

ECODEVO 101

WYANDOTTE
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
Bonner Springs • Edwardsville • Kansas City, KS

EcoDevo 101: How Economic
Development Supports the Growth
of Wyandotte County Businesses

CASE STUDY:

 **INDUSTRIES**

CJ Industries is a locally owned and operated certified Minority and Women Business Enterprise (MBE/WBE) construction company. Founded in Kansas City, Kansas, their mission is to “Ignite relationships by being true to your word and getting the job done.” The company has been recognized as one of the top businesses in the industry:

- Named the 2019 Kansas Minority Owned Construction Firm of the Year in 2019 by the Kansas Department of Commerce.
- Listed as one of the Top 25 Minority Owned Construction Firms in Kansas City in Ingram’s Magazine.
- Already successful, CJ Industries’ growth has been accelerated by the business and investment attraction efforts of the Wyandotte Economic Development Council.



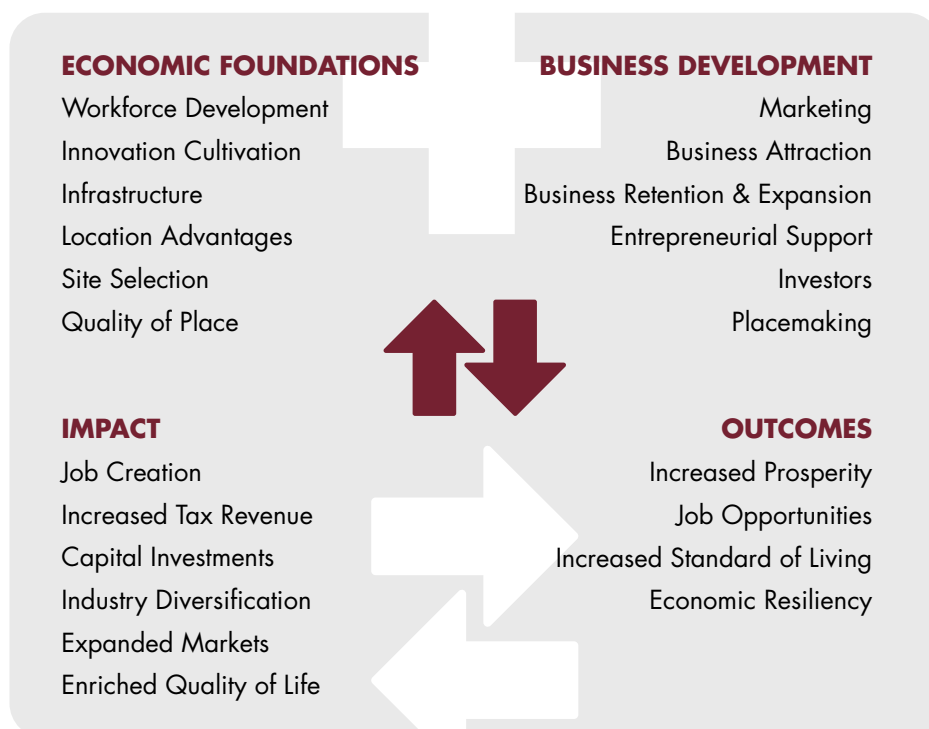
EcoDevo 101: How Economic Development Supports the Growth of Wyandotte County Businesses

Economic development is often discussed in terms of its parts, each category siloed and distinct: business retention and expansion, attraction, workforce development, and job creation, among others. Wyandotte Economic Development Council (WYEDC) joins other innovative thinkers working to flip the perception towards an ecosystem model where each objective is interlocked and dependent like the pieces of a puzzle to form the total picture of EcoDevo 101.

Economic Development Ecosystem

Structuring economic development around this ecosystem framework — like pieces of a puzzle — creates an environment where economic foundations and business development create impact and favorable economic outcomes. Wyandotte Economic Development Council prioritizes:

- Creating Jobs
- Raising Household Income
- Building and Strengthening the Workforce
- Improving Quality of Life
- Generating Tax Revenue





Character of Place is an Important Economic Foundation

In *"The character of innovative places: entrepreneurial strategy, economic development, and prosperity"* (*Small Bus Econ* 43, 9–20, 2014), Maryann P. Feldman asks, "Why do investments in certain places yield jobs, growth and prosperity while similar investments made in seemingly identical places fail to produce the desired results?"

While acknowledging that geography and clustering of resources play important roles, she postulates, "What matters most is human agency — the building of institutions and the myriad public and private decisions that determine what I call the character of place — a spirit of authenticity, engagement and common purpose."

In the Kansas City, KS, (KCK) region, Wyandotte Economic Development Council (WYEDC) supplies the human agency for placemaking, bringing assets, stakeholders, innovators and agencies together to fortify the region's economic development ecosystem. WYEDC promotes and strengthens Wyandotte County's economy through innovative approaches to programs, partnerships and incentives, as well as leadership in industrial, residential, office and retail markets. **In 2022, WYEDC's efforts resulted in 30 announced projects, \$418 million in capital investment, and 444 new jobs. Over the last 10 years, there has been over \$6.1 billion in capital investments.**

How Attracting Urban Outfitters to Kansas City, KS, Benefited Local Businesses & Our Community

\$403M
DISTRIBUTION CENTER

2,000 JOBS

URBAN OUTFITTERS

CONTRACT WORK FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES

Wyandotte County's central location, robust infrastructure and access to a skilled workforce were instrumental in attracting Urban Outfitters. Wyandotte County Economic Development Council worked closely with the Kansas Department of Commerce, KC SmartPort, the Kansas City Area Development Council, Kansas City Board of Public Utilities, and the Unified Government of Wyandotte County in attracting Urban Outfitters to the KCK metro region. Collaboration was vital for this transformational project.

In October 2022, the \$403 million Urban Outfitters distribution center — handling wholesale, retail and direct-to-consumer services — opened in Wyandotte County, representing the company's first such facility in the Midwest. Located on 65 acres owned by the Kansas Speedway, projections show the creation of 2,000 jobs.

The Kansas City Business Journal reported the facility is expected to generate \$270,000 in additional revenues for the city of KCK and \$200,000 to \$220,000 for the Bonner Springs School District in the first year of operation. These figures will grow over time.



CJ Industries Growth

In addition to investment capital and creating jobs, there is the under-told story of how the construction of the Urban Outfitters facility improved Wyandotte County's economic development ecosystem by contributing to local business success through contract work. The contract work provided existing Wyandotte County businesses with new clients — one of the tenets of business retention and expansion.



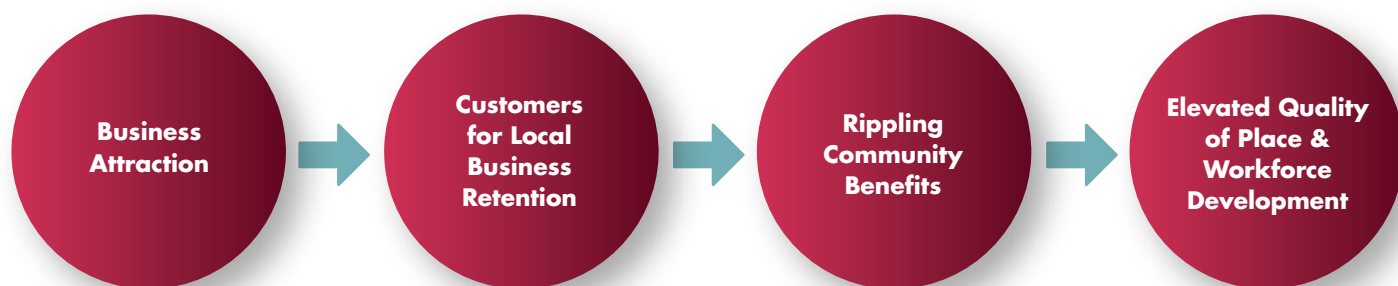
Urban Outfitters announced a commitment to using minority- and women-owned businesses in building out its facility. One such KCK-based business was CJ Industries, a general, mechanical and millwright construction company certified as a Minority and Women Business Enterprise (MBE/WBE). CJ Industries, which employs around 50 union workers, was a subcontractor for Blue Rock Construction, the general contractor for Urban Outfitters' new facility.

Mindy Rocha, President and Owner of CJ Industries, is local to Wyandotte County with a family legacy in construction. She worked for her father's construction company between high school and college. Both her father and grandfather were union pipefitters, and Rocha later got her own master plumber designation.

"I find it satisfying to continue our family history in construction," said Rocha. "I'm very proud that my dad and grandfather were in the industry. My great-grandfather was a plant manager at U.S. Gypsum. It's gratifying to have this history and tradition that I can hopefully pass down to my kids." CJ Industries, founded in 2013, was named for her sons, Christopher and Joshua.



KCK Community Benefits Ripple from the Success of CJ Industries



Wyandotte County Jobs

"I think probably the best part of doing business in Kansas City, Kansas, is helping to create jobs for the community I live in," said Rocha. "Being part of Urban Outfitters was huge. Getting to drive by it and know that it's going to employ more people in our community is a good feeling."

"The Urban Outfitters facility is going to continue to create opportunities for collaboration," continued Rocha. "The building is going to need maintenance and that will provide other construction companies opportunities. Then there are services needed like cleaning. It goes on."

Uplifting Women-Owned Businesses

The ripple effects for Wyandotte County from CJ Industries' success go beyond employment. Rocha dedicates her time and talents to the KCK community and to uplifting women-owned businesses. Her work directly contributes to the economic foundations of quality of place and workforce development for Wyandotte County.

Rocha is in her presidential year for the National Association of Women In Construction (NAWIC). "I'm honored to be the president of a local chapter. I think I was 'voluntold' to become a member, and it pushed me to find the voice that I knew I had but was scared to use. I think that really helped me find more of myself. And now they can't shut me up."

"It's empowering to be surrounded by women who understand what you are going through; who have experienced hurdles that not everyone can empathize with," said Rocha. "I mean, at the end of the day, we're all in this together. I had a lot of support from people in the industry as I was trying to accomplish my certifications. If I didn't have that safety net to fall back on, I wouldn't be where I am today. Having a small group of WBE owners from NAWIC, who I can call, is beyond beneficial. I grew up hearing about Rosana Privitera Biondo, Co-owner and President of Mark One Electric, and now I'm fortunate enough to call her my friend."

Rocha is also the first female board member of the Mechanical Contractors Association of Kansas City in its history. Additionally, she is on the board of Resurrection Catholic School.



"I think the more we expose younger generations to construction so they can see the benefits of a career in this industry, the better everyone will be."

Workforce Development Through Youth Outreach

If you think there are no more hours in the day for Rocha, you would be sorely mistaken. Her volunteer efforts, which add to Wyandotte County's placemaking, extend into workforce development through her dedication to introducing area youth to the construction trades.

"I just know if I hadn't grown up in construction with my dad, I would have never gone into it," said Rocha. "I think the more we expose younger generations to construction so they can see the benefits of a career in this industry, the better everyone will be. There are good career paths available besides college. College isn't for everyone and that's okay."

Rocha is a board member of Young Women on the Move. "This organization starts with young women in middle school in the KCK schools to help keep them on the path of education by giving them the self-confidence and structure they need to continue on through high school. The mission is to empower young women in Kansas City to become the leaders of tomorrow, to give them the mentors they need."

Once in high school, girls can attend Kansas City Camp NAWIC, a free, hands-on week-long opportunity to learn basic carpentry, concrete, painting, plumbing, electrical and welding skills from local journey-level tradeswomen. Camp activities include job site visits, tool demonstrations, and more.

"I'm a boy mom," said Rocha, "so after being a part of Camp NAWIC for a few years, I wondered, 'Why are we not doing this for boys?' Since I am a Board Member of the Mechanical Contractors Association, I started a Mechanical Trades Camp for high school boys, which, last year, was sold out in two days. We ended up adding a second day. They got hands-on experience with the plumbers and pipefitters. My dad was a pipefitter by trade, so mechanicals is kind of my niche, my home."

"The camp is growing and expanding this year by pairing with sheet metal to make it a Heavy Metal Trades Camp. The participants will hopefully get a free pair of Redwing boots and a bag full of tools. I'm super excited about that."



Improving Childcare

Through Wyandotte Economic Development Council (WYEDC), Rocha has also become involved with local childcare issues. Inadequate child care is an often underappreciated hurdle to employment that is one of WYEDC's focuses. "Greg Kindle (WYEDC President) helped me get more involved in the child care aspect of our workforce issues," said Rocha. "Greg knows if there is anything I can do to help him do better for our community, he can call me."

"I'm working with an initiative called Raising WYCO through The Family Conservancy. We're working with childcare providers to see where we're lacking and what we need. We are investigating how we can help support them because we don't have enough affordable quality childcare providers. It's necessary that community members realize that a childcare facility is a small business. They're not always seen that way."

2023 for CJ Industries

CJ Industries was hired by U.S. Engineering for work on the new Kansas City International Airport terminal that recently opened. “Our main contract was providing mechanical support,” said Rocha. “It was such a valuable experience for us; it was pivotal because of the recognition it got us. It’s not very often you get to be on a \$2 billion project.”

In 2023, CJ Industries will mark its 10-year anniversary. “I don’t know what’s not to like about Kansas City,” said Rocha. “We have some of the nicest people, and I feel like everyone has ‘six degrees of separation.’ You can trace everyone you meet to some common tie in Wyandotte County.”

Wyandotte Economic Development Council’s EcoDevo 101

Wyandotte Economic Development Council’s focus and facilitation improved the county’s economic development ecosystem by pulling the pieces of the puzzle together: business attraction and job creation (Urban Outfitters), business retention (CJ Industries) and improved quality of life (Rocha’s volunteer work impacting youth, workforce development and childcare).

What does the puzzle’s total picture look like? Prosperity for Wyandotte County residents. Through creating jobs by supporting local businesses and bringing new companies to the county, the median household income and tax revenues are increased. The additional property taxes from new projects help provide additional resources to the local school district, library system, community college and local and state general services. It’s EcoDevo 101 and it’s what Wyandotte Economic Development Council does. The best news is, there’s always room for new pieces for our prosperity puzzle.





Wyandotte County Economic Development Council (WYEDC) helps businesses harness "The Power of the Dotte." WYEDC promotes and strengthens Wyandotte County's economy through innovative approaches to programs, partnerships and incentives, as well as leadership in industrial, residential, office and retail markets. Contact them today! Follow WYEDC on LinkedIn and Facebook!



CJ Industries is proud to be a locally owned and operated construction company working since 2013 in both Kansas and Missouri. Their mission, "Ignite relationships by being true to your word and getting the job done," continues to guide them toward their future. Everyone at CJ Industries is devoted to providing top quality workmanship, leadership and service to every client. Contact them today!



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