

# ROCK COUNTY COMMUNITY FUND



## BACK TO OUR ROOTS

By: Sailor Jewett, Sophomore at Rock County High School

On the surface, it may seem like nothing happens in a small town. Sure, Rock County may not be much of a tourist attraction, but many would argue that there is much more to this place than just a rest stop. Generation after generation will grow up here and move out to pursue college and careers. A select few will return back to their roots. However, it isn't as simple as going back home to the ranch. There are vast amounts of reasons to return to rural communities. Do these motivators outweigh the obstacles that will stand in their way? I decided to interview some young returners about their decision to move back to a rural community.

It is easy to see that this area is very different from that of the city areas such as Omaha or Lincoln. Just knowing that points out some trouble you would have to face to live here again or to move here as a newcomer. For example, Rylee Stoltz stated, "Transitioning from an environment such as Lincoln, Nebraska to Bassett was definitely a change of pace from being a new college graduate. So much

so that I almost decided to go back to Lincoln." Also, as if the change of environment wasn't enough there is more to the move than that. Caleb Lackaff also said, "Many people my age have a hard time finding their own house to rent or buy. More and more people are moving back to these smaller areas, and there must be adequate housing to support them."

So why come back? Well Rylee Stoltz continued in saying, "I have decided that being in a small rural community is the best place I could start my future. Living in Bassett has given me the ability to not only grow my resume at work, but in my community as well." She goes on to say that in this community something as simple as an impression you leave on someone else can mean so much. Your time and hard work is valued as an individual whereas in the larger cities you can feel like just another passing face. However, do not just take her word for it. Harlee Hollenbeck backs Rylee up with the statement, "I enjoy how the community can come together to support events and each other. The

school system, businesses, and the people make it all worth coming back to." Her brother Andrew Hollenbeck added, "The people here are what helped me make the decision to return. They are always friendly and there if you need something." Plus Caleb Lackaff also mentioned the sheer convenience of this small community in saying, "I like that everything is 'close'. I don't have a commute. I can get to any business in town in less than five minutes. Traffic free. Life flows a little more gently as opposed to the slightly chaotic lifestyle I had in both Lincoln and Omaha."

All in all, the author's English teacher would probably call her use of the word 'community' repetitive and she does not blame said teacher, but there is significance to how many people replied with that word. Rock County is considered more than just a rest stop to many. It is a genuine community. Multiple people will say it is worthy of being called 'home'. Many will come and go and many more will come back to stay.

## BIOS FOR COVER STORY

**Sailor Jewett**, a Sophomore at Rock County High School, lives with her family in Long Pine. She is an introvert with time on her hands, so spends much of her time reading and writing. If you would like to read similar articles to our cover story, please follow her on twitter @Sailor17930783.

**Caleb Lackaff** grew up 20 miles south of Bassett on a family owned cow-calf Red Angus ranch. He attended Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln, NE and graduated in 2016 with a BS in Business Administration and a Minor in Psychology. He returned back to the area to be able to be closer to the ranch and interned with Sandhills State Bank. He was hired on shortly after as a lender. When he's not in the office, he is either helping with cattle work or fishing.

**Rylee Stoltz** grew up by Pierce, Nebraska where her family has a small Show Calf operation. She attended the University of Nebraska at Lincoln where she graduated with a Bachelors of Agribusiness with an option in banking and financing. She is currently employed at Sandhills State bank where she has had the opportunity to learn almost every aspect of the banking industry.

**Andrew Hollenbeck** is a graduate of Rock County High School who attended Central Community College in Hastings, graduating with a degree in precision agriculture and agricultural sciences. He moved back to the area where he works for Verny Krieger farming corn and soybeans.

**Harlee Hollenbeck** has recently accepted the position as the preschool teacher at Rock County Public Schools. She graduated from the University of Nebraska at Kearney with a Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood and Elementary Education. She continues to take classes to support herself in the classroom. She and her fiancé, Marc, recently bought a house in Bassett where they live with their son, Taysom. They look forward to watching Taysom grow up in the community of Bassett.

## DREAMS TO REALITY

At the inception of the Rock County Community Fund, one of the goals set was to build a sizeable endowment so that some earnings from the endowment could be granted back to the community. This dream has become a reality as generous donations have built an endowment of nearly \$800,000! So far, RCCF has been able to grant money to the Newport Fire Hall, Rock County Senior Center, and KBR Leadership Academy. With more money available for granting, a committee of seven Rock County residents has volunteered to serve on the Rock County Community Fund's Granting Committee: Megan Frizzell, Gary Shankland, Mary Roggasch, Lori Stolcpart, and Larry Buell. It was decided to get the youth of the community involved in this process, so Rock County High School students Paxton Smith and Jillian Buell were also selected to join the committee. The committee has been meeting regularly and has developed an application process for granting. Here are a few of the details:

- Our fiscal year ends on June 30 and we have a certain amount to grant each year based upon endowment returns
- Grant applications are due biannually on June 1 and November 1
- We may accept multiple applications from the same organization in one year
- Eligible organizations must either be a 501(c)(3) or a government entity (village, city, county, school district, etc.)
- Businesses are not eligible to apply

The full application is available if you click on endowment granting at [rockcountycommunityfund.com](http://rockcountycommunityfund.com). Please consider applying or encouraging others to apply. We hope to use this granting tool as a way to help the residents of Rock County turn their dreams for their community into reality.

## WE DID IT!

BY: HOMER BUELL

In late 2016, Nebraska Community Foundation gave us a great opportunity to partner with The Sherwood Foundation and Peter Kiewit Foundation to help insure our community's success in the future. For every two dollars, up to \$200,000, contribute to the Fund's unrestricted endowment by the end of 2018, The Sherwood Foundation would contribute one dollar. Throughout the campaign, Peter Kiewit Foundation provided grant support for Nebraska Community Foundation's peer learning sessions with other communities across the state. In less than a year, we raised the \$200,000 and were given an additional \$100,000.

Through grants like this, the Sherwood Foundation and the Peter Kiewit Foundation promote local capacity to address locally-identified priorities and thereby strengthen the common good we enjoy as fellow Nebraskans. Their guiding principle is to support *locally* controlled decision-making about the *local* future. The following priorities guide what they do and are also very important to how our Rock County Community Fund operates:

**Community Leadership** development that helps local community members expand and deepen their skills and experiences to better serve their community through learning and innovation.

**Community inclusion** that is broad based and intentionally developed to leverage the diverse skills and the perspectives of community members in service to the benefits and responsibilities of community life.

**Community collaboration** that aligns stakeholders and resources in order to strategically build upon and utilize locally-controlled assets.

Thank you to the Sherwood and the Peter Kiewit Foundations for providing us with this challenge and training opportunity, and a big thank you to all our donors who are helping to provide the resources to make Rock County a progressive, vibrant community!

## COMMITTEE SPOTLIGHT: TAMI COSGROVE

Tami Cosgrove and her husband, Keith, have lived in Rock County for the past 25 years. They have three children: Cash is a junior at UNL, Skylar is a freshman at Bryan College of Health Sciences, and Allie is an eighth grader at Rock County Public Schools. Tami has been teaching at Bassett Grade School for 23 of those years and has also spent many years coaching junior high volleyball, basketball, and track. She has recently started an after-school Running Club for elementary students.

Tami and Keith are very involved in the Sandhills Ranch Expo as Keith became a board member in 2010. This is Nebraska's largest ranch expo, which takes place in Bassett every June. Tami has also been a Girl Scout leader, a North Central Youth Athletic Club board member for numerous years, and is a member of Holy Cross Catholic Church.

Tami joined the RCCF in 2016. She feels that it is important to invest and recruit investments in order to keep Rock County alive and thriving. "We have an amazing hospital and school system, and we've recently seen an influx in young people moving back to their roots. It is imperative that we strive to listen to our community members and are able give financial support to entities in need. We are currently doing a feasibility study on building a community center." Tami hopes that one day her children will consider moving back to a flourishing Rock County to raise their families.





# SOMETHING MORE

BY: CALEB LACKAFF

Look up and down nearly any Main Street in a small, rural Nebraska town. You'll probably find a grocery store, a post office, and perhaps a place to sit and eat. Many small communities struggle to keep their stores open for business and the population thriving as many young adults move away in search of something 'more'. To combat this, Bassett's Main Street is starting to take a little different shape than most. A hotel and café, boutique, clothing store, hardware store, hair salon and others make up Bassett's Main Street scene. The newest addition to Main Street isn't something you'll usually see in a town of 600. A building on the north end of town, once a laundromat, turned day care, turned insurance agency, turned physical therapy office had sat empty for nearly a decade. David Gale, CEO of Sandhills State Bank, saw a vision for something 'more'. The Northern Sandhills has a geographically large gap in access to the many Sandhills artists in the area. Thus, the Old Feed Store Art Center was born.

Spearheaded by Gale, an economic development group in Bassett purchased the old abandoned building on Main Street and work began. Hundreds of hours of volunteer labor installed new floors, painted walls, hung a new ceiling, installed a privacy fence, and landscaped the back portion of the property. The Old Feed Store opened on January 15th featuring an exhibit from the Museum of Nebraska Art (MONA) – Joel Sartore's Photo Ark. That first month alone over 400 visitors passed through the building. Gale and the volunteers who made the Art Center possible could hardly believe the overwhelmingly positive reception.

The Old Feed Store Art Center is more than just an art museum. It is broken up into different sections that all serve a different purpose. There is a gallery that, twice a year, will host a collection on loan from MONA. A separate local gallery will display art by local Sandhills artists. A large classroom will host art classes with teachers and students of all ages. In the back corner of the building is a creative workspace for anyone who wishes to draw, paint, mold, or create. Lastly, a back courtyard transformed into a sculpture garden and reception area.

The Old Feed Store Art Center would not have been possible without the positive support from the community. The Center held one fundraising campaign from December to January and raised over a \$100,000 from nearly all local donations. Even the Peter Kiewitt Foundation saw the vision and agreed to grant the Center funds for additional remodeling and programming. The Center is open four days a week and hosted by volunteers. Plans for the future include remodeling the kitchen, bathroom, and completely finishing the sculpture garden.

Imagine getting a room at a hotel downtown, walking down the street to do some shopping, taking a break in a relaxing park across the street, and then finishing your afternoon viewing a world-class art exhibit. What sounds like a trip to Lincoln or Omaha can be found in our little community of Bassett and due to those who have a vision for a little 'more'.

The Old Feed Store Art Center opened on January 15th featuring an exhibit from the Museum of Nebraska Art (MONA) – Joel Sartore's Photo Ark. For more information about current exhibits and events, please join us on Facebook or visit [www.oldfeedstore.org](http://www.oldfeedstore.org).



Rock County High School Sophomore, Sailor Jewett, shared her writing at a poetry slam held at the Old Feed Store Art Center. The Art Center also hosts open mic nights for musical entertainment.



## A COMMUNITY CENTER ON THE HORIZON

A community center for Rock County is a project that our Fund is currently pursuing. A committee was formed in response to the community-wide survey indicating a need for this project. Those volunteers have spent time traveling to other communities to gather ideas for a center in Rock County. After initial tours, the committee saw the need for an architect to do a preliminary project budget and drawings for the community center. The choice was easy to go with Master Builders Associates of Doniphan Nebraska, as Kenneth Frederick has strong ties to Rock County. Kenneth was a 1987 graduate of Rock County and now owns a very reputable company with a diverse portfolio. His work includes initial programming, budget management, construction estimates, and contract administration.

The next step was to have a business plan to help with the development of the project. Odee Ingersoll of Pinnacle Consulting was hired to develop a business plan for a proposed community center. Leadership envisioned a comprehensive new facility to provide local and regional activities; a gathering place for private celebrations, public networking, educational activities, and newly created events. The facility will feature a large multi-use room with at least two separate meeting spaces. Support spaces and infrastructure includes a production and catering kitchen with storage and freezer equipment. Plans include a recessed stage adjacent to the multi-use event room. The building will be on a concrete floor and foundation and offers approximately 11,000 square feet.

The project is initially being developed as a private non-profit venture, in cooperation with Rock County Growth Inc, and Rock County Ag Society. Development of the project will be paid for from pledges, grants, and donations as well as donor endowed funds. Construction will not begin until 70% of the required funds are raised or pledged. A community center account under the Rock County Community Fund is currently accepting donations for this project. If you would like to donate, please feel free to either fill out and submit the pledge card in this newsletter or contact us.



# GIVING BACK – ANNUAL GIVING TOTALS

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 William and Ofella Ramirez Anderson  
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 Cheryl Arrowsmith  
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 Brian C. and Elaine Buescher  
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 Billy and Sara Butler  
 Jessica Clark  
 Leanne Cook  
 Sam and Linda Coulter  
 Flair Styling Salon  
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 Donald Fritz  
 Duane and Marcia Fritz  
 Corey and Megan Frizzell  
 Joe and Cheryl Hazel  
 William R. and Becki J. Herrington  
 Scott and Dorrann Hultman  
 Colleen Ittel  
 Dean Jilg  
 Douglas and Carol Ann Jilg  
 Mark and Mary Kay Keck  
 David and Linda Knoetzel  
 Paul and Kay Knox  
 Joanne Laine  
 Howard A. and Josephine K. Lamb  
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 Bryce and Elizabeth Lund  
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 Curtis and Michele Nelson  
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 Thomas and Carol Becker  
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Anonymous Contribution  
 Homer and Darla Buell  
 Paul Engler  
 Arlen and Jeri Nelson  
 Dennis and Terri Swanson

## Platinum (\$10,000-\$25,000)

Lawrence and Nickie Buell  
 David and Kristine Gale  
 Richard Mauch  
 Tri-County Bank  
 West Central Initiative

## Platinum Plus (\$25,000+)

Anonymous Contribution  
 Kiewit Corporation  
 Francis Kramer  
 Rock County Growth, Inc.  
 Sandhill Equipment  
 The Vetter Foundation

THANK YOU TO OUR  
 GENEROUS DONORS!

**Pledge Card**

If you would like to contribute to the Rock County Community Fund Endowment or if you would like more information on becoming a member of the 1888 Legacy Society, please fill out the form below and return to PO Box 506, Bassett, NE, 68714.

Name (as you would like it to be listed): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Donation: \_\_\_\_\_ \$50 \_\_\_\_\_ \$100 \_\_\_\_\_ \$250 \_\_\_\_\_ \$500 \_\_\_\_\_ \$1,000 \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ YES! I want my donation to go towards the community center building project.
- ☐ I am interested in automatic withdrawal on a monthly or quarterly basis.
- ☐ I want to be a member of the 1888 Legacy Society by including the RCCF in my estate plan.
- ☐ I am a member of the 1888 Legacy Society, having included the RCCF in my estate plan.
- ☐ I would like more information on the RCCF.

*The Rock County Community Fund is an affiliated fund of the Nebraska Community Foundation ("NCF"), a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. All contributions to our Fund are tax-deductible.*

*Please direct all inquiries to Homer Buell, Chairman of the Rock County Community Fund, at either (402) 760-0615, or via email at [homer@nntc.net](mailto:homer@nntc.net). The mailing address for the Rock County Community Fund is PO Box 506, Bassett, NE 68714.*

**Vision**

Rock County will be a progressive, vibrant community, which will welcome and retain residents, visitors, and businesses.

**Mission**

Serving as a leader and catalyst in developing solutions and financial resources to meet the immediate and retention needs of Rock County.

**Values**

**Trustworthy.** We are honest, competent, responsible and transparent as a fund and in our fiscal duties.

**Committed.** We are dedicated to carrying out our donor's intent and listening to our community's wants and needs.

**All-Encompassing.** We strive to include all citizens and organizations in our community as we work to improve our quality of life.

**Progressive.** We want to strengthen our community and proactively plan for future needs.

**[www.rockcountycommunityfund.com](http://www.rockcountycommunityfund.com)**



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