

NEBRASKA BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER

# 2017 ANNUAL REPORT





## DEAR FRIENDS OF NBDC

**T**he Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) has had another successful year providing vital services to Nebraskans who are starting or growing their businesses. The impact of the businesses supported by NBDC is illustrated by the success stories in the 2017 Annual Report. They represent only 12 of the more than 2,026 clients we served across our state this year; however, their stories exemplify the success of our clients and the breadth of our service.

Small businesses are the backbone of dynamic communities. Nebraskans invest time and treasure to build businesses that provide meaningful jobs for our citizens—supporting not only families, local communities and the state, but also our nation.

In 2017, NBDC clients created or saved 1,858 jobs, invested \$46.4 million in their operations and increased their sales including government contracts by \$221.7 million. The total economic impact to Nebraska of this collaborative effort was \$496.5 million. We thank Dr. Chris Decker, chair of the UNO College of Business, Department of Economics for his IMPLAN economic model of the data.

NBDC takes pride in being a valued resource in the Nebraska economic development ecosystem. Together with local Chambers of Commerce, local and state economic developers, organizations of the University of Nebraska and other higher education providers, we help employer-based entrepreneurs and established companies succeed. Our partners value and endorse NBDC’s highly qualified professionals, confidential services and statewide delivery.

Our services include business plan preparation, financial projections, market research, loan packaging (including SBA guaranteed loans), helping business qualify for and submit proposals for government contracts, export assistance, commercializing innovative products, exit and transition planning

(including business valuation), and sustainability.

The services of NBDC are not possible without the support and funding from the University of Nebraska at Omaha, the U.S. Small Business Administration, the Defense Logistics Agency, the Environmental Protection Agency, and First National Bank of Omaha. Through the University of Nebraska, we leverage federal grant funds (2-to-1) to provide our services.

NBDC is a department of the College of Business Administration at the University of Nebraska at Omaha with offices in Omaha, Lincoln, Wayne, Norfolk, Grand Island, Kearney, North Platte, McCook, Scottsbluff and Chadron. Our partners, the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, the University of Nebraska at Kearney, Wayne State College and Chadron State College, leverage their funding to support our efforts.

The businesses highlighted in this report demonstrate the entrepreneurial spirit of Nebraska. We are proud to recognize their successes and continuing our commitment to “help good businesses become better.”

## OUR PARTNERS



Catherine Lang, JD  
State Director  
Assistant Dean



Louis Pol, PhD  
John Becker Dean  
College of Business Administration  
University of Nebraska at Omaha

# 2017 NBDC IMPACT ON NEBRASKA



**CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 1**  
Jobs—462

Sales —\$118.0 million

**CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 2**

Jobs—865

Sales —\$69.3 million

**CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 3**

Jobs—531

Sales —\$34.4 million



**Jobs created and saved** **1,858**



**Increased sales** **\$21,324,623**



**Investment by businesses** **\$46,360,178**



**Government contracts** **\$200,368,515**



**Clients Served** **2,187**

**\$496.5 MILLION**

**Total impact to  
Nebraska's economy<sup>1</sup>**

NBDC programs include the Small Business Development Centers, the Procurement Technical Assistance program, the Pollution Prevention Resource Information Center, Technology Commercialization, and Professional and Organizational Development. Funding is received from the U.S. Small Business Administration, the Defense Logistics Agency (U.S. Department of Defense), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the State of Nebraska, and First National Bank of Omaha.

# NEBRASKA

**BEYOND THE NUMBERS** NBDC's impact can be seen in the successes of its clients across the state. Read their stories in the following pages.

<sup>1</sup>Total state-wide economic impact includes direct, indirect, and induced impact as calculated using the IMPLAN economic model



## Partnerships across the state strengthen consulting services

**N**ebraska is a state brimming with big dreams and entrepreneurial spirit. For over three decades, the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) has tirelessly worked to bridge the gaps between the dreams, the businesses and their ultimate potential. Today, NBDC continues to pursue this mission with the help of the partnerships it has cultivated statewide.

Catherine Lang, the state director of NBDC, stresses that building relationships between state and local organizations creates awareness of their services. Lang says, “Many of our NBDC consultants engage with other programs in Nebraska’s economic development community.”

By being deliberate about networking, communication among organizations is better than ever and that means more support for businesses. For instance, NBDC may make a referral to another partner in the ecosystem to access their expertise and provide an optimum overall result for the business.

Lang says, “In Nebraska, local banks, Chambers of Commerce, state and local economic developers and

our education partners provide great programs and services to support the growth of businesses. We are happy to partner with them.”

### Notable Partnerships

Margaret Akin, a recent addition to the NBDC team in Scottsbluff, has a CPA background and has utilized her many relationships with local banks to help businesses file for financial backing. She says, “I feel like I have a great working relationship with the banks, and most are aware that we are here, so they start sending people to get them ready. I can help prepare businesses to talk to the bank and know their own numbers.”

She has also participated in Resource Meetings for “anybody that is looking to start a business or who is in business looking to expand.”

With a variety of hosts, including the Chamber of Commerce, community colleges, and Centers for Economic Development, these Resource Meetings bring financial and consulting resources to as many as 35 businesses at a time. At the end of each meeting, there is a networking period during which business

owners are encouraged to seek out partnership opportunities.

### Sharing the Load

The area served by Chuck Beck, NBDC procurement technical assistance consultant, covers 50,000 square miles in Central and Western Nebraska. He states that “I could not be nearly as effective as I am without having such a great network of partners throughout that 48-county area.”

Beck relies on partners when planning webinars, workshops, and other events to educate clients about government contracting. He also hosts Meet the Buyers Conferences which bring businesses and government agencies together. Business owners share marketing materials and connect with buyers in the government market. Beck has also connected clients to University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK) business professors so they can benefit from student marketing and management projects.

### Leadership Collaborations

Harold Sargus, client services manager for the NBDC Professional and Organizational Development program, and Eric Koeppe, president of the National Safety Council, Nebraska, are also partnering— to train professionals in Safety Leadership.

Their partnership began unexpectedly, as Sargus describes, “There was a gentleman who was in one of our leadership classes and now works for the National Safety Council, Nebraska who came up with the idea of collaborating.” Once the idea was brought to both organizations, each has been reaching out for additional partnership opportunities with organizations throughout the state.

This collaboration has been a great success. Koeppe explains, “we provide the base safety knowledge, NBDC provides the leadership.”

“We really complement each other,” Sargus adds.

Although they have already developed a successful safety and leadership training program, the organizations are both looking forward to the next partnership—a certificate program that addresses emergency preparedness and business continuity.

To put it simply, as Koeppe says, “when two like-minded organizations work together, you get a lot done.”

### Business Plan Loan Packaging Capital Access Market Research Tech Commercialization Exporting



MARGARET AKIN



GARY DUSEK



SARA BENNETT



UMEDA ISLAMOVA



WEI JING



JOSH NICHOL-CADDY

### Succession Planning Financial Projections Business Valuation



CHARLIE MCPHERSON



ARETHA BOEX



ODEE INGERSOLL



LOREN KUCERA



RICK YODER



JEAN WATERS  
DEPUTY STATE DIRECTOR

### Sustainability Training

### Government Contracting BidMatching Subcontracting Registering Market Research



VERONICA DOGA



MARY GRAFF



CHUCK BECK



CARLIE SHAFROTH



DICK UHING



QUENTIN FARLEY

### Process Improvement Leadership Development Project Management Supply Chain Safety Leadership



RENEE HELD



HAROLD SARGUS



BETH GIESBRECHT



KIM HARTER



LAURIE MATTHEWS



JERRY PARRIOTT  
BUSINESS MANAGER

## INTENSIVE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT PROJECT FOR GAGE COUNTY



### Collaboration concentrates economic development efforts on Gage County businesses

**P**artnering with Gage Area Growth Enterprise (NGage), the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) delivered its second intensive business development program in November, 2017. The project took an in-depth look at participating Gage County businesses and developed personalized strategies to improve their processes and identify opportunities for growth. Jean Waters, NBDC deputy state director, says, “these business owners are providing jobs in their community. We want to celebrate that fact and help them to be more successful.”

Walker Zulkoski, executive director of NGage, particularly values this partnership because NBDC respects confidentiality in its business relationships. “We are pretty selective in what we put out to our

business community, so this event was taken very seriously,” says Zulkoski.

Although from a wide variety of businesses — manufacturers, retail, food service, and startups — participants still felt a sense of community stemming from a common goal to improve.

“We ended up having twelve businesses. It was a really nice mix of companies that took advantage of the program and gave it great reviews afterwards,” says Zulkoski.

The Gage program was based on a successful project NBDC delivered for Dawson County the previous fall. “The plan is to bring a team of NBDC consultants to a community for a week,” says Waters. “They will assist in identifying key issues to work on for each participating business and customize a plan based on their special needs.”

Opening with a welcome dinner Sunday night, Gage participants met the consultants who would be their partners over the course of the project. Monday through Wednesday was spent identifying issues and working

### ROSENE MACHINE

Rosene Machine ([rosenemachine.com](http://rosenemachine.com)) is a high-quality, full-service machine shop in Firth, Nebraska, in northern Gage county. Owner Dennis Rosene and his employees specialize in providing customized solutions for production and manufacturing using top-of-the line precision CNC machining and turning centers. They assist with product development and fabricate prototype designs, and produce tools and specialty parts for manufacturing. Rosene manufactures their own line of internal pipe cutters and provides on-time service to customers in many industries, locally and nationally. NBDC consultants provided the standard 8-wastes of manufacturing analysis and financial consulting for growth during the intensive business development program in November.

on a plan for each business. Focusing on efficiency in operational processes, better human resource practices, and improvement to cash flow, one or two consultants met with each owner at their place of business to make implementation recommendations.

“NBDC provides a lot of financial consulting. Something we do really well is help business owners understand their equity in the business. We can also help them compare what other businesses are spending on rent, utilities, or labor,” explains Waters.

For future reference, each participating business received a comprehensive report of everything covered in their consultation.

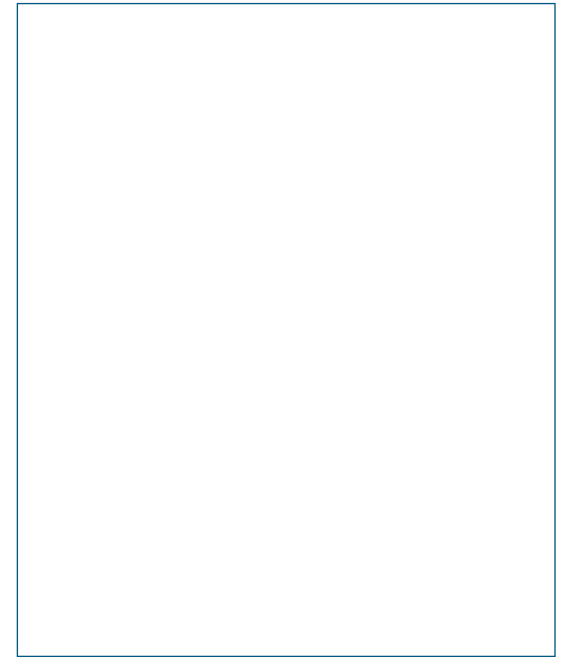
On Thursday, a celebratory dinner at the Black Crow Restaurant in Beatrice was held to honor the contributions these businesses have made to their community and their commitment to pursue excellence. The dinner gave attendees the opportunity to network with fellow business owners. Zulkoski reports that several partnerships forged through the Gage County business development Project are still thriving today.

News about the improvements NBDC made for

business owners spread by word-of-mouth in Beatrice and Gage County. “It has created some buzz for them,” says Zulkoski. “It legitimized how good NBDC is at what they do. The businesses have been spreading the word ever since.”

The partnership was a mutual success, and as Waters states, “we appreciate the leadership of Walker and NGage to support their existing businesses, which are essential to the economic vitality of the county.”

## CONSULTANTS



# Global interest brewing for Nebraska-grown hops



**G**rowth is a goal for any new business, and when the product of your business is a crop such as hops, the promise of growth — and an eager market come harvest time — are essential to success.

Accurate market analysis is just one of the services that Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) consultants have provided to Annette and Bruce Wiles, co-owners of Midwest Hop Producers in Plattsmouth.

Annette had previously worked in product development for a national corporation with offices in Omaha. “I looked at hops as I would with any other product, and that requires market analysis,” she says. “We got in touch with NBDC as soon as we started.”

That relationship continues today as Midwest Hop Producers looks into exporting its uniquely Nebraska-grown hops to China and other countries overseas where craft beers are gaining in popularity.

Wiles says NBDC technology commercialization consultant John Nichol-Caddy and Wei Jing, who is the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) program manager at NBDC for the state of Nebraska, have provided market research reports and expertise during the application process for a SBIR Phase I grant and, most recently, Midwest Hop Producers’ Value Added Producer Grant application. “Everyone we have reached out to at NBDC has been helpful and supportive,” Wiles says.

Hops are a “very labor intensive” crop that takes three years from planting to reach maturity, Wiles says. Because hops are more commonly grown in the Pacific Northwest in a climate and soil different from Nebraska,

the Wiles have planted 22 varieties to determine which will grow best here.

Once the initial crop matured in 2016, they furnished a full array of samples to area brewers to get their feedback. “Nebraska brewers are very open and honest,” Annette says, “and they are willing to pay a premium price for a locally-grown perennial.”

The Wiles have participated in hops breeding trials with researchers at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and have explored the region’s wild hops because of their proven resistance to the area’s conditions and diseases. They have identified multiple wild hops throughout Nebraska — including one they spotted in a ditch alongside the road while driving to an aunt’s funeral in Plattsmouth. “We named it ‘Doris Mae’ in her honor,” Wiles says.

With the rise in popularity of craft beers around the world comes an increased demand for American-grown hops, Wiles says. “It’s incredible the number of people in the world who want U.S. hops,” she says.

To tap into potential overseas markets, NBDC has provided lists of sales leads, and consultants have participated in a meeting with a representative of a Chinese company regarding Midwest Hops Producers products. NBDC consultants have also detailed financing options available through the U.S. Small Business Administration and U.S. Export Assistance Center.

Since the Wiles’ initial meetings with growers and processors in 2014, the advice and services provided by NBDC’s consultants have proved extremely useful, Wiles says.

“I’ve seen what some companies spend to obtain the services that the NBDC offers without charge,” she says.

“The state of Nebraska does a great job promoting new and small businesses. Wherever I go, I’m always tooting Nebraska’s horn.”

---

Hops take three years from planting to maturity.

---

Hops are more commonly grown in the Pacific northwest.

---

The popularity of craft beers around the world has increased demand for American-grown hops.

---



MIDWEST HOP PRODUCERS



PLATTS MOUTH

## Research team tackles difficult diagnoses

**N**ebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) consultants and workshops provide knowledge and insight as Sanguine Diagnostics & Therapeutics, Inc., pursues funding that will help the Omaha medical research and commercialization company realize its vision.



Sanguine Diagnostics and Therapeutics (SDT) was formed in 2009 by current CEO and legal counsel Brian Brislen, J.D.; Administrator Amy Dodson, MBA; research scientists Tony Hollingsworth, Ph.D., and Surinder Batra, Ph.D.; and physician scientist Aaron Sasson, M.D.

Wade Junker, Ph.D., is the company's chief scientific officer. He actively works on basic research and product development with University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) research

scientists Maneesh Jain, Ph.D.; and Sukhwinder Kaur, Ph.D.

Junker says SDT is currently developing mucin-based diagnostic and therapeutic modalities for the management of pancreatic diseases (pancreatitis, pancreatic cancer, and cystic lesions of the pancreas), and is planning to develop diagnostics and therapeutics for multiple cancers.

"NBDC has been very supportive of our efforts to further our projects and apply for Small Business Innovation research (SBIR) funding," Junker says. "At an SBIR Road Tour conference sponsored by NBDC, I met (Technology Commercialization Program Director) Wei Jing and inquired about NBDC performing a market analysis for SDT."

As a result, two NBDC researchers, Pallav Bajracharya and Josh Nichol-Caddy, provided a market report that was helpful in finalizing SDT's 12-page commercialization plan, which is required when applying for Phase II or Fast-track Phase I/II funding.

"Specifically," Junker says, "NBDC understood our innovative product concept and conducted secondary research that focused on the target market, customer, and our advantage relative to the competition."

Junker also attended a two-day conference sponsored by NBDC that included a presentation by consultant Jim Greenwood, who has served as a commercialization reviewer for Phase I, II and IIb SBIR/Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) proposals at the National Science Foundation.

SDT began active product development with its first STTR Phase I award in 2014 for the project, "Mucins in

the Diagnosis and Prognosis of Pancreatic Diseases."

"Patients harboring cystic lesions in the pancreas are considered to have a high-risk of developing pancreatic cancer, and due to the variable malignant potential of cystic pancreatic lesions, a majority of patients are managed surgically," Junker says. "Since pancreatic surgery carries significant morbidity, better markers are needed to stratify the risk of malignancy in patients with asymptomatic cystic pancreatic lesions. Our proposed studies will validate if MUC4 staining in endoscopic ultrasound (EUS) fine-needle aspiration biopsies can help in appropriate patient selection for surgical resection."

SDT received a second phase I award in 2016 for another project, "Ultrasensitive SERS Nano-Sensors for Pancreatic Cancer Diagnosis and Prognosis."

Most recently, SDT received an SBIR Fast-track grant and is beginning Phase II work to validate an antibody-based diagnostic assay. A second SBIR Fast-track is under consideration to be awarded this April.

Junker says the company has received the support of Joe Runge, J.D., and Michael Dixon, Ph.D., of UNeMed — the technology licensing office of UNMC/UNO — in SDT's continuing efforts to develop arrangements for use of the reagents and intellectual property that emerge from collaborations between SDT and UNMC.

"Throughout the process," he says, "NBDC has helped us put it all together."

Standing: Amy Dodson, Ali Hamzaoglu, Brian Brislen, Surinder Batra, Tony Hollingsworth, Maneesh Jain  
Seated: Sukhwinder Kaur; Wade Junker



**INNOVATION BUSINESS OF THE YEAR**

is awarded to a Nebraska business that advances technological innovation, partners with a Nebraska university to meet federal research and development needs, or increases commercialization of federal research.

- 2012 – SectorNow
- 2013 – LNKChemsolutions
- 2014 – LI-COR Biosciences
- 2015 – Windcall Manufacturing (GrainGoat)
- 2016 – Goldfinch Solutions
- 2017 – Sanguine Diagnostics & Therapeutics



# Third generation carpenter preserves history

“His work not only supports his family and creates jobs, but also preserves a living history of Willa Cather and her time in Red Cloud. Seeing his work in various stages is amazing and inspiring.”

**E**ven a third generation carpenter can use a little advice about building relationships with government agencies. Armando “Al” Leal, owner of Al’s Old House Repairs in Red Cloud got the help he needed when he approached Chuck Beck at the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) office in Kearney.

Leal uses his carpentry skills to restore old and often historically significant structures to their original glory. He reached out to Beck, a government contracting specialist in NBDC’s office at the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK), for help completing his System for Award Management (SAM) registration. The registration enabled Al’s Old House Repairs to take part in the Moon Block Project, one aspect of a \$7 million Community Development Block Grant revitalization effort for the City of Red Cloud.

During the work that followed, Leal and his business completed the restoration of two storefronts in the Moon Block, a large, 19th century building owned by the Willa Cather Foundation.

When they met to fill out the SAM registration, Beck provided an overview of government contracting, as well as details of other NBDC procurement program services. Beck also referred Leal to Sara Bennett, business consultant at the Grand Island NBDC office, and through that referral, Leal met Dena Beck, senior project leader with the Center for Rural Affairs’ Rural Enterprise Assistance Project (REAP).

Dena Beck has high praise for Leal and Al’s Old House Repairs.

Chuck Beck continues to provide resources and information as Leal’s interest in securing government contracting opportunities grows. Additionally, Beck introduced Leal to Sri Seshadri at UNK, which led to participation in a UNK graduate student project that focused on improving the company’s marketing efforts.

“I received the marketing plan in December and I am reviewing its recommendations,” Leal says. “Without Chuck bringing us together, I never would have thought a college graduate student would be interested in helping my business.”

A resident of Red Cloud since 2010, Leal’s roots reach back two generations to family carpenters in Madrid, Spain. In 1997, he was able to collaborate on the restoration of the Murphy Ranch House, a historic, 1846 stagecoach stop in Mathis, Texas. That project refined Leal’s carpentry skills and fueled his interest in research, history, and replicating the fine craftsmanship of early immigrants.

“To this day, I can’t use nail guns in my work,” he says, proud of maintaining “the old ways” of his ancestors. “I use a nail set and a hammer. It’s hard for me to change, unless someone shows me a better way.”

Leal is preparing to apply for the U.S. Small Business Administration’s 8(a) program, which he hopes will lead to more federal contracting opportunities. He says working with the specialists at NBDC “has been a great experience.”

“Most of all, it has built confidence in me and my business,” he says. “I know I’m not out here on my own. I have support, and I’ve learned things I can do to better my business.”



RED CLOUD

## DUO LIFT MANUFACTURING



Hellbusch family: Jim, Ben, David, Connie

# Duo Lift Manufacturing still growing after 75 years

**V**aluable advice to Duo Lift Manufacturing Co., Inc., from the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) is proving that even a 75-year-old company can learn a few new tricks of the trade when it comes to government contracting.

Primarily a trailer manufacturer for the agriculture industry, Duo Lift was facing a slump in the market in 2015 due to lower corn and soybean prices. That is when Dick Uhing, Procurement Technical Assistance program consultant at the NBDC office in Wayne, contacted the Columbus manufacturer.

Uhing suggested the company refine its ongoing search for available government contracts by completing a System for Award Management (SAM) registration, as well as registrations for the online government database BidMatch and Proxity.

“Dick explained that his priority was to assist our company in finding additional contracts in the online procurement marketplace that best suited our capabilities,” says Connie Hellbusch, who co-owns Duo Lift with her husband, Jim.

The following year, with assistance from Uhing and NBDC, Duo Lift completed approximately \$200,000 in government contracts. In 2017, that total rose to \$1 million.

Duo Lift in 2013 had completed a 40,000-square-foot addition, boosting its manufacturing facility to 102,000 square feet. The company also added a second paint booth, robotic welders, new laser cutting table and computer numerical control (CNC) lathe equipment, “so the opportunity for additional government contract work was timed perfectly,” Hellbusch says.

“We had attempted to look for more government contracts on our own but we were not as successful as we wanted to be,” she says. “Dick gave us the

information we needed to pinpoint the work we are interested in doing. He showed us how to use it, and mentored us along the way.”

Duo Lift was founded in 1943 by Arthur Hellbusch, a farmer who as a hobby had built a wagon lift in the family’s milk barn. He designed a mechanism to slide between the wagon box and running gear, which, through a series of pulleys and cable, lifted the wagon box and allowed grain to be emptied out the back.

In the early 1950’s, Arthur Hellbusch designed and manufactured a trailer to transport irrigation pipe to and from the field, and to store the pipe during the winter. The trailer became so popular it is still in production.

After graduating from the University of Nebraska, Jim Hellbusch, Arthur’s son, joined the family business in 1969 with the desire to grow the company beyond what his father accomplished after a long day of farming. Placing the emphasis on manufacturing, Jim began designing and building trailers. Later, he expanded the line of agricultural equipment and trailers for the fertilizer industry, and added trailers for all types of machinery, irrigation engines, automobiles, and snowmobiles.

Art Hellbusch retired and Jim became company president in 1981, the same year Connie joined the company. Today, Duo Lift has 65 fulltime employees.

Along with its agricultural trailers, Duo Lift produces a variety of commercial and industrial trailers that could be attractive to state and municipal agencies, including trailers that hold high-beam lights or portable generators, and salt brine production systems and anti-ice tank trailers.

“We feel there is more potential government business out there, and Dick has made finding it possible in a most efficient way,” Connie Hellbusch says. “That’s why he’s on speed dial.”



# Exmark benefits from Lean training

Innovation and dedication to continuous improvement have enabled Exmark Manufacturing Co., Inc., an independent turf care manufacturer in Beatrice, to stay a cut above its competition.

Founded in 1982, Exmark Manufacturing has been a client of the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) since 2014. Consultant Renee Held has provided lean certification services and is working with the company to schedule next level lean (NLL) certification classes, says Cindy Jurgens, lean manager at Exmark.

“We started our lean journey in 2000 and are well on our path,” Jurgens says. “It is an ongoing process for us.”

Jurgens says NBDC has also conducted an Overall Equipment Effectiveness through Total Productive Maintenance workshop at Exmark, attended by about 20 managers, supervisors and employees who run the plant’s robotic welders. The workshop is designed to allow companies to pull separate business functions together with a single useful metric.

“For us to stay competitive, control costs, improve our processes, and improve performance, we need to continue to build a lean culture here,” Jurgens says. “It starts with people, and it ends with people.”

She says the managers and supervisors who achieve lean certification bring the knowledge and practices

back and share them actively with the company’s more than 500 employees. “When they see the improvement lean methods make, it’s easy to get them to buy in,” she says.

At its inception, Exmark focused on manufacturing a line of mid-size, walk-behind mowers and turf rakes. In 1987, the rapidly expanding turf care equipment market and its competitive nature prompted Exmark to expand its product line to include commercial riding mowers.

In 1995, production began on the Exmark Lazer Z, a mid-mount, zero-turn riding mower that was welcomed by turf care professionals as a state-of-the-art machine. Today, the Lazer Z line is the market leader in its category in the United States, the company says.

In 1997, the company’s 15th year, Exmark became a division of The Toro Company, which has since served to ensure Exmark’s continued growth and market presence.

Situated in the Gage County Industrial Park, Exmark and its employees support the Beatrice community in

many ways, including donating time and funds to the local food pantry, United Way, Relay for Life, and other charitable causes.

Additionally, Exmark has donated mowers to the Beatrice Parks Department and local Humane Society, and in 2007 funded the renovation of Charles Park in Beatrice, now named Exmark Park. In 2017, the company awarded the Beatrice YMCA a \$25,000 grant to build a new splash park in the city.

Whether it is supporting its employees’ development or the community in which they live, Jurgens says Exmark is committed to giving back. The company says it annually contributes two percent of its pre-tax domestic profits to strengthening its communities and industries.

“It is important to invest in people, and to stay at the forefront of processes, to continue to be competitive,” she says. “It is inspiring for our people to see the commitment we are making in them through NBDC training and process implementation.”







**MANUFACTURING BUSINESS OF THE YEAR**

is awarded to a Nebraska business that demonstrates leadership in employee involvement, continual process improvement, customer and supplier relations, innovation and new product development, sales growth, and sustainability.

2012 - Tri-V Tool & Manufacturing

2013 - Certified Transmission

2014 - KZCO

2015 - Brand Hydraulics

2016 - Hornady Manufacturing

2017 - Exmark Manufacturing



**BEATRICE**

## Government market opportunities boost sales

**T**he Nebraska Business Development Center's (NBDC) guidance in navigating the often murky waters of government procurement has helped Klute Steel rise from zero government contracting revenue to more than \$2.5 million on average per year the past three years.

Founded in 1961 as a farm machinery, welding, and repair shop, the York company fabricates steel chiefly for the electric utility and transmission industries. From its 135,000-square-foot manufacturing facility, Klute Steel serves the North American utility market through major utility companies, cooperatives, packagers, and engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) contractors.

Klute Steel became a client of NBDC in 2011, not long after Frank Cifani Jr., joined the firm as national sales and business development manager.

"When I came on to start the sales organization here, I realized we were missing a large segment

with government agencies," Cifani says. "That's why I reached out to NBDC."

NBDC's government contracting specialists responded with assistance reviewing solicitations in FedBizOpps. Consultants also helped Klute Steel optimize its System for Award Management (SAM) registration, create a powerful profile in the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) Dynamic Small Business Search and develop a professional capabilities statement. NBDC also assisted with market research and enrolled the company in the NBDC bid matching service.

Cifani developed a government marketing strategy of connecting with prime contractors for subcontracting opportunities. He utilized FedBizOpps to mark interest in projects, find the prime contractors, and establish relationships.

"From there, we focused on attending a lot of government procurement meetings," Cifani says. "The value of those meetings is priceless, from the knowledge and free services, to being able to get in front of the right people."

Cifani has also attended the U.S. Department of Energy Small Business Conference the past two years to strengthen those relationships with prime and government contacts. In addition, he has attended several NBDC workshops and continues to work with NBDC contracting specialist Quentin Farley, who serves southeast Nebraska.

"Number one, they understand how to brand and market in a way that makes it easy for customers to get pertinent information from us," he says. "Our capabilities statement is an example of that."

Cifani says he especially appreciates the various services NBDC offers that allow him to contact a growing number of government agencies and contractors.

"We go to market through manufacturing representatives, but in the end, I'm just one person," he says.

"NBDC's government procurement services allow me to easily see solicitations from across the country. I can't knock on every door, and even if I spent all day on the Internet, I probably wouldn't find 90 percent of the information we need.



---

“The value is incredible. It has increased my productivity and our efficiency. These are opportunities that we wouldn’t have seen otherwise, and it is not costing us anything.”

The contracts Klute has secured have had a ripple effect across the business, Cifani says.

“As we’ve partnered with some of these prime contractors, we’ve become aware of contracting opportunities beyond the government projects they work on,” he says. “That new business has allowed us to add five full-time estimators and a project manager. Overall, we’ve grown from about a dozen employees six years ago to 60 people today.”

Farley says, “Partnership, persistence and hard work have led Klute to tremendous growth.”



Three generations of ownership: Don, Dave and Steve Klute



Sam Absy regularly attends food expositions in the Middle East to market his products

## Previously closed market opens to Omaha exporter

**T**he combination of tasty new products and eager new markets has led to substantial growth for exporter American Premium Foods.

Sam Absy, owner of the Omaha-based business and a University of Nebraska-Lincoln graduate, says reports and guidance from the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) export consultant Josh Nichol-Caddy have been factors in helping fuel that growth.

“Josh has been very good at directing us to agencies that can help us, including export organizations and marketing programs at the state level,” Absy says. “We definitely made use of that information in the past year.”

Recent successes include regaining access to markets in Saudi Arabia, which had been closed to U.S. beef for four years, Absy says. “That is one of our best accomplishments,” he says. “We plan to begin exports there this year.”

American Premium Foods’ products are served by restaurants, catering companies and hotels, and are sold in some supermarket chains. With perseverance and guidance, the company has been able to expand the number of countries it exports to from seven to 10, Absy says, “and we have an eleventh coming up soon: Singapore.”

For the first time, Absy staffed a booth at SIAL Middle East 2017 in Abu Dhabi, which attracted 1,072 exhibitors and more than 26,000 trade attendees. Absy distributed marketing materials and even a few samples. “Participating in SIAL Middle East was a

great thing for us,” he says. “It gave us a one-on-one opportunity to educate many of our current clients and add new ones.”

The company began in 2014 as an international wholesaler and exporter of primarily “halal” processed meats to Middle East and Southeast Asia nations. Halal is an Arabic term which means permissible according to Islamic law. In reference to food, it is the Islamic dietary standard, as prescribed in Islamic Law.

Meat is the most strictly regulated of the food groups. The most common example of forbidden (or haram) food is pork. While pork is the only meat that cannot be consumed by Muslims, other foods not in a state of purity are also considered forbidden. The criteria for acceptable non-pork items include their source, the method of the animal’s death, and how it was processed.

American Premium Foods sells halal products such as beef bacon, turkey bacon, and deli products. Knowledge of the dietary requirements, and an educational background in chemical and process engineering, have been instrumental in producing high quality products that are well received globally, Absy says.

Nichol-Caddy previously provided international market research in preparation for the company’s attendance at Gulfood, an annual food exposition that attracts 90,000 buyers to the Dubai World Trade Center. He conducted the market research through the State Trade Expansion Program (STEP), funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA).

Absy, who in 2006 came from Palestine to Omaha to attend college and found the city a good environment to start a business, works with other food distributors and says he prefers to utilize Nebraska meat processors when he can. “With China’s elimination of its ban on U.S. beef and Singapore’s growing demand for halal meats, we see many opportunities in the near future,” he says, “for American Premium Foods and our partners.”



### EXPORT BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

is awarded to a Nebraska business that successfully sells and delivers products or services internationally.

2013 – Elliott Equipment

2014 – Bruckman Rubber

2015 – New Grand Ocean International

2016 – International Propeller Service

2017 – American Premium Foods

Embracing continuous improvement helps harness the knowledge and experiences of employee owners and focuses the business on driving value to customers.

## Company commits to continuous improvement

A desire to achieve operational excellence, increase sustainability, return value to our employee owners, give back to the community, and heighten our customers' experiences has fueled an active partnership between the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) and Truss Craft Structural Components, Mead Lumber Company's component manufacturing facility in Grand Island.

In addition to Truss Craft's plant manager enrolling in NBDC's Lean Enterprise Certificate program, the company volunteered to host one of the program classes at the Grand Island plant. Four Truss Craft employees and the plant manager participated in the two-day Value Stream Mapping class.

"This class was an eye-opening experience for our employees, as each became part of a team made up of individuals in leadership roles at other nearby companies," says Jeff Taake, vice president of manufacturing and commercial sales, regional manager at Mead Lumber. "They benefitted tremendously from listening to the questions and ideas from the other companies, while at the same time using actual lean thinking tools."

NBDC Lean consultant Renee Held says the manager and employees of Truss Craft display a "spirit of entrepreneurship" that embodies the mission of NBDC.

"The Truss Craft participants were willing partners in this workshop to recognize ways to improve processes and services to their customers," Held says. "This led to a three-day Kaizen process improvement event at the company. The Truss Craft team members were able to recognize ways to improve their operations, and

ultimately make these improvements to serve their customers' diverse product requirements."

Held says the ultimate display of entrepreneurship came in the form of allowing the NBDC team to present the findings of the three-day Kaizen event during a Building Component Manufacturing Conference last October in Omaha. This presentation shared with the nearly 200 attendees the story of the ways Truss Craft was able to improve its operations.

Taake says Mead Lumber "wants the continuous improvement culture to become part of our DNA. We

will continue to send key associates through the Lean Enterprise Certification program, while at the same time hosting our own Kaizen events."

Part of the company's commitment to the community is to work to limit its waste stream, and to educate customers regarding building products that will reduce waste and energy consumption.

"We currently recycle cardboard, wood, aluminum, and metal as best as we can," Taake says. "At Truss Craft and our other component manufacturing plants, we continue to invest in linear saws that increase the yield



## MEAD LUMBER/ TRUSS CRAFT



Jeff Taake, vice president manufacturing and commercial sales, Mead Lumber; Lewis Schelkopf, plant manager, Truss Craft

and reduce the waste from each piece of lumber.”

Mead Lumber not only encourages these best practices in other area businesses, it also gives back to the communities it serves. From Boys Scouts and Girl Scouts, to Habitat for Humanity, the American Red Cross, and United Way, along with many other local, regional and national foundations and organizations, Mead Lumber supports programs by providing materials, money, and manpower.

“Embracing the continuous improvement culture will harness the knowledge and experiences of our employee owners, and focus us on driving value to our customers,” Taake says. “The NBDC and its consultants will be with us on that journey.”



### CHAMPION OF SMALL BUSINESS

has been presented annually since 1983 to a Nebraska small business owner who has triumphed in the field of business and is an empowering entrepreneur who stands up for other small business owners. For all past awards visit [nbdc.unomaha.edu/about/champions](http://nbdc.unomaha.edu/about/champions).

2012 – Jim and Tim Schneider, S&S Plumbing

2013 – Douglas Garwood, Garwood Enterprises

2014 – Roger Franklin, Gary’s Cleaning and Restoration

2015 – Christine and Kevin Grooms, American Agricultural Laboratory

2016 – Cody and Chrystal Brooks, White River Feed LLC

2017 – Mead Lumber/Truss Craft

# CWD ranks in the top twenty nationwide

Unparalleled service to customers was the foundation of Cash-Wa Candy Company when it began in 1934, and it remains the cornerstone of Cash-Wa Distributing Co. more than 80 years later.

Headquartered in Kearney, now Cash-Wa Distributing (CWD) has grown to become one of the top 20 largest Broadline Foodservice Distributors in the nation, serving more than 6,500 customer companies, agencies, and organizations in 11 states.

CWD became a client of the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) in 2010, working initially with government contracting specialist Scott Knapp in NBDC's office at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Knapp researched contracting opportunities and provided information on the Central Contracting Registry (CCR) to expand sales in the government market.

After Knapp left the Kearney office, Chuck Beck stepped in and continued to assist CWD in its efforts to increase government sales.

"Our relationship with NBDC has enhanced our sales to governmental agencies, resulting in significant sales growth in our government customer category," says Jim Hanson, CWD vice president of multi-unit accounts foodservice. "Our conversations with Chuck have resulted in a better methodology on how we market our business to potential customers."

Beck has suggested ways to improve sales, including reviewing industry codes and updating government registrations to better reflect the range of products CWD offers. He has also provided information for the Defense Commissary Agency and The Exchange, as well as the Defense Internet Bid Board System (DIBBS), and registering to do business with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Hanson and Bob Kruse, new accounts manager, have attended NBDC's Meet the Buyers conference in Omaha. Beck worked with both men to establish a BidMatch account, and supplies CWD with market research and contact information for contracting officers.

Six years after the company was founded, Harvey Henning went to work for Cash-Wa when he was 17 years old, pedaling his bicycle around town to take and deliver orders. After his service in World War II, Henning became a full time employee. In 1957, he purchased the company.

CWD remains privately owned by the Henning family with second generation and third generation family members playing significant roles. Tom Henning, Harvey's son, is CWD's chairman and CEO.

"We are grateful to be the recipient of the Government Contractor of the Year award," Tom Henning says. "We know this will help us gain recognition and visibility with government agencies. This will provide potential customers the confidence that we have the ability and expertise to deliver great service and products that fulfill their needs."

Henning says CWD's relationship with Beck and the NBDC has yielded many new contracts. "Over time, we had many discussions within our company on how to pursue government business" he says. "We knew we needed additional expertise to be successful at obtaining new business. NBDC has provided us with the expertise, consultation, and help we required to drill down to a good marketing plan."

Hanson says CWD appreciates the workshops and other services NBDC offers. "The ongoing training and guidance is extremely important," he says. "It keeps us abreast of the changing marketplace, and continues to help us identify and reach potential customers."





CASH-WA DISTRIBUTING

BUSINESS  
OF THE YEAR

2017

**GOVERNMENT CONTRACTOR OF THE YEAR**

is awarded to a Nebraska business that is successful in selling and delivering products or services to federal, state or local government.

- 2012 - Issues Management Solutions
- 2013 - Calvin L. Hinz Architects PC
- 2014 - Mark VII Enterprises
- 2015 - Farris Engineering
- 2016 - Prairie View Industries
- 2017 - Cash-Wa Distributing



OPTIMAL FAMILY PRESERVATION

STARTUP SC

“Our challenge is to locate the resources, or create them if they’re not there. Finding other viable resources in a rural environment is not an easy thing to do.”

## Taking on a mission to keep families together

**Y**outh and family specialists Brett and Mandee Walter are experts at advising how to keep families together, but in order to open their Scottsbluff business, Optimal Family Preservation, LLC., they turned to the expert advice of the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC).

Incorporated as a private, for-profit social service agency, Optimal Family Preservation was started in 2013 as a pilot program designed to address the needs of youths in the juvenile justice system and the panhandle. At the time of the pilot program, Mandee was working with Speak Out, a non-profit youth advocacy group.

“After Brett started the pilot program, we worked to further it along by gathering data and referrals,” says Mandee Walter. “In 2014, we took that information and our vision to the NBDC and Ingrid Battershell in Scottsbluff, and she helped put our business plan on paper.”

Battershell and now Margaret Akin, the current director of the NBDC office in Scottsbluff, have supported the Walters with services including cash flow projections to obtain working capital, Quick Books accounting assistance, and general business management assistance.

New projects for the business include a potential residential youth home that would act as a viable alternative to detention and provide family crisis stabilization, Mandee Walter says.



Carlos Williams, Brett Walter, Mandee Walter, Colin Borgman

“The youth home would be a caring place, a place that could get these children back home and back in school.”

Optimal Family Preservation works with a variety of departments providing services, and its therapists are accredited and licensed by the state. The Walters were foster parents for many years. Mandee and her husband are certified as Emergency Medical Technicians, and Brett serves on the Gering Fire Department.

The business provides many services including intensive family preservation, anger management classes, supervised visitation, extensive family interventions and family support, and tutoring by certified teachers in conjunction with the Scottsbluff Public Schools.

Mandee says the challenges they face include securing stability for services once their programs are complete. “For example, we provide tutoring, but after our program is complete, how do these children get help within the schools?” she says. “Our challenge is to locate the resources, or create them if they’re not there.”

Optimal Family Preservation serves 12 counties in the Nebraska Panhandle. “Finding other viable resources in a rural environment is not an easy thing to do,” Mandee says.

She says the NBDC is a valuable source of information that she has and will continue to recommend to others who are seeking to establish or expand their business.

“First, NBDC is very accessible,” she says. “They’ve been very good with us arranging appointments and keeping a flexible schedule. Second, they offer a wealth of information about available services and business programs. Third, they provide continued support, which is very important once you get your doors open.

“They have made all these services available to us, and I give them five stars.”

## WEST POINT DESIGNS



### SUSTAINABILITY BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

is awarded to a Nebraska business that has demonstrated leadership incorporating environmental sustainability as a strategic business value that has resulted in improved business performance.

2012 - ServiceMaster

2013 - The Grey Plume

2014 - Greenhouse in the Snow

2015 - Sand Creek Post & Beam

2016 - Top Block

2016 - West Point Designs

## Waste represents opportunity

**F**inding ways to repurpose materials “is something we love to do” at West Point Design, Inc., says Erv Eisenmenger, owner of the company that produces Spread-All Manure Spreaders, considered to be the gold standard for heavy-duty industrial manure spreaders.

“The U.S. wastes a lot of natural resources when another use can be found for so much of it,” says Eisenmenger, who operates the West Point business, along with West Point Implement, with his sons, Scott and Chad.

Eisenmenger first became acquainted with the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC) through its consultant at the office at Wayne State College, Loren Kucera. “Loren was a customer of ours back when he farmed with his dad,” Eisenmenger says. “After Loren went to work in Wayne at the college, we got advice on several issues over the years. He always has good, sound direction and information to pass along.”

He says Kucera and the NBDC have also conducted training workshops at the West Point manufacturing

plant. “In business today, it takes a lot of input to keep on track,” he says. “We’ve been blessed to have sources like Loren and the NBDC.”

West Point Design was founded in 1993 when another company that we represented left the spreader business. The Spread-All Manure Spreader was the first product designed and built West Point Design, and it continues to be the main product marketed within a region stretching from the Dakotas south to Texas.

Since developing the spreader, Eisenmenger has designed, manufactured and marketed 10 products under the West Point Design tradename. Two of the products are no longer in production.

The company employs a total of 95 people at its manufacturing facility and at the implement dealerships in West Point, Columbus, Neb., and Missouri Valley, Iowa, Eisenmenger says.

There are five models of the Spread-All and each incorporates as much repurposed material as possible, including former military tires, rear-axles from semi-trailers, repurposed chisel teeth in the distributors, and the floor and sides that are made from composite





Chad Eisenmenger, manager, West Point Implement; Erv Eisenmenger, Elaine Eisenmenger, and Scott Eisenmenger, manager, West Point Design

material recycled from plastic bottles and other plastic items.

“The composite material is much better than steel or wood because it doesn’t deteriorate from the acids in manure,” he says. “It costs more, but it lasts longer.”

West Point Design also markets the Shade-All, a 30-foot-by-30-foot cover used in feedlots for up to 75 mature cattle to protect them from heat and high humidity. The Shade-All has also been used for shade by people at county fairs and concerts, Eisenmenger

says. Repurposed tractor tires are filled with cement to act as the Shade-All base, and repurposed steel tubes are incorporated as supports.

Another product, the Fence-All, is a portable cattle panel that can be moved with a loader or forklift and reused in several locations. It, too, incorporates recycled metal tubing.

“What some people consider waste, we consider opportunity,” Eisenmenger says. “Military tires, for

example, are superior to an ag tire and the military rotates them by age, not use. Some of the tires we get have never even been mounted. It would be a waste not to use them.”

Ensuring his customers are productive and profitable has been a key element of success, Eisenmenger says. “You have to make sure you’re helping them,” he says, “not just living off of them.”

# Healthcare clinic off to a healthy start

**H**ealthcare provider Kelli Lewandowski-King has learned that going into business for oneself does not mean going it alone, thanks to the Nebraska Business Development Center (NBDC).

Certified as an Advanced Practice Registered Nurse,

Lewandowski-King began her career in North Platte at Great Plains Health after earning her bachelor's degree in nursing from the University of Nebraska Medical Center. In 2004, she graduated from UNMC with her master's in family practice as a Nurse Practitioner. She later worked for the Sandhills District Health Department, and provided medical services to the Lincoln County Jail, Peoples Family Health Services and a local family medical practice.

In 2014, Lewandowski-King decided to explore the possibility of her own family clinic in North Platte. She met with a lender who referred her to Charlie McPherson, director of the North Platte NBDC office. She and McPherson met several times, and he assisted her with the creation of a business plan and the development of financial projections.

Rather than immediately open her own clinic, Lewandowski-King rented space at another local clinic so she could gain additional business experience. McPherson continued to check her progress and offer assistance. Lewandowski-King grew her practice to approximately 225 patients.

In 2016, she and McPherson updated her business plan and financial projections. In June, she opened the doors to Precise Family Care.

"Kelli started with minimal staffing, conducting much of the work for the practice by herself," McPherson says.

Since then, Precise Family Care has grown to more than 1,000 patients and more than 3,000 patient visits. She has two fulltime staffers and is looking into adding another service provider to keep up with the growing patient numbers.

McPherson says patients are impressed by Lewandowski-King's training and experience. She is a licensed Emergency Medical Technician and is certified in advanced cardiac life support. She is an American Heart CPR instructor and is Department of Transportation certified for the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

In addition, Lewandowski-King is a member of the executive board of Nebraska Nurse Practitioners, and is a member of the American Nurses Credentialing Center, and the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners.

"Kelli is an expert in her field, and her knowledge has been a valuable asset not only to her community, but to others around the state," McPherson says. "She has played a pivotal role assisting and mentoring other small business owners and entrepreneurs, including several individuals who were interested in starting their own nurse practitioner businesses. Two of those individuals have begun operations, one in Alliance and one in Kearney."

Lewandowski-King says she never could have gotten her business off the ground without the help of McPherson and the NBDC. "I sent him the numbers and said, 'OK, you tell me,'" she says. "Working with Charlie gave me the confidence that there truly was a need for my business."

McPherson continues to pass along information such as workshops that she could find pertinent to her business. "We chat quite often," she says. "I'll throw an idea at him and see what he says."

Coming from a healthcare professional, her praise of McPherson seems especially appropriate: "He takes good care of me."



Kristen Corfield, Kelli Lewandowski-King, and Anna Smith