

BUSINESS CONNECTIONS

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Horton is on the Road to Reinvention



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BUSINESS CONNECTIONS

The City of Horton may be small, but there are big things taking place there. From the Reinvent Horton movement to the fiber network installation, businesses of Horton are clearly on a path to progress. In celebration, we're featuring Horton in this issue of *Business Connections*.

Horton, like many small rural communities, faces significant challenges. On page 3, we look at the **Reevaluating and Reinventing** required to keep going as well as the power of technology to help level the playing field between rural communities and big cities.

On pages 4 and 5, you'll find a **Business Spotlight on the City of Horton** including an interview with Mayor Tim Lentz about the status of the Reinvent Horton movement. Many residents are working together to make Horton a better place, and Rainbow Communications is doing our part by bringing fiber to this community.

On page 6, we spread the good news of **Horton Public Library Named 2016 Best Small Public Library**. It's impressive what innovation can do, especially when combined with technology. **Returning to Your Roots** appears on page 7 and shares the story of why Mark Ross, Athletic Director of Horton High School, decided to return to his hometown of Horton.

Whether your business is located in Horton or somewhere else in northeast Kansas, Rainbow Communications is here to keep you connected to the solutions you need. Contact us for help meeting your 2017 goals.

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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Reevaluating and Reinventing

How rural communities are changing inside and out to overcome their challenges



Rural communities all over the country, including in Kansas, are facing steady depopulation, economic decline, and deteriorating main streets. This typically stems from the loss of a community's original or main industries that provided the foundation for the local economy in the past. Despite these challenges, there are ways for rural families, businesses, and leaders to work together to turn things around.

Taking a Fresh Look

It starts with taking a fresh look at the rural community. Instead of trying to recreate exactly what it's been in the past, the focus turns to imagining what it could be in the future. This often involves:

- **Reevaluating** current assets such as historic buildings in the downtown area, a beautiful rural landscape, low cost of living, unique cultural/arts resources, and potential for entrepreneurial businesses.
- **Reinventing** the community's appearance and use of technology to make it a more attractive place for residents to live and travelers to visit.

While beautification of building exteriors, through painting and other “spruce up” projects, is often where rural communities begin their efforts toward positive change, it's important for them to also invest in the improvements not readily seen—communications technology. For example, high-speed Internet helps to level the playing field between rural communities and big cities. Existing businesses can access the Internet speeds and reliability needed to expand e-commerce, and cities have an easier time attracting new businesses and recruiting new talent.

Working Together, Leveraging Technology

Robust partnerships between local government, nonprofits, business organizations, and community groups are essential to the success of reinvention. While most economic development strategies involve trying to recruit major employers, many small towns and cities complement recruitment by emphasizing their existing assets and distinctive resources.

Rural communities can get help from Cool & Connected, a planning assistance program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Utilities Service, EPA's Office of Sustainable Communities, and the Appalachian Regional Commission. Cool & Connected helps small towns use broadband service to revitalize main streets. Communities can combine broadband service with other local assets such as cultural and recreational amenities to attract investment and people as well as diversify local economies.

You can read about the Reinvent Horton movement on pages 4 and 5, a Kansas example of a community changing inside and out. Rainbow Communications is supporting these efforts by installing a fiber network in Horton and offering other advanced technology.

City of Horton

This struggling community is reinventing itself though the hard work of many hands



When life hands you a lemon, you get help from Lemonis. That's what the City of Horton discovered in 2014.

The City of Horton underwent public scrutiny that year stemming from a situation involving a dilapidated structure owned by an elderly veteran. Due to the media attention, Horton gained the interest of Marcus Lemonis, entrepreneur and host of CNBC's reality series, *The Profit*. Lemonis reached out to help the struggling community, offering to guide its revitalization. The help was sorely needed. Empty downtown lots were strewn with debris, grass and weeds grew up from the sidewalks, and some storefronts were in serious disrepair. From there, a committee was eventually formed called Reinvent Horton, and changes began to happen.

Reinvent Horton is Working

Mayor Tim Lentz says, "Every Saturday, a core group of Horton residents (lovingly referred to as the Reinvent Ladies) and others get to work on Reinvent Horton projects. They've painted downtown buildings and curbs, cut down brush, helped citizens cleanup their yards, worked on city parks including the lake playground equipment, helped organize Octoberfest and the Night of Lights, and much more."

Reinvent Horton has been successful. Lentz notes, "We've spearheaded a swimming pool project which will begin

construction in 2017, and we've attracted some new businesses. For example, R Bar B, a farm and ranch store from Topeka, came to Horton as did Fiabesco, a clothing boutique. These stores are both located in buildings owned by Lemonis. He remodeled them at his own expense and is giving both businesses one year of free rent."

Coming up, Reinvent Horton will continue work on a downtown revitalization project. "We've already torn down derelict buildings and planted eight trees on the empty property. In the spring, we'll plant lilies and turn it into a small park. This park will add to the already spruced up downtown, featuring new sidewalks as well as new light poles donated by Horton's residents, businesses, and alumni," he explains.

People, Progress, and Product

Before Reinvent Horton started, the City of Horton was on the brink of going by the wayside, as have many small communities across the country. Lentz notes, "Other towns often contact me for advice, asking, 'How did you get started with revitalization?' I tell them it all comes down to the people in our community. They make it happen. We talk about Lemonis' method of the three P's – People, Progress, and Product."

Part of progress involves technology, which Rainbow Communications is proud to provide to Horton. A key component is the 2017 project of bringing a fiber network to the city.

Help from Rainbow Communications

“Bringing fiber to Horton will bring our small community up to speed with technology. I think getting fiber will be as big of a deal as it was to first get Internet service years ago. We’re very fortunate to have Rainbow Communications invest in fiber for our community,” says Lentz.

City offices in Horton currently use surveillance cameras, a hybrid IP phone system, Internet, and phone services from Rainbow Communications.

Lentz notes, “Horton had been in the ‘dark ages’ in terms of surveillance cameras, and Rainbow Communications helped us make a major upgrade. We received a grant and now have cameras placed in the front offices and on the exteriors of city buildings as well by parking lots. Our patrol cars also have cameras. The Chief of Police can now log on to the camera footage from his smartphone and keep abreast of activities.”

“While sprucing up the look of buildings is important, Horton also needs upgraded technology to succeed.”

—MAYOR TIM LENTZ, CITY OF HORTON

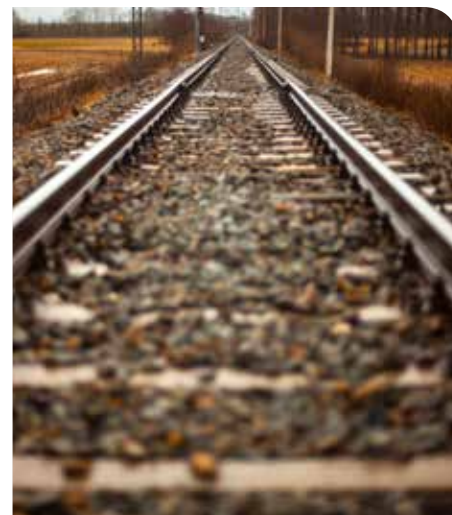
The hybrid IP phone system—a traditional phone system with an IP extension to other buildings—gives City of Horton employees the ability to easily transfer calls between buildings and leave voice mail messages. “This system has been a huge benefit to us and will only get better once the fiber network is installed. We’re really looking forward to the faster Internet speeds that fiber will bring, enabling more efficiency when downloading files, emailing, and so on,” Lentz explains.

He adds, “We greatly appreciate Rainbow Communications giving Horton access to the latest technology. While sprucing up the look of buildings is important, Horton also needs upgraded technology to succeed. As Mayor, I would also say that Rainbow Communications has always given us help whenever I’ve asked for it. They believe in the Reinvent Horton movement and support us.”

Are you interested in opening a business in Horton? You’re invited to call Mayor Tim Lentz at 785-548-5028 to discuss opportunities.



Mayor Tim Lentz



HORTON'S HISTORY BEGAN ON THE RIGHT TRACK

The City of Horton in northeast Kansas was founded in 1886 and named after Albert H. Horton, chief justice of the Kansas Supreme Court. The city grew rapidly due to the Rock Island Railroad; the first train steamed into Horton that same year. Its growth was so impressive that Horton came to be known as “The Magic City” or “Little Chicago.” At its height in 1923, the population reached more than 5,000.

Unfortunately, this boom period derailed years later when cars and airplanes became the preferred methods of transportation and the demand for railroad service declined. The last of the railroads in Horton were removed in 1985. Once the Rock Island Shops closed, the number of residents dropped dramatically. Today, Horton’s population stands at about 1,700.

The good news is that Horton is back on the right track with the Reinvent Horton movement. As it continues to chug forward, it’s gaining momentum.



Horton Public Library

Named 2016 Best Small Public Library

In October, the Kansas Library Association named Horton Public Library (HPL) the 2016 Best Small Public Library in Kansas. HPL received a traveling banner to hang in the library, a plaque, and a check for \$500 from the award's co-sponsor, Auto-Graphics, Inc.

HPL was selected for this designation because of its commitment to become the center of the community of Horton by reinventing the library and its services. Examples of this creative transformation include HPL:

- Giving its existing building a makeover to raise awareness of the library within the community.
- Developing new services including Toddler Tuesdays to promote early literacy, the BookBrag Club for homeschoolers, the Book Worm Café to serve free lunches in the summer, and an office supply store concept to provide equipment, supplies, and computer help.
- Collaborating with groups in the community including the Boy Scouts and Horton High School to create six Little Free Libraries.
- Raising money to purchase a digital sign for outside to serve as a community bulletin board.

Library Director Rita Higley notes, "The digital sign is just one of the recent technology improvements at HPL. We've also worked with Rainbow Communications to get a surveillance/security system and an updated phone system. With the fiber installation, HPL will have even faster Internet service. We offer computers for public use and want to provide the best possible Internet service we can afford for our patrons. Our goal is for HPL to be a place where members of the community gather, and awesome Internet service only helps us attain that goal."

The new library programs and renovation resulted in an increase in library visits and circulation of materials over the past two years. Higley says, "New faces are coming in the library weekly, and with the improved Internet experience, I believe this trend will continue."

Higley says, "We appreciate the support and service we get from Rainbow Communications employees. They're always very attentive and responsive to our needs, and they take the time to make sure we understand the solution to an issue. I really enjoy working with Rainbow Communications."

LIBRARY RECEIVES \$2,500 FRS GRANT

Rainbow Communications congratulates Horton Public Library (HPL) on being one of the 2016 recipients of the Foundation for Rural Service (FRS) grants. The mission of the Foundation is to enhance the quality and sustainability of life in America by advancing an understanding of rural issues. The FRS grants reward organizations that are making an impact through community engagement and use of broadband technology.



HPL was endorsed by Rainbow Communications during the grant application process. The \$2,500 FRS grant received by HPL will be used to purchase two computers for the library, which serves an extremely low-income area (80 percent of school children receive free or reduced lunch rates). Students use the public computers for homework and games, and adults use them for job searching, social interaction, and government forms.



Returning to **Your Roots**

Each quarter, we highlight one or more people in our community whose career path brought them back to their roots. For this issue, we recognize Mark Ross, who returned to his hometown of Horton to become Athletic Director of Horton High School.


Mark Ross grew up in Horton and was actively involved in his youth with athletics as well as hunting and fishing. Ross says, “I left Horton years ago to pursue my college education, but I’ve always had pride in my roots and wanted to come back and see Horton grow and improve.”

He continues, “Prior to moving back to Horton, I worked at the University of Kansas as an Offensive Quality Control and Graduate Assistant with the football program. From there, I accepted a position at Union State Bank in Horton and then was hired as Athletic Director of Horton High School. Employment in Horton provided my wife and me with an opportunity to move closer to family, enjoy the benefits of a smaller community, and participate in the Reinvent Horton movement. In addition, being able to work with the students at Horton High School on an everyday basis has truly been a blessing.”

What’s new at Horton High School? Ross replies, “We’ve made huge advancements in promoting the school and providing

information to the community through the use of social media and the launching of the new USD 430 website—developed and maintained by the technology class at Horton High School. The students have done great things under the direction of David Rebant, technology class teacher. We’re also working to promote the culture at Horton High School and make Charger gear more readily available to the community via the TeamStore on the website and the Booster Club.”

Ross notes that Horton High School students have been very involved in the Reinvent Horton movement. He adds, “The students help out with Reinvent Horton through their senior community service hours required for graduation. Reinvent Horton has also played a huge role in the development of the Horton CEO (Community Enhancement Organization) group. These efforts have developed a sense of pride in the students at being able to improve the quality of Horton High School facilities.”

A woman with shoulder-length brown hair, wearing a white top, is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is in a clothing store with racks of clothes and a large arched window in the background.

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