in other industries. Browse around Pinterest for images that may spark a more creative tactic for items such as your office interior, product packaging, or advertising.

In addition, check out these tips from the U.S. Small Business Administration:

- **Offer your business as a franchise or business opportunity.** Franchising your business will allow for growth without requiring you to manage the new location. This will help to maximize the time you spend improving your business in other ways, too.

- **License your product.** This can be an effective, low-cost growth medium, particularly if you have a service product or branded product. Licensing also minimizes your risk and is low cost in comparison to the price of starting your own company to produce and sell your brand or product.
- **Form an alliance.** Partnering with a similar type of business can be a powerful way to expand quickly.
- **Diversify.** Diversifying is an excellent strategy for growth, because it allows you to have multiple streams of income that can often fill seasonal voids. Some of the most common ways to diversify are to sell complementary products or services, teach adult education or other classes, and become a paid speaker or columnist.
- **Target other markets.** Your current market may be serving you well, but are there others that could use your products?

Remember, you want to be a cool business—not a frozen one.

To keep evolving and improving your business, take advantage of today's advanced phone and Internet services. For details on the solutions offered by Rainbow Communications, call 800-892-0163.





Nancy Parks Wright

Returning to **Your Roots**

Hiawatha native Nancy Parks Wright returned home and opened Wright's Eclectibles

When Nancy Parks Wright left for college in 1980, she didn't envision ever returning to live in Hiawatha but always stayed connected to the community. She subscribed to the Hiawatha World to keep up with old friends and made visits home to see her parents.

Nancy and her husband, Rusty Wright, met in Wamego where she worked for SRS and he practiced law. They spent almost 11 years in South Sioux City, Neb., and another 11 in Arkansas City, Kan. When the couple purchased the old building at 709 Oregon in October 2013, their four adult children were semi-supportive of their parent's plan to live unconventionally and start a business in downtown Hiawatha.

Nancy recalls, "Our kids loved that we'd be closer to my folks, but were concerned that we might be getting into more than we knew. They gave us *The Money Pit* movie for Christmas right after we bought the building."

The Wrights have worked hard to restore the building, which dates back to 1892 and has been home to many businesses. It sat empty for about five years before they purchased it. The downstairs is the location of their antiques and collectibles store called Wright's Eclectibles. Rusty says, "We tell everyone there are treasures in every corner of the store. But the most fun is hearing customers say, 'Grandma had one of those when we were growing up.' We love that."

The upstairs of the building is their home. Working with the same philosophy of restoring what was, the couple refinished and used all of the yellow pine floors and woodwork on both stories. "This was a labor of love," they both agree.

Nancy notes, "It's been a great time to start a business in Hiawatha. Fellow business owners have helped us, and we're all working together to do downtown events. This little corner of northeast Kansas is full of fun shops and fun success stories. We're happy to be part of the revitalization," Nancy notes.

She adds, "My Great-grandfather Parks had a dairy in Hiawatha; my grandfather continued that and then took the company into the egg business, which was carried on by my Uncle Charlie. My dad, Bob Parks, had his own insurance office for years. Then he and my mother, Pat, along with classmate, Bill Hargis, built the first Best Western in Hiawatha. I am proud of what Rusty and I have done in Hiawatha and happy that the name "Parks" is once again on a local business. We named 709 Oregon the Parks Wright Building, and we invite everyone to stop by."



GO FURTHER
GO FASTER
GO FIBER

The Rainbow Communications Fiber-Optic Network offers Internet speeds up to 1 Gig, roughly 100 times faster than the average broadband speed, which means your business can quickly increase efficiency, productivity, and collaboration.



For details on pricing and availability,
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