

JCED BULLETIN

Jones County Economic Development Newsletter

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COULD RURAL AMERICA BE THE HEART OF INNOVATION IN THE FUTURE OF WORK?

Entrepreneurial Gen Z and Millennials in rural America are ready to lead — but gaps in access and infrastructure could squander high-potential talent. America's entrepreneurial spirit has been a hallmark of the recent wave of enthusiasm for start-ups and small businesses built on new technologies that could transform any idea into the next major innovation of our generation. But while many associate this fast-moving and innovative approach with big cities and Silicon Valley, rural Americans have prided themselves on their ability to build businesses into success stories. In fact, they're especially keen on being the ones to lead the charge.

A majority of rural workers (51%) want to own their own business in the future, significantly more than their non-rural peers (41%), according to the University of Phoenix's recent *G.R.O.W. Generating Rural Opportunities in the Workforce™* report on workers in rural and non-rural areas. This includes half or more of younger generations such as Gen Z (53%), Millennials (56%) and Gen X (50%). Innovation has long been embedded in rural America, where agriculture, manufacturing and other industries have thrived. As the knowledge economy expands, companies all over America should be able to tap into rural communities, where there is a wellspring of ability and talent — especially as the need for innovation continues to grow in the face of advancing technology and competition overseas. Now more than ever, businesses of every stripe should be looking to rural America or connecting with the workers who live there to take advantage of both their abilities and their entrepreneurial spirit.



However, despite technology that should connect these communities to the opportunities that tech can provide, many rural communities cannot access them. This could spell disaster as rural workers are forced to move to pursue career opportunities elsewhere. Overcoming the barriers rural workers face in order to participate in a growing American economy, requires systemic change. Those changes can benefit not just rural communities by strengthening their economic opportunities, but also the

businesses and industries in need of the strengths and skills of rural Americans — people who could fuel the next generation of American innovation while also increasing our competitiveness on the global stage.

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Anamosa Embarks on Phase 3 of the Downtown Façade Project

The City of Anamosa was recently awarded a third consecutive Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) under the Downtown Revitalization (DTR) moniker. This grant will invest another \$650,000 from the State of Iowa over the next couple of years and will impact up to twelve more building façades in the downtown.

Like the previous two projects, this project will be a partnership between the City of Anamosa, the State of Iowa, local building owners, and Jones County Economic Development. The money each entity provides will go towards the design of each building façade, the administration to run the program, and of course the construction phase of the project where each building gets a facelift with the desires of the owners and the requirements of the grant.

The first phase of the project started with ten buildings on the south side of Main Street in 2020 and was completed in 2021. The second phase of the project included ten buildings as well and was on the western half of the north side of Main Street. The second phase began in 2023 and ended in 2024. This third phase is projected to begin in late 2025 and be concluded by 2027.

As can be seen by some of the photos on the right, these projects have immediately impacted the aesthetic beauty of the downtown as well as making it seem more lively. Multiple buildings have been purchased after going through the construction process and receiving new businesses and/or tenants.

By the time all three phases of the project are complete, there will be up to thirty-two buildings with façade rehabilitations in the downtown and roughly \$5 million dollars invested from all of the interested stakeholders. The investments from the building owners, the City of Anamosa, and the State of Iowa have all contributed to the continued and growing interest in the City of Anamosa current and future successes.

At the moment, the City of Anamosa is working through paperwork required by the State and going through the design phase with the architect. Over the next few months when that is complete, the City will start the process to go out to bid for a general contractor to run the project. The hope is to get up and running with construction as soon as possible. More information will be forthcoming as it becomes available regarding start dates, construction inconveniences, etc.

The City of Anamosa is hopeful this project will continue its success under the program and all of the great statewide recognition gained from its previous successful projects through the CDBG program.



Innovation in Rural America *(Continued from Page 1)*

Workforce Shifts Leaving Rural Workers Behind

The recent rise in remote work opportunities has radically changed how Americans see their work opportunities. Not only has there been a massive 67% increase in jobseekers' desire to work remotely since 2022, 40% of workers would even work for a lower salary if their employer offered more flexible arrangements. On the other side of the coin, if the push to return to the office continues to grow, then rural areas have an opportunity to use the tech available to turn their communities into hubs of commerce and innovation. In other words, either trend can be capitalized upon to transform rural work opportunities, and especially allow businesses and workers alike to thrive either remotely or in-person.

These trends *should* allow rural workers, who could work either remotely or in person, to join the knowledge economy and provide their talents to businesses that previously relied on workers in metropolitan areas. But so far, these shifts have not benefited rural workers, in large part due to infrastructure and cost challenges that prevent these communities from accessing high-speed internet. Even when bringing broadband to rural areas is possible, the process is challenging. Because of this, the rise in remote work that should be a particular boon to rural workers has instead left them further disconnected from the growing knowledge economy.

As a result, nearly half of rural workers (49%) feel held back in their careers because of where they live (compared to just 30% of non-rural workers) — a disparity driven by rural Gen Z and Millennial respondents (64% and 54%). These same younger generations of rural workers are less likely to feel satisfied in their jobs (67% of Gen Z and 62% of Millennials, compared to 78% of Gen X and 84% of Boomers). Why do these workers feel they need to come to the opportunities when there is more than enough reason for the opportunities to come to them?



Troublingly, it's a lack of resources that seems to be driving this outlook: Just 56% of rural workers are happy with the tools and resources they have for achieving their career goals, significantly less than their non-rural peers (73%). If rural communities want to gain from shifts in workforce trends. If businesses want to benefit from the untapped abilities of rural workers, something must be done to close this gap.

Reconnect, Reskill, Renew

Education has long been a key path for capitalizing on new economic opportunities, with higher education being something that 76% of rural and non-rural Americans alike agree to be worthwhile. But once again, while educational institutions should be a lifeline for rural Americans, too many struggle with geography, with an estimated 41 million Americans living more than 30 minutes' drive away from the nearest college or university: that's 12% of the country's population facing this obstacle to access.

Communities and businesses need to collaborate in building support networks (both infrastructural *and* social) that can benefit rural employees and employers alike. And while 56% of rural workers are interested in the flexibility of online resources such as apps, portals, or websites that allow them to learn at their own pace, infrastructure challenges once again throw up obstacles. Rural workers rank the quality of their area's education technology (36%) or internet (32%) as merely fair or even poor. This is where businesses and educational institutions need to listen to what rural workers are saying could help them in their career journeys; here, rural workers are emphatic. An overwhelming 86% of rural workers agree that more partnerships between employers and educational institutions are needed to create employment opportunities for students.

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INNOVATION IN RURAL AMERICA *(Continued from Page 3)*

It will take more than a village to reconnect rural communities with the opportunities they deserve. Businesses and educational institutions will need to work together to help rural communities access infrastructure necessary to participate in the future economy. They will need to implement solutions that connect rural workers with job opportunities where they can begin earning and adding value; and they will need to constantly reskill and upskill these populations when trends inevitably shift again.



But the good news is that once these efforts are in place, they can help prepare for that next shift — both by providing rural workers with the infrastructure and support they need, as well as by providing businesses the insights and abilities of rural Americans who have so much to offer the knowledge economy.

Most importantly, tapping into the innovative spirit of rural Americans, and indeed workers everywhere in the country, will more than make up for the initial effort. The upfront cost may be daunting, and the time may be urgent, but these investments in rural workers will pay dividends for generations to come, just as America

continues to benefit from the hard work of rural Americans in the past, present, and future.

**This article was reprinted with the permission of its authors: Bill Menner (Bill Menner Group Founder); Matt Dunne (Founder & Executive Director of the Center on Rural Innovation); and Raghu Krishnaiah (Chief Operating Officer at the University of Phoenix). Stay tuned for more expert-directed articles in future newsletter editions.*

NEW HOME FOR SALE IN MONTICELLO!

Jones County Economic Development has a 1200 square foot home with 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, and a full unfinished basement on a corner lot just waiting for an owner to move in and make this house a home!

If you or anyone you know is interested, reach out to Derek at 319-480-7446!

Flyer and details on Page 5 of the newsletter.

Contact Us

Jones County Economic Development has two convenient offices:

107 S. Ford Street in
Anamosa inside City Hall

200 E. 1st Street in
Monticello inside City Hall

Our Executive Director, Derek Lumsden, can also be reached by Phone at 319-480-7446 or by email at:
director@jonescountydevelopment.com

\$220,000



NEW BUILD FOR SALE

Property Features

- 3 Bedrooms
- 2 Bathrooms
- 1200 Sq Feet
- Corner Lot
- Full Unfinished Basement

Buyer is subject to income restrictions and must present most recent tax documents

 319-480-7446

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