

WYANDOTTE COUNTY IS A
HEALTHCARE COMMUNITY

RISE OF AUTOMATION TAKES
HOLD IN WYANDOTTE COUNTY

WYANDOTTE COUNTY
AND THE FUTURE OF TALENT

MAKING IT IN THE D●OTTE

MAGAZINE





Welcome

— GREG KINDLE

Welcome to the Making It In The Dotte magazine. This magazine aims to tell the stories that go alongside the data WYEDC collects, and to highlight the great things that are happening here in Wyandotte. The following articles highlight approaches in which our organization and our partners are working together to address the talent challenges before us. The big capital investment projects often catch the headlines, but it's the day-to-day work that goes on behind the scenes that is often the most important to our residents.

Today, "Making it in the Dotte" has come to symbolize more than just what we make here in our community. It has become more of a holistic idea, centered around what it takes to make a difference and to make a mark in Wyandotte County.

One of our collective goals is to find ways to overcome barriers to employment, raise the household income of Wyandotte Countians, and to find ways to better connect the business community to our future talent pipeline. WYEDC partners with our communities, the business and nonprofit sectors, education institutions throughout the county, Workforce Partnership, Kansas Manufacturing Solutions, and many others to work towards a brighter future. Through workforce solutions, the Community Health Improvement Plan, and other initiatives that are featured in these articles, progress is being made.

The articles featured in this publication highlight a few of the businesses and their stories. We appreciate them and the many businesses that choose to call Wyandotte County home. A special thank you to our partners at Kansas Manufacturing Solutions and Kansas City Kansas Community College for helping make this magazine a reality. Finally, thank you to all our companies for Making It In The Dotte!

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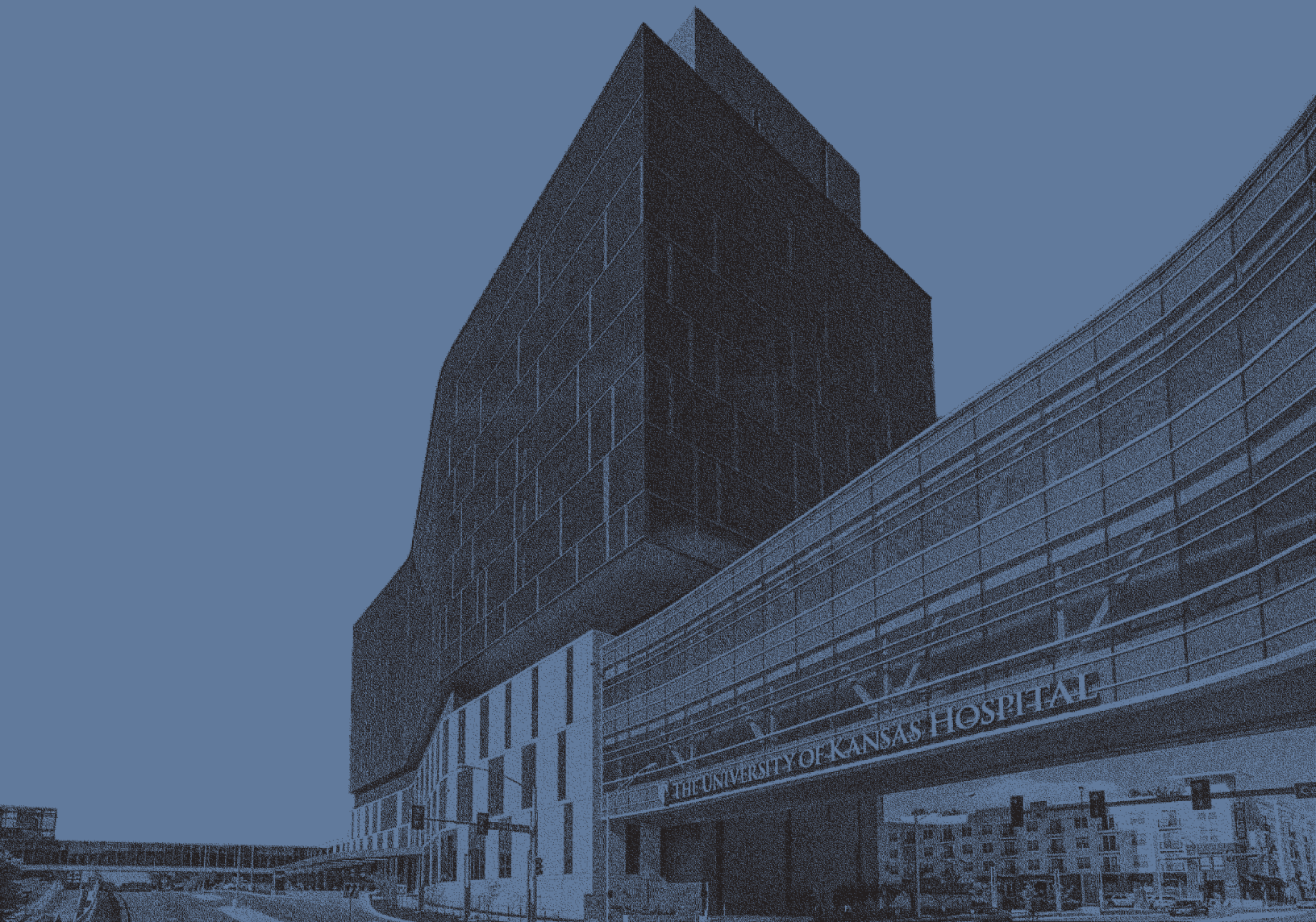
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THE TIE THAT BINDS US TOGETHER
WYANDOTTE ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

FEATURED

Wyandotte County is a Healthcare Community

Wyandotte County is a healthcare community, brimming with jobs and educational opportunities in the industry. The University of Kansas Hospital and University of Kansas Medical Center were the top two employers in Wyandotte County as of February 2023, and the county is continuing to see a steady growth of healthcare jobs in the region. Local school systems and colleges are working to meet the workforce needs of the healthcare industry through specifically designed healthcare programs, starting as early as middle school and high school.



"Piper School District has 6 Wall-to-Wall Academies through which middle school students have the chance to explore, then when they enter 9th grade as Freshmen they are enrolled and aligned into one of the six academies. We purposefully did this to ensure that all students belong to an academy and will graduate with a Market Value Asset along with a high school diploma," said Dr. Jessica Dain, School Superintendent, Piper Unified School District (USD 203). "Market Value Assets can be defined as industry-valued and recognized skills acquired in high school that create a more seamless transition from school to post-secondary education and/or the workplace. Our goal is that by 2030, 100% of students graduate with at least one Market Value Asset along with their high school diploma."

Dr. Dain is referencing the Kansas City Real World Learning, an initiative designed to prepare students and employers for the future through immersive learning experiences like projects and internships with leading business partners in the region.

Students with access to Real World Learning get a head start on achieving their career goals.

Through the academies, students will have a chance to explore potential fields of study they may have otherwise not encountered until much later in their educational journey. One of the six academies in the Piper USD is The Academy of Health & Life Science which focuses on five different focus areas in the science field.

"Along with our Academy of Health & Life Science, we also have a partnership set up with Kansas City Kansas Community College for our students to take classes on campus and graduate high school with their CNA license so they can begin working immediately," said Dr. Dain.

Turner Unified School District (USD 202) has a similar option for students interested in pursuing careers in the healthcare industry.

"Turner USD 202 has a Health Care Careers pathway at our high school. That pathway includes Biology, Chemistry, Anatomy & Physiology, Nutrition & Wellness, Medical Terminology and Care of Athletes. Their junior and senior year, students can take coursework at Kansas City Kansas Community College, where they can earn college-level credits and get their CNA by the time they graduate high school. These courses at the community college are taken during the school day and our district pays for their tuition. In addition to the CNA program, seniors can enroll in the Medical Assistant program at the community college," said Lauren Aiello, Director of Public Relations, Turner USD. "We are grateful for our partnership with Kansas City Kansas Community College that allows students to take coursework at the college while they are still in high school. The community college has more resources, such as machinery and other health care items, that gives students a more hands-on learning experience than we are able to provide in our classrooms."

Piper USD 203 and Turner USD 202 both benefit from a partnership with Kansas City Kansas Community College that opens the door to a more streamlined approach to gaining a CNA and college credits, with little to no debt.

Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools (KCKPS USD 500) offers a Health Science and Biomedical Pathway at all five of its high schools as well. These pathways present unique opportunities to connect with local health centers to gain firsthand knowledge and skills related to the healthcare industry. Like Piper USD, KCKPS is a member of the Real World Learning program that provides students with the opportunity to earn Market Value Assets to enhance their academic experience and to help prepare them for post-secondary success.

Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools has partnered with BullDoc, an on-site Federally Qualified Health Center (a product of University of Kansas Medical School), Children's Mercy Hospital, Kansas City Medical Society and KU Medical Center to provide students with hands-on research, projects and training in real medical environments. Two examples of these uniquely beneficial partnerships are upcoming programs for the 2023-2024 school year.

"Students in the Health Science and Biomedical Pathways will be able to participate in a clinical rotation experience with KU Medical Center's Elevate Internship Program during the 2023-24 school year," said Kelley James, Career and Technical Education Coordinator, Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools. "Wyandotte High School students can also participate in clinic rotations in family medicine and pharmacy at Mercy and Truth Medical Missions, just steps away from their high school."

Students at KCKPS participate in extended learning experiences like performing cancer research with KU Medical Center, and can even be published as part of the scientific research in medical journals. Lab Technician internships are also offered at all KCK high schools with the Medical Interventions course. The opportunities that abound in Kansas public schools that are not seen elsewhere in the nation; the Kansas City and Wyandotte County school systems are well-equipped for the need to prepare more students for careers in the healthcare industry as the industry continues to grow.

The University of Kansas Health System

In the 39th and Rainbow area of Kansas City, Kansas continues to grow through the construction of the 92-bed Cambridge North Patient Tower. This seven-story, 377,000 square-foot facility was completed in 2017. The new patient tower is a \$330 million investment, adding 700 new jobs to Wyandotte County. KU Medical Center has recently constructed a \$75 million, 171,000 square foot Health Education Center. This Center has increased the number of students trained in Kansas City, Kansas since it opened in 2017.

Providence Medical Center

Located in thriving Western Wyandotte County near the Legends and I-435, is a community hospital affiliated with Prime Healthcare. Providence is also associated with Saint John Hospital, located in Leavenworth. More than 1,300 skilled and qualified individuals provide nursing, medical and support services at both locations. The dedicated and experienced staff, along with 275-plus devoted volunteers, serves the health needs of Wyandotte, Leavenworth and northern Johnson counties and surrounding areas by providing expert care, close to home.

There are already 10,313 individuals employed in the Wyandotte County healthcare industry.

These numbers will continue to grow with the education that will occur at all of these locations. Local colleges like Kansas City Kansas Community College and Donnelly College are also prepared to further usher these students into well-earning healthcare careers. Kansas City Kansas Community College is a public two-year institution offering certificate and associate degrees with an outstanding Nursing program. KCKCC also offers adult education like ESL, GED courses and a highly popular EMT Paramedic degree.

Donnelly College is a Catholic College with an outstanding nursing program that has been ranked the #1 Most Diverse College in the Midwest by U.S. News & World Report for four straight years. Being such a diverse educational facility, the college provides students with the Success First Program.

This program can benefit those who are unable to test into college-level classes due to language barriers or credits from abroad that do not transfer and helps individuals gain the strong English language and reading and writing skills they need to succeed.

County school systems and local colleges are already acting to meet the growing need for healthcare workers in Kansas, however, many immigrants who have received education and licensing abroad are unable to practice in the state. Wyandotte County leaders are working to reconcile the challenges they face when relocating by providing resources like the workforce training and upskill programs offered by Workforce Partnership.

Workforce Partnership

Offers both short-term classroom training and work-based training options to prepare individuals to earn certifications or pass a licensure exam that will benefit their job search. Programs like this help prevent current skill sets from being underutilized while simultaneously building new ones.

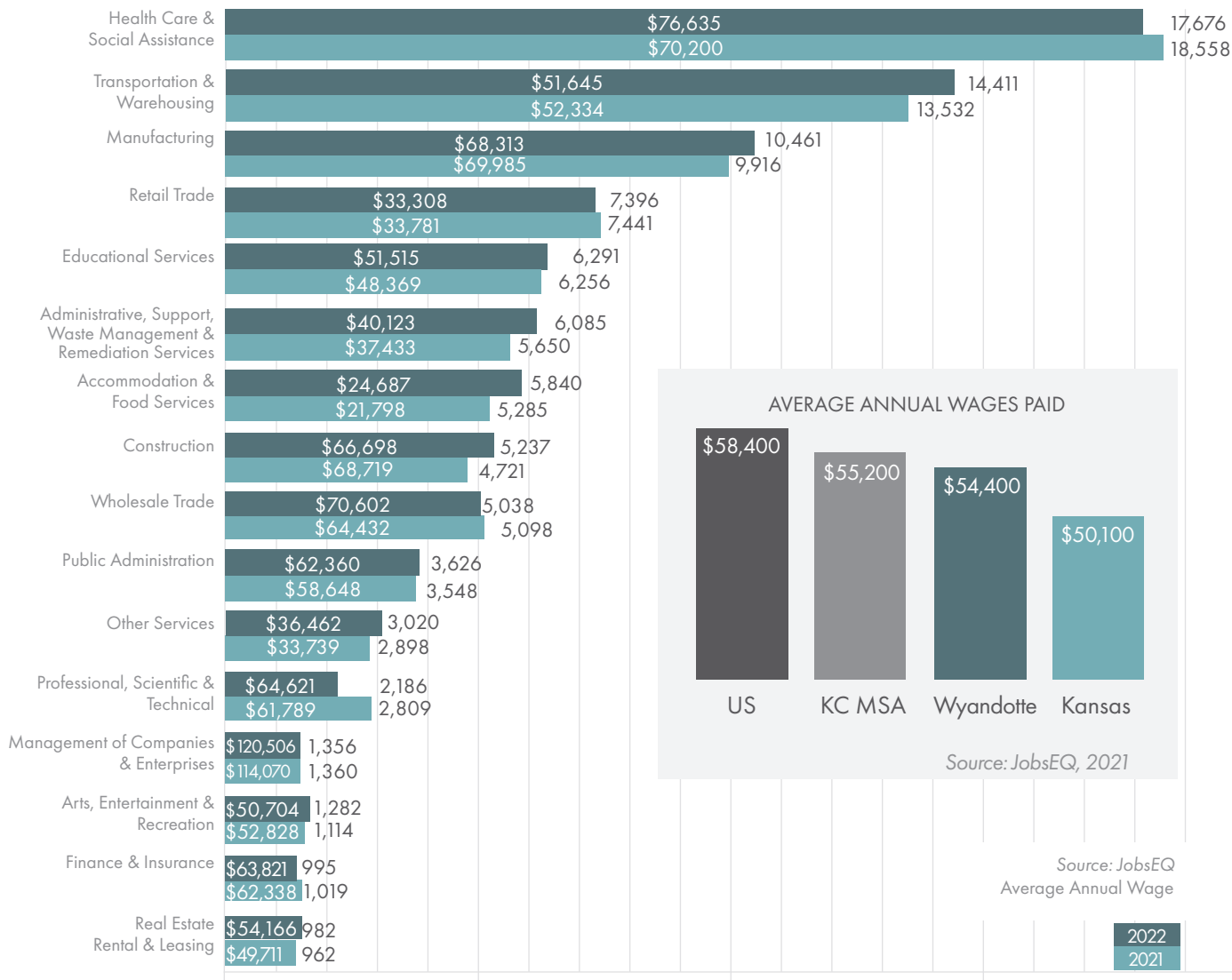
Additional resources for healthcare education and career choices can be found at www.dottehealthcareers.com, a website created by the Kansas City Medical Society Foundation. The KC Medical Society has curated a

list of high-impact healthcare careers with long term forecasted success for those who want to pursue a career in the healthcare industry but aren't quite sure where to start. Educational pathways, median wages and projected job growth are laid out in an easy-to-read format for each high demand healthcare career option.

Opportunity abounds in the Wyandotte County healthcare industry. It is an ever-changing field, and the community works together to address, prepare for and embrace these changes through educational opportunities, diversity training and business expansion.

Wyandotte County is proactive in creating partnership opportunities within our district between students and employers in order to develop the best possible healthcare community.

WYANDOTTE COUNTY EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY, 2022 VS. 2021





Kansas City Kansas
Community College

Elevate Your Workforce With Kansas City Kansas Community College

KCKCC offers tailored training, stackable industry-relevant credentials, and specialized degree programs that prepare the workforce your company needs.

- ✓ Kansas City's only Federation of Advanced Manufacturing (FAME) Education Partner—training the next generation of advanced manufacturing technicians.
- ✓ Get ready for our High Voltage Certificate starting in Fall 2024, powering up your workforce's skillset.
- ✓ Responsive, short-term, customized training solutions provided to partners such as GM, BPU, Amstead Rail, Empire Candle and many others.
- ✓ Partnering with others to offer credit-based programs to build a skilled workforce.

KCKCC.EDU

RAISING HOUSEHOLD INCOME THROUGH EDUCATION IN THE URBAN CORE

Raising household income through education is a driving force behind Wyandotte Economic Development Council’s (WYEDC) workforce development initiatives. Wyandotte County leaders and community partners have combined forces to reduce economic inequality and give residents a better quality of life while ensuring a steady supply of talented workers for local businesses.

One promising project, the Kansas City Kansas (KCK) Community Education, Health and Wellness Center, will be particularly beneficial to Wyandotte County residents and businesses. Dr. Greg Mosier, President of Kansas City Kansas Community College (KCKCC) is a leading advocate for reducing poverty rates in Wyandotte County.

His background in higher education has contributed to his interest in business expansion and workforce development over the last 30 years. He has developed many public/private partnerships within the business industry, and, in recent years, he became a board member of WYEDC. This year Dr. Mosier is serving as the Board of Directors Chair and he is leveraging this position to bring education, business and community partners together to make lasting change in Wyandotte County.

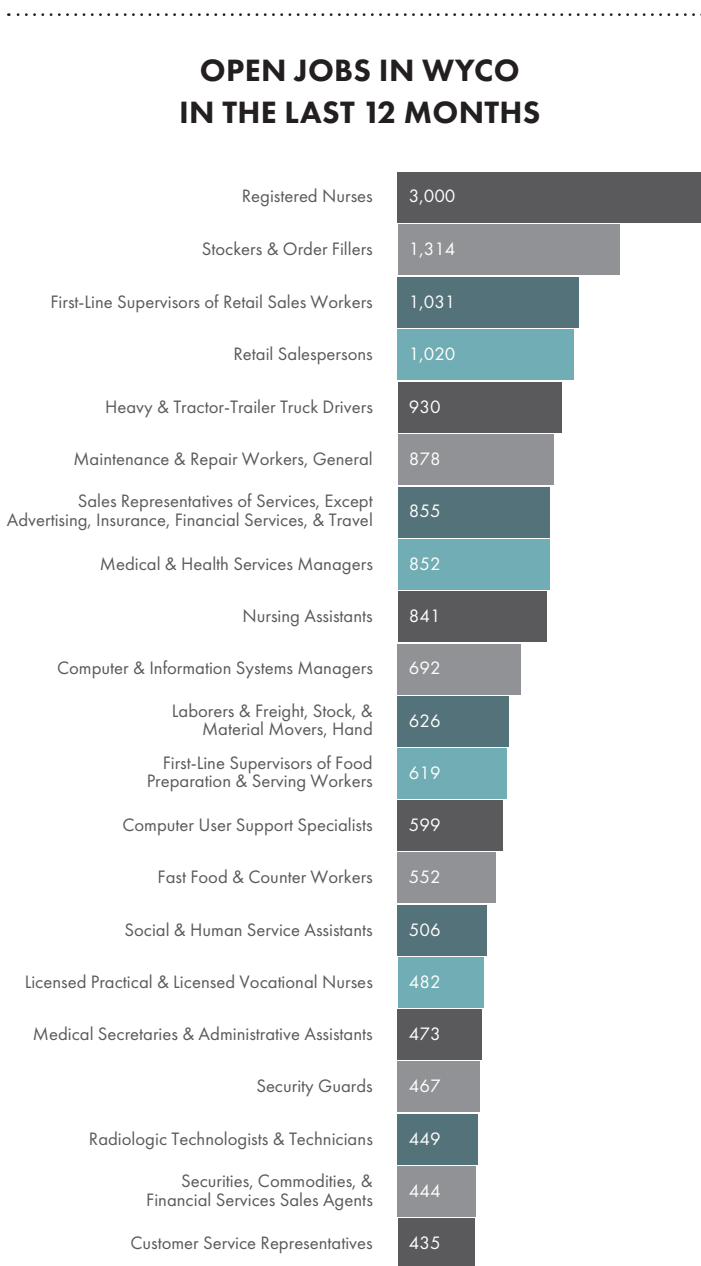
“Our efforts, specifically the up-and-coming KCK Community Education, Health and Wellness Center, will change a lot of lives. Once someone receives a quality education, that education will extend through the ages and end generational poverty. Areas like KCK’s Urban Core have been underserved for more than 30 years. We are trying to lift that burden,” he said.

The Community Education, Health and Wellness Center will be a comprehensive solution to meet the holistic needs of Downtown Wyandotte, also referred to as the Urban Core. It will provide access to local and affordable healthcare, quality education and financial planning services, all in one central location. The joint efforts of Kansas City Kansas Public Schools, Swope Health, CommunityAmerica Credit Union and Kansas City Kansas Community College will make the project a reality.

The state-of-the-art Center will play a critical role in increasing the prosperity of residents. As an underserved community, access to higher education, healthcare and dental care have been a debilitating challenge for the Urban Core for decades. As of July 2023 Wyandotte County has the highest median wage in the state at \$47,577, but it lacks the skilled workforce needed to fill these jobs locally (Kansas Wage Survey, 2023 Edition). Two-thirds of the county’s jobs are currently filled by individuals who live outside of Wyandotte County due to these skilled workforce shortages.

The Community Education, Health and Wellness Center is one solution that will heal the community, build a more skilled workforce and raise local household income.

“The Urban Core is only 6.7 miles to the main KCKCC Campus, but it might as well be 67 miles if a single parent is working a part-time job without transportation and a child or two to take care of. They simply do not have enough time to hop on public transit and make all the bus stops just to take a couple classes and then take the transport all the way back home at the end of the day. This Center will make education more accessible to those who need it the most in Wyandotte County,” Dr. Mosier said.



KCKCC will be the provider of education at the Center. Technical education programming will prepare graduates for easy transitions into successful high-wage career fields. The college will also offer ESL, GED, and other associate degrees and transfer programs. Two major areas of educational expansion include Commercial Construction Technology and Automation Engineering – there is a growing need in the field for trained individuals with these credentials.

Individuals with high-paying careers in Commercial Construction and Automation Engineering will contribute to a positive economic impact that touches and extends beyond the Urban Core. The Center will also partner with KCK Public Schools to allow 11th and 12th graders to attend the community college and receive their high school diploma and Associate of Applied Science degree in Commercial Construction Technology, simultaneously. Workers whose highest level of education was an associate degree make nearly 20% more in median weekly earnings than those with a high school diploma alone. (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Education Pays, 2022)

“Instead of going to a high school campus, students will come to this location for tech training and general education classes that will transfer back to a high school diploma. They’ll graduate with a high school diploma and already have apprenticeship experience. When their peers are just graduating from high school, the graduates from the Community Education, Health and Wellness Center will already be earning \$50,000-\$60,000 wages. This is much faster than the traditional route,” said Dr. Mosier.

Not only will these efforts open the door for Wyandotte County residents to gain knowledge and obtain better paying jobs more efficiently, but it will also contribute to the local economy as a whole.

Once the Center is complete, KCKCC will have access to the new partnership between KCKCC and the Kansas City chapter of the Federation of Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME). Manufacturing companies partner with FAME to sponsor students that will participate in classroom and on-the-job training through a paid apprenticeship. The earn-while-you-learn program is a unique approach that allows students to graduate to well-paying jobs with high-performing manufacturing companies more quickly. Students in the program are paid to work, which contributes to graduating without debt.

“Access to local and affordable healthcare is another huge challenge for KCK’s Urban Core and one of the reasons residents are unable to pursue education and jobs. Residents need to be in better health so they’re ready for education and then, eventually, the workforce. Swope Health will tend to medical needs and CommunityAmerica Credit Union will partner with the people to provide financial literacy training and entrepreneurship, business and financial planning services. These organizations combined with the college education from KCKCC will work together to provide a whole array of services so people downtown don’t have to go to other locations,” emphasized Dr. Mosier.

KCKCC has already committed \$13 million to the project and is asking for more contributions to this noble cause. The Center will be a solution to the decades long battle against social and economic inequities.

“There is not another community college facility in the country I’m aware of with private-public partnership like this – One that offers education, health services and financial literacy training all in one place, developing the site together. Each partner will own space in the building like a commercial condominium. This collaborative effort is unique to us,” said Dr. Mosier.

This transformative project is just one of the ways Wyandotte Economic Development Council and its partners are “Making it in the Dotte.” The community is determined to increase the socioeconomic prosperity and long-term success of Wyandotte County residents and businesses. The Kansas City Kansas Community College’s Community Education, Health and Wellness Center, led by KCKCC, is a model for community collaboration and lays the foundation for future economic prosperity for all Wyandotte County residents.



Median Household Income

Wyandotte County MHI has improved 5 of the last 6 years.

2021: \$52,366 (68th)*

2020: \$48,093 (82nd)*

2019: \$46,881 (87th)*

2018: \$47,285 (66th)*

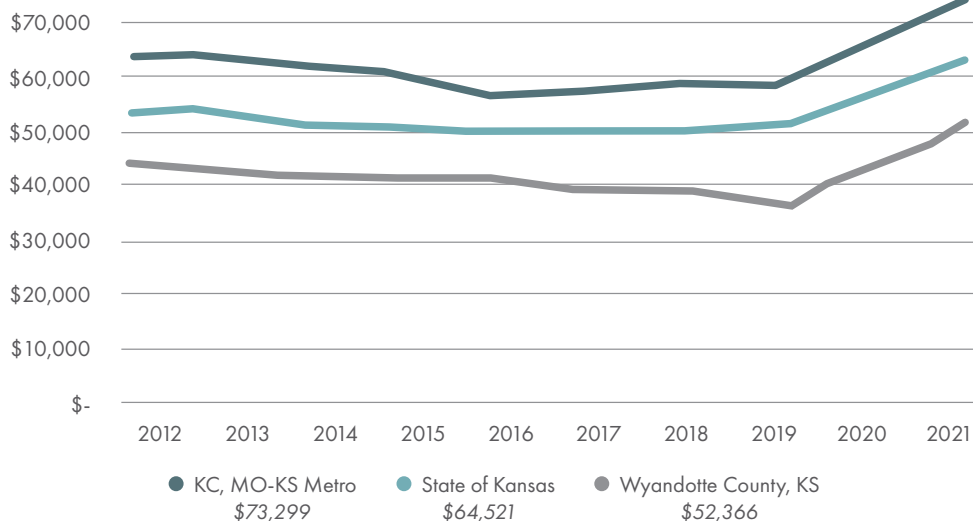
2017: \$46,310 (76th)*

2016: \$43,396 (87th)*

*Out of 105 counties in Kansas

2019-2022 Source: US Census ACS 5-year
2015-2018 Source: US Census ACS 1-year

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME COMPARISON





WYANDOTTE COUNTY COMPANIES ARE COMPETING ON THE GLOBAL STAGE

Wyandotte County is home to many noteworthy small and mid-sized companies that are competing on the global stage. From fulfillment centers for internationally recognized brands like Urban Outfitters to smaller companies like Knit-Rite that make specialized products for amputees across the world, businesses in Wyandotte County are expanding and making a name for themselves internationally.

A large support system is available to Wyandotte County businesses that make it easier to be competitive. Wyandotte Economic Development Council (WYEDC) prioritizes engagement with existing companies to determine what their needs are and provides potential solutions through its Business and Retention Expansion (BRE) program. A dedicated team member from WYEDC conducts interviews with businesses to collect quantitative and qualitative data that identifies business needs and opportunities for growth. They then use this data to connect these businesses with the resources they need to grow.

According to results from the most recent WYEDC business surveys encompassing nearly 170 companies, 18% of WYCO businesses plan to expand within 1 year, 20% of local businesses introduced new products within the last 3 years and 64% of industries are hiring. These statistics point to growth and movement towards the global stage for many WYCO businesses.

"The Wyandotte Economic Development Council has been a great resource. During our expansion in 2017, the team guided us on the right path every

step of the way. They helped us get our construction package pulled together from outside engineering to inside tax advantages. They brought all the nitty-gritty stuff into one resource and made us aware of what our options were and continued to be a huge support through the process," said Matt Morrow, Facility Project Manager, INX International Ink Co.

INX International Ink Co. began their building expansion in 2015 and had completed it by 2017. The building was expanded by 37,000 square feet, making it 85,028 square feet total with additional expansion potential. This building addition allowed INX International more space to expand their operations.

"INX International manufactures energy-curable materials, inks and coatings used across the globe for cereal boxes, packaged food items, cosmetics and more," said Morrow. "Ink is a material most people never consider or think about, but it's on everything - from an automobile to dash components to food supply in grocery stores to the aluminum soda can in your refrigerator right now. That is what we make. It is 100% consumable."



A product that is used every single day across the world is made right here in Wyandotte County. "While the building expansion was primarily for more space for machinery and operations, we have hired more team members and expanded production because of this project," said Morrow.

Expanding companies like INX have access to a business ecosystem through WYEDC where business owners can meet and collaborate on new ideas. One of these programs is the Kansas City Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME) chapter. WYEDC was a key player in starting the FAME chapter in Kansas City by bringing INX and other businesses in the corridor together to discuss the program. All the companies that are FAME sponsors are global competitors. This apprenticeship program helps enrich companies in the county by putting students on a path of education and allowing more companies to retain workers who want to make a career out of their training.

Hiring a trained workforce is critical for Wyandotte County companies competing internationally. Infrastructure and transportation assets are too.

"A critical part of businesses being able to compete on a global scale is finding a home base that supports these efforts. Wyandotte County has the best highways with the lowest traffic issues for a metropolitan area— a positive for distributing products," said Morrow.

Businesses in Wyandotte County can reach 85% of the U.S. population in two days or less. In 2018, The U.S. Department of Transportation reported that the Kansas City metropolitan area had one of the highest numbers of highway miles per capita in the entire country. Businesses here are able to ship out products or receive supplies efficiently. Wyandotte County is served by five major railroads and the new Kansas City International Airport which sits just north of Wyandotte County further supports the national and global distribution channels in place.

Global companies like Urban Outfitters are benefiting from these strategic location advantages. The company has a \$403 million, 880,254-square-foot distribution center that will ultimately employ approximately 2,000 people. They have incorporated the latest technology in their facility to ensure competitive product delivery times. Tiffany Stovall, CEO, Kansas Manufacturing Solutions (KMS), said the organization is working with other companies to incorporate new technologies and automated systems.

"Manufacturing companies in Wyandotte County are embracing automation as a way to augment what they are already doing and become even more efficient in the process. They are making space for it because there's a workforce shortage in every industry," she said.

With the proper automations in place, Wyandotte County companies like Urban Outfitters and Amazon are globally competitive and reinforce the Kansas City metropolitan area as the second largest rail hub in the U.S.

Morrow says companies are watching what's happening in Wyandotte County, and its reputation for competitiveness is growing.

"Wyandotte County has a lot of grassroots efforts in manufacturing. The area and the people involved hold all the key ingredients of modernizing manufacturing and re-establishing it in the southern states."

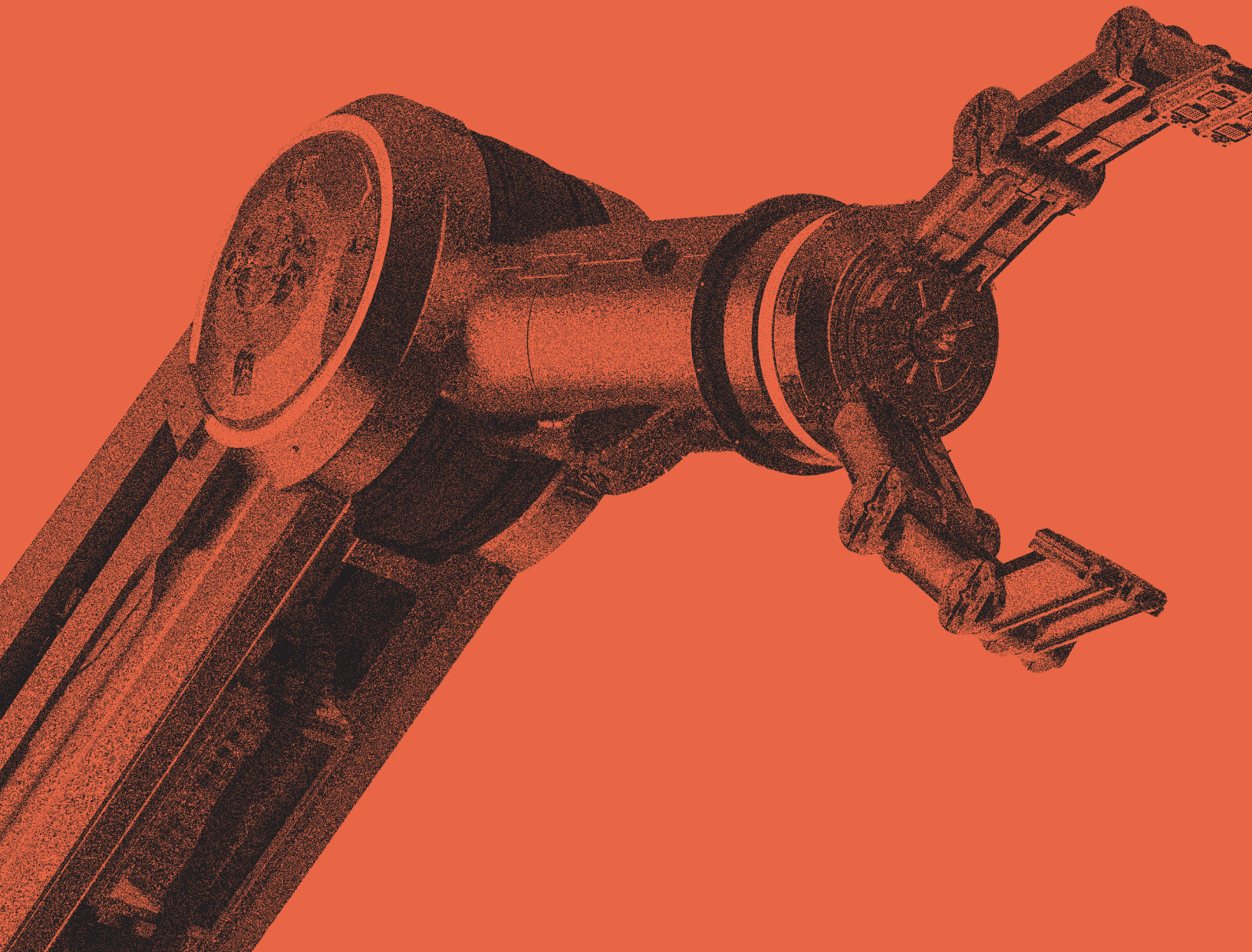
"We are a twin city to Kansas City, Missouri. The river separates the two Kansas Cities. There are organizations on that side that are taking note of what is happening here. They want to be a part of it. They admire our educational programming, and they see our expansion plans. We are influential in the local and global competition," he added.

WYEDC is at the heart of the efforts to expand manufacturing in Wyandotte County and position businesses for global success. "Our manufacturing companies are led by innovative thinkers who are deploying new technologies, collaborating on workforce education and working with partners to strengthen the community," said Greg Kindle, President of WYEDC. "Globally-competitive companies are emerging from Wyandotte County, Kansas that will revolutionize the future. Our job is to help them do it."



Rise of Automation Takes Hold in Wyandotte County

The rise of automation is modernizing production, increasing efficiency and simplifying the lives of many manufacturers. More companies are adopting robotics, for example, and using them as a way to strategically enhance their existing workforce. "Wyandotte County manufacturing companies are pioneering new technologies and leveraging them to become even more competitive," said Greg Kindle, President of Wyandotte Economic Development Council (WYEDC).



"We've been talking about these topics for a long time. Around eight to ten years ago, companies would balk at the idea of automation and digital manufacturing because they thought it would replace jobs," said Tiffany Stovall, CEO, Kansas Manufacturing Solutions (KMS). "We are now talking about automation not as a way to replace jobs, but as a way to solve workforce challenges. The conversation has shifted quite a bit."

KMS is focused on helping manufacturers be more competitive by providing services like data information and skill building programs directly to those interested in learning about automation. They help businesses to answer questions surrounding automation like: Is this right for me? Which systems are the best for our businesses? How do we implement these systems and train employees on how to use them? By addressing these questions upfront, KMS is helping to make the transition easier and a useful stepping stone on the pathway towards the rise of automation.

"KMS is part of the Manufacturing Extension Partnership, a public-private partnership out of the National Institute of Standards and Technology. There is one in every state, and we exist to help manufacturers live and grow," said Stovall. "We have a team of experts working with company leadership and assisting businesses from the front office to the shop floor."

The rise of automation is being felt across all industries and 31% of businesses have fully automated at least one function, according to a 2020 global survey by McKinsey & Company. This finding suggests that more organizations are pursuing automation now than they were in past years. The most common use for automation in most businesses is automated data entry and the robotic processing of digital business platforms (McKinsey). The automation of these processes is a substantial time saver. Stovall echoes that most businesses start transitioning into the use of robotics solely for logistical or design purposes.

"We work with companies in Wyandotte County, partnering with the Technology Development Institute (TDI) to help companies uncover opportunities to integrate robotics within their facilities. Some companies will start to dip their toe into what automation might look like when they can use it for cyber security or digital design (3D). We help roadmap their readiness in these areas, starting with collaborative robotics," Stovall explained.

76% of businesses surveyed by Formstack in 2018 used automation for standardizing or automating daily workflows; 58% used automation for data/reporting for planning; and 36% used it for regulation or compliance. These small tasks can be a waste of time, money and manpower so the number of businesses using automation for menial tasks has grown. "Many companies realize robotic technology is now essential to running their business," said Stovall.

To some small and midsize businesses, automation saved their companies during the pandemic. According to a 2021 Zapier Data Report, 63% of small to midsize businesses say automation allowed their company to quickly pivot and transition their goods and services online during the outbreak.

Businesses this size are still seeing the benefits of automation in a post-pandemic world –

88% of small business owners say automation allows their company to compete with larger companies
(Zapier).

Automation has the capacity to reduce operating costs, increase efficiency and lead to higher profits for businesses of all sizes. The question at hand for many Wyandotte County businesses is how to attain a skilled workforce that can operate machines to their optimal capacity.

"We work with many other colleges and organizations in the community. The WYEDC team has a success-driven perspective, and the way they work with companies to meet their needs is absolutely innovative and inspiring," said Stovall. "We collaborate with TDI and Pittsburg State University on automation trends and training, and Wyandotte County's Kansas City Kansas Community College is one of our biggest partners. These organizations do a really great job preparing students with practical skills that shift them into jobs in manufacturing quickly."

Chuck Saunders, Automation Engineer Technology Instructor at Kansas City Kansas Community College (KCKCC), said education surrounding automation is also evolving. As interest in robotics steadily increases, the KCKCC advisory board is aligning with the industry to adjust and improve educational programming.

"Recent changes in robot technology are allowing robotics to be used in applications that were previously not considered. This is partially because over the past 5-7 years, robots have become less expensive, easier to learn and, most importantly, much safer to work within close proximity,"
said Saunders.

With the expansion of robotic capabilities comes students interested in knowing how to control and program the technology behind the robotic functions. "We are seeing a different type of student in the skilled trades than in years past. There is still the desire for the satisfaction of working with equipment to achieve a specific result, but now we have students who were born into this tech-heavy world. Many of today's students could use a tablet before speaking in sentences," Saunders explained. "Their level of tech awareness is now quickly changing what we consider possible."

With more technically-inclined students and an adaptable community interested in evolving with the times, local organizations like KMS and colleges like KCKCC are capitalizing on these strengths and developing a manufacturing workforce that is more competitive and profitable.

Local manufacturers are also pitching in to retain a skilled workforce that supports robotic advancements. Each manufacturer in Wyandotte County offers training specific to their individual robotic equipment. With the equipment to train and practice on, aspirational students are better able to commit new concepts to memory.

"The most valuable skill we can help them develop is how to self-teach. Technology changes so fast that even if we taught them everything there was to know about robotics today, they would be under-skilled in 2 to 3 years if they didn't stay curious and seek new information. We develop students that can self-teach when they encounter challenges," Saunders explained.

Automation has proven to be a beneficial addition to manufacturing. In recent years, more manufacturers are acknowledging these benefits with 2 out of 3 manufacturing workers admitting it keeps them more productive at work (Zapier). Streamlined manufacturing processes, errorless data consolidation and a mentally stimulated workforce result from integrating automation successfully into the industry. Wyandotte County manufacturers and their support systems are setting a trend of success for the future of automation.

AMSTED RAIL IS LEVERAGING THE REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM TO BUILD A LASTING TALENT PIPELINE

Wyandotte County businesses are leveraging Registered Apprenticeship programs to train and maintain a diverse workforce. These apprenticeship programs provide Wyandotte County students with the opportunity to refine industry skills, while giving employers like Amsted Rail access to a skilled workforce.

"Registered Apprenticeship provides young adults with an opportunity to learn and develop skills in a profession where they can have a career and financial stability, while also providing employers with much needed skilled labor," said Denise Dare, Human Resources Manager, Amsted Rail.

A Registered Apprenticeship (RA) is a government program developed to create an industry-driven career pathway where employers can train their future workforce, and individuals can obtain stable, paid work experience. Through the RA program workers can receive progressive wage increases while they're learning from a qualified classroom instructor. A Registered Apprenticeship results in a nationally-recognized credential that allows students to secure employment anywhere.

The RA program continues to show strong growth throughout the nation with a 64% increase since 2012, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, FY 2021 Data and Statistics. Across the United States, over 593,000 apprentices were obtaining skills to succeed and earning a living wage in 2021 alone.

"Wyandotte County is rapidly growing with new businesses and there is a shortage of qualified candidates to fill skilled laborer positions," Dare said. "We are using the Registered Apprenticeship program to help fill this void."

Shonda Anderson, Director of Apprenticeship and Internship, Kansas Office of Apprenticeship, echoes this statement. "The need for skilled trades talent in Wyandotte County is significant. The Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) performed a skilled trades talent report in 2019 and found 'nearly two-thirds of the workforce in transportation and material moving occupations will need to be replaced over the next five years, while roughly half the workers in the production, construction, and installation, maintenance and repair occupations will need to be replaced,'" Anderson said. "At the same time, skilled trades enrollment in career and technical schools and colleges is decreasing, and it's hard to recruit for these essential positions. With the advent of retirement and the need to attract more young people into the skilled workforce, Registered Apprenticeship provides a game-changing system for attraction and retention."

In Kansas, the program is employer designed, allowing the employers to seek the specific skills they need. When there is a lack of skilled candidates, the RA program develops them. There are 118 sponsors in the state. The "sponsors" are the employers participating in the program, and Amsted Rail will soon be one of them. "With the current shortage of skilled trades, we are excited to start an apprenticeship program that we believe will be beneficial in helping us as a company. It will allow us to have some control on how positions are filled and with what specific skills," said Dare of Amsted Rail's application to become a Registered Apprenticeship sponsor.

Registered Apprenticeship can be developed for any of Wyandotte County's most in-demand, hard-to-fill and high-wage occupations. "There are countless conversations happening about creating Registered Apprenticeship systems to meet these needs. Industries such as the railroad, CDL

transportation and warehousing, manufacturing, construction, healthcare and more are ripe to develop and maintain long-term, sustainable Registered Apprenticeship programs that have immediate benefits," said Anderson.

The RA program pairs on-the-job learning with technical instruction and mentorship within a company. Long term employment is the priority, and Return of Investment rates are high for employers at \$1.48 for every \$1 spent, according to KansasWorks.

"The WYEDC is working hard to engage their partners in these important opportunities, but there is already robust Registered Apprenticeship activity in the region. Both labor and industry organizations are apprenticing thousands of Kansas City residents. Some of the largest in Wyandotte County and surrounding areas include Oracle Cerner, General Motors Fairfax and the Greater Kansas City Laborers Training center," Anderson said.

With 4,044 apprentices statewide working in 172 different occupations, according to the KansasWorks Office of Registered Apprenticeship, the RA program is flourishing.

The RA program leads to occupational proficiency and job retention. There is currently a 91% employment retention rate for those who have completed the apprenticeship program, according to current information from the U.S. Department of Labor. The program is a way for Wyandotte County businesses to cultivate lasting employer/employee relationships.

"The program sets students up for success by teaching them skills that will benefit them for a lifetime. Upon graduation and completion of the program, they are ready to hit the ground running and start their career. The program is especially beneficial to those students who may not want to attend college," Dare explained.



"The word "apprenticeship" is really going through a renaissance and is being emphasized across business, state government, non-profits, public workforce systems and the federal government. We are leveraging this excitement to grow high-quality apprenticeship programs across the entire state!" Anderson said.

Apprenticeship programs have a proven track record of producing strong results for both employers and students. These students, or "apprentices," will become skilled workers with access to hundreds of occupations that pay competitive wages. Wyandotte County employers and employees alike are witnessing these workforce improvements firsthand. Registered Apprenticeship is beneficial across all industries, not just an inclusive few.

"In Kansas the most significant barrier is that many people believe Registered Apprenticeship is a union-only training system. The unions have long brilliantly used the apprenticeship system because it works! But since 2017, the modernization of apprenticeship has grown to include non-traditional apprenticeship industries such as IT, healthcare and now teaching. We can also help make implementation and growth easier through the Registered Apprenticeship System," said Anderson. "The opportunities are endless."



WYANDOTTE COUNTY'S FEDERATION FOR ADVANCED MANUFACTURING EDUCATION IS THE FIRST WEST OF ST. LOUIS

With over 250 manufacturers across more than 15 industries in Wyandotte County, manufacturing is undoubtedly an important industry employing residents throughout the county. WYEDC and its partners create opportunities for the manufacturing industry by putting programs in place to ensure a steady stream of educated and able employees for the industry. The Kansas Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME) Program is one of these vital resources.

The FAME Program is an "earn and learn" program where students are sponsored by an employer. They go to school two days a week and work for their employer three days a week. The students pay for their own school but are paid enough by their employer to more than cover any educational costs for the program. There are also multiple scholarship opportunities for this program. "The beauty of it is that students come out of the program with two years' worth of work experience, an associate degree, a job paying \$50,000-\$60,000 or more and no debt! I can't think of another program similar to this," reported Eric Young, former Chairman and current member of the board for the Kansas City FAME (KC FAME) Chapter.

Students ready to gain valuable employment experience in the manufacturing industry while also drawing an income can thrive by taking part in the FAME program. The Kansas City FAME Chapter is the first extension west of St. Louis.

As the Operations Manager of Amsted Rail since 2018, Young was part of the original discussion to bring the FAME program to Kansas. He has been involved since its inception in 2021, and Amsted Rail was one of the original partners. FAME is a national program, created by Toyota in 2010 before transferring to the Manufacturing Institute for expansion in 2019.

FAME currently has the support of 400 manufacturers nationwide and continues to grow. The Kansas City Chapter is relatively new, but Wyandotte County is already experiencing the benefits. “The program is entirely industry run, so we all work together on a regular basis which builds relationships between manufacturing companies because we all have a common goal,” said Young.

Danica Rome, Vice President of Kansas Manufacturing Solutions (KMS), agrees that the FAME Program has unifying power. She said the program is essential to the KMS goal of growing and sustaining the manufacturing industry in Kansas.

“What makes this program unique is that FAME Chapters are established by a coalition of manufacturing companies in a local area. The chapter creates by-laws to ensure the member companies are in sync with the mission, which includes the program being employer-led. The member companies recruit from the local community to build a future talent pipeline,” said Rome.

“The FAME Program has been essential to our efforts to build a solid, skilled manufacturing workforce for Kansas manufacturers.”

Amsted Rail, Berry Global, Catalent, CHG, Cii Foods, Empire Candle, Flowers, Garmin, Gehrig, Huhtamaki, Inx International, National Beef, Premium Waters, Rise Baking Company, Wabtec and West Rock are some of the Kansas City Chapter Partners that work together to support the FAME program. The program also receives strong community support from Kansas City Kansas Community College (the host of the KC FAME program), Kansas Manufacturing Solutions, National Association of Manufacturers and Wyandotte Economic Development Council. “The KC FAME Chapter has gained momentum and recognition as a leader in the workforce and training effort. This has led to the increased interest of manufacturers in the KC area. We expect to have a wait list of companies hoping to participate,” Rome said.

Dr. Greg Mosier, President of Kansas City Kansas Community College, also considers the FAME program an integral part of the education and training efforts in the Wyandotte area. “We are the only FAME program in Kansas and in all surrounding states like Iowa, Colorado and Oklahoma. The program effectively partners businesses in the manufacturing sector with students, who have to be sponsored by an industry leader to participate. Businesses will actually choose the people they want to go through the program,” said Dr. Mosier. “It’s the best of both worlds – a college education with opportunities to learn in a state-of-the-art lab and steady work with employers who reinforce the skills the students learn at college.”

Of all employment sectors in the Kansas City metropolitan area, manufacturing, construction & transportation/warehousing made up 144,359 jobs, or approximately 62% of all regional skilled jobs.

— according to data provided by the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) in their 2019 Talent to Industry Exchange Skilled Trades Report.

However, two-thirds of the county’s high paying jobs are currently going to individuals who live outside of Wyandotte County, due to a lack of a skilled workforce (Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas, State of the Economy Snapshot, 2023). “There is no shortage of job options in Wyandotte County for those interested in a skilled trade, and the Kansas City FAME program is an excellent solution to help local residents gain the skills they need to benefit from these high paying jobs,” said Greg Kindler, President of WYEDC.

Students with an interest in obtaining technical education and training while avoiding school debt will find an answer in the FAME Program. Driven, career-oriented individuals who enter the program will come out of it with an Associate’s Degree in Automation Engineering Technology and two years of work experience under their belts. With the skills needed to succeed in the field of their choosing and a steady income already within grasp, the Kansas City FAME Chapter sets students up for life.

Organizations interested in partnering with the Kansas City FAME Chapter can learn more about the program by visiting the website. “We have companies contact us organically through the National FAME website at www.kcfame.org or www.fame-usa.com. We also are contacted by companies who have heard of us through KCKCC and local development groups as well,” Young said of the strong local interest in partnering with the program.

The FAME program is one of many community efforts to support Wyandotte County residents and improve and strengthen the manufacturing industry. Rome emphasized the incentives of living and working in Wyandotte County. “It is an attractive location for manufacturing companies looking to reside or relocate with proximity to transportation, and the local and state incentives help make it even more pro-business,” Rome said. Wyandotte Economic Development Council works closely with the manufacturing community to offer support and connects businesses with innovative solutions like FAME to develop a skilled workforce that will meet the growing and changing needs of the industry giants located here.



WYANDOTTE COUNTY RESIDENTS GET SECOND CHANCE TO BUILD THEIR FUTURES

Making it in the Dotte sometimes requires second chances. Not everyone chooses a career path or embarks on training right out of high school or completes their high school education for a number of reasons, which can lead to lasting underemployment and poverty. A variety of organizations in Wyandotte County are working together to create a supportive ecosystem for those who hope to earn a higher income, become more well-equipped parents or family members and find success in all avenues of life.

“We put people in a position for greater personal and economic advancement. We are the spark, and the fire grows from there,” said Nelson Gabriel, Founder, President & CEO, Made Men. Made Men is a Wyandotte County not for profit organization that makes these hopes a reality. The organization offers community members in need of a second chance a straightforward path to education and a better career.

Made Men connects individuals to resources that will help them obtain a General Educational Development (GED) certification, which is an alternative to a high school diploma; pass a College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) test, which is an alternative means to gaining a college credit without taking a college course; or train for an insurance license or commercial driver’s license. These programs prepare students through academic tutoring, life skills training and career awareness building.

“Around 20% of our residents don’t have a high school diploma. There are many jobs but not enough individuals with the skills to take those jobs. The important thing we focus on is that we want to be an education partner. Education is a basic necessity you have to have in order to get a job. Once individuals in our programs have a high school diploma or college level certificate, they can move on to a better career or trade,” said Gabriel.

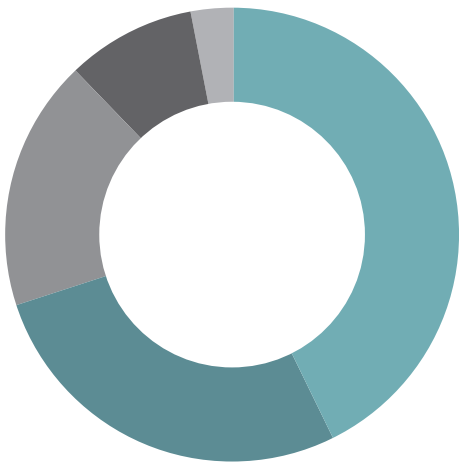
It can be a challenge to know where to start when pursuing further education as an adult, especially as an adult with children to raise and bills to pay. Made Men works with busy individuals and their complicated schedules to make dreams for a better future come true. “We are that necessary spot. We provide a comprehensive case by case system that identifies needs and barriers to individuals and connects them to a partner that will help alleviate those barriers,” said Gabriel.

In addition to educational resources, Made Men connects individuals with other empowerment services and opportunities like the 20-Day Life Strategies Program. This program prepares them in these areas: work life, fatherhood/motherhood development and faith and finances. These life skills will lead to more success in everyday living and working. With better job skills, access to community resources for parenting challenges and technical financial training that overlaps with life-changing messages of faith, opportunities open up.

Parent Cafe and Dad’s Cafe are two other Made Men resources that help bring parents together in support of one another. Most of these parents are young fathers who grew up in poverty and are now transitioning into responsible parenting roles themselves. Parent Cafe focuses on parental resilience and knowledge of child development and social/emotional competence. It provides much needed social connection and support in times of need.

Kathrine Gomez is one of these driven individuals who went through a Made Men program to obtain her GED and secure a more permanent career. “I am a single mother to six children and was working a dead-end job. I started working for the child support branch here in Kansas City, and they required me to get my GED to keep my job,” said Gomez. “Within a month of being hired, I completed my GED, and now I have so many more opportunities available to me. If I can do it, anyone can do it. Nelson is a great mentor. He was understanding and determined to help me. I am forever grateful to Made Men!”

Success stories like Kathrine’s are made possible by Made Men and local partners who come together to support the Wyandotte County community.



Education of Incarcerated Individuals

- 24% Up to 11th Grade
- 30% GED
- 11% High School Degree
- 29% More than High School Degree
- 6% Unknown

Source: Kansas Department of Corrections Annual Report 2021



"We have awesome community partners like Wyandotte Economic Development Council, Kansas City Kansas Public Library and Vibrant Health. Vibrant Health provides clinical, medical, dental, vision and behavioral health programs for our clients," said Gabriel.

In addition to Made Men, other organizations in Wyandotte County like Kansas City Kansas Community College (KCKCC) offer work preparedness programs. The KCKCC Adult Education Program serves Kansas adults who are in need of basic skills for the workforce, community participation and family life. The program includes adult basic education classes that cover reading, math, English, Science and Social Studies; high school equivalency preparation classes for the GED; the English as a Second Language (ESL) course; and the Accelerating Opportunity program, which provides an opportunity for GED students to learn new skill sets that will help them obtain a career with a family-sustaining wage.

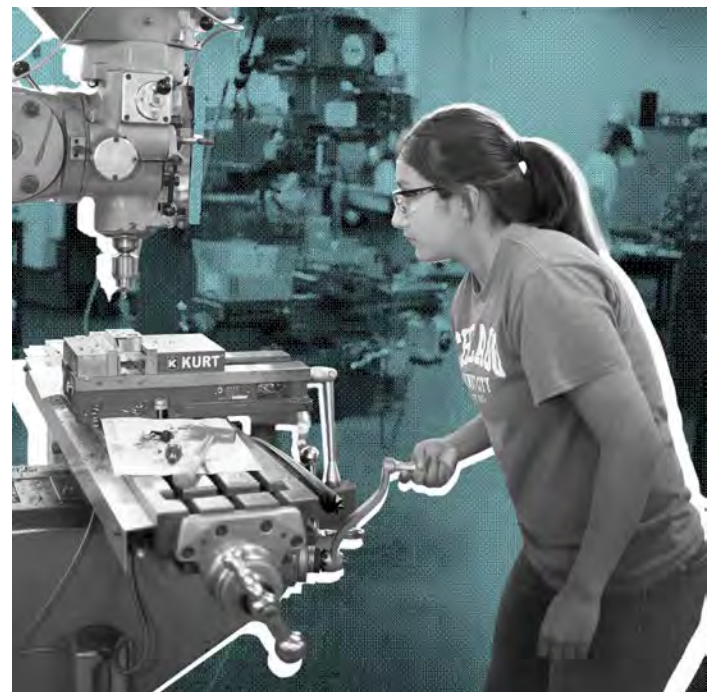
According to data gathered from the 2022 Census, Wyandotte County has the largest percent of people with no schooling at 16% when compared with nearby counties like Jackson, Johnson, Leavenworth, Douglas and Platte. Wyandotte Economic Development Council, KCKCC, Workforce Partnership and Made Men are some of the organizations working to improve these statistics.

Workforce Partnership is a resource that offers a variety of services for those in need of a second chance. The Mature Worker Program accomplishes similar educational and training goals, but for those over the age of 55. Mature workers in need of assistance to meet new or changing career goals can find services like resume development, job search strategizing, digital skills training, registered apprenticeships, financial assistance and even "returnships" - a paid internship for individuals returning to the workforce at an advanced age.

For those whose choices have led to incarceration, the Workforce Partnership RespectWorks program gives them a second chance. This program helps these individuals achieve their employment goals through free training, education, computers and internet access. The program can also provide assistance with basic living expenses until employment is secured. Workforce Partnership also has other avenues of training for displaced workers or those in need of re-skilling or up-skilling to meet their career goals.

Wyandotte County's community-wide support system for anyone aspiring for a better career and more personal growth is second to none. Programs offered and collaboration among Wyandotte County government entities ensure success for those who pursue it. "Wyandotte Economic Development Council brings partners together across industries so we can address the challenges of poverty and a lack of education head-on," said Greg Kindle, President of WYEDC.

"It will take powerful partnerships and continued collaboration to end generational poverty and ensure that everyone in Wyandotte County has the skills necessary to succeed in the high paying job opportunities offered by our local businesses. The strides we are making today will have a generational impact."



SCAN FOR THE:

First Edition, Industry-Driven
Career Guide

Wyandotte County and the Future of Talent

The future face of talent is shifting, and Wyandotte County education leaders and business partners are helping shape that future. Businesses, high schools and colleges are actively collaborating to provide students with well-rounded educations that meet changing industry needs.



"Globally competitive Wyandotte County companies are joining forces and working together. Our businesses are changing with the times. The manufacturing company you see today is not the same manufacturing company your grandparents saw. We are more aware, employing robotics to get more jobs done. We are using cleaner manufacturing processes and building modernized facilities. We need young people with the right skill sets to support these changes," said Matt Morrow, Facility Project Manager, INX International Ink Co. INX International Ink Co. is one local company that engages in cutting-edge training programs that provide an answer to advanced and future-driven industry needs.

The school systems are aligning with local businesses like this to train students to be a future workforce that meets these evolving needs. "Wyandotte County is a melting pot of different cultures, socio-economic classes, and opportunities. Our county has a host of urban, suburban and rural communities and workforce needs," said Teresa Snyder, College & Career Student Advocate Bonner Springs High School. "The county is home to many first-generation college students, but still many people do not even choose to attend college. There's definitely a need for workforce-ready high school graduates."

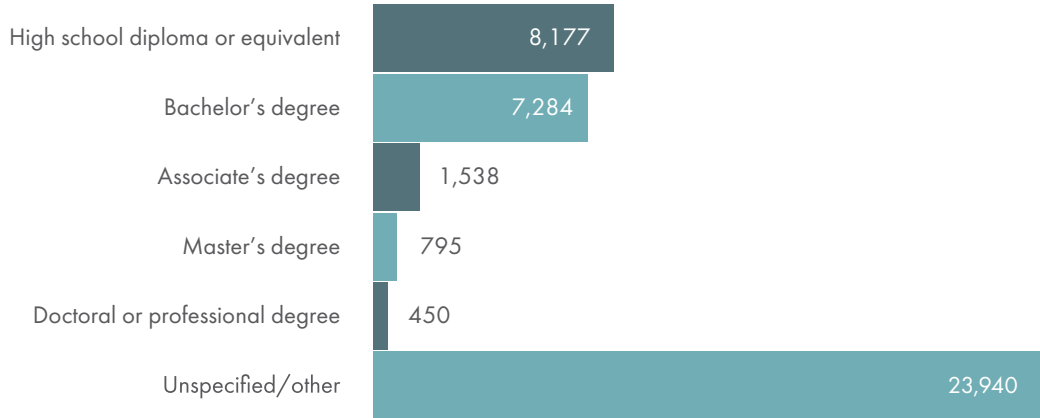
Bonner Springs High School is one of the many educational facilities in Wyandotte County that strives to develop a workforce that harbors a diverse skill set to meet these needs. There are four public school districts and a private high school serving more than 30,000 students in Wyandotte County. One of the ways the public school districts help the student population is through the future-focused Real World Learning Initiative. "The Real World Learning Initiative fosters connections between employers and students within local districts, facilitating immersive learning experiences that establish talent pipelines for businesses in the KC Metro area," said Dr. Jessica Dain, Superintendent, Piper USD #203. Students are able to participate in unique, immersive experiences with leading business partners in the region, like projects and internships. Students can also join Workforce Partnership, another program that facilitates the connection between employers and students for work-based opportunities.

"Wyandotte Economic Development Council (WYEDC) has put together an Industry-Driven Career Guide and a hard-copy directory where students (and other community members) can flip through approximately 160 pages of Wyandotte County-based companies. WYEDC also organizes bus trips where students visit local businesses and the Kansas City, KS Community College - Technical Education Center," Snyder said. "This has helped to connect students with future careers and employment opportunities."



The Industry Driven Career Bus Tours Ms. Snyder is referring to are organized by WYEDC, and they bring students to at least two local businesses and the local Technical Education Center at Kansas City, KS Community College, KCKCC-TEC. At each worksite, students tour the facility, hear from professionals on site and see the different areas of work required. At KCK-CC-TEC, students hear from instructors in the FameLab, an apprenticeship program, and in the Manufacturing program. During these tours, students walk through each facility and see the equipment and technology used in day-to-day tasks. "I believe the tours are successful at informing students of the myriad of career opportunities within their own backyard. All of the sudden their concept of their own community expands into seeing opportunity right here in our county," said Snyder.

Education Needed for Open Jobs



Dr. Dain also believes the Industry Career Driven Bus Tours add an extra dimension to student education. "These tours give students an opportunity to visit industry locations that have high-wage, high-demand job opportunities. Students experience a "see it to be it" event and have a chance to learn more about the newly launched FAME program," said Dr. Dain.

Scott Dreiling, Assistant General Manager of Earp Distribution, has recently connected with Ms. Snyder and Bonner Springs High School to develop internship opportunities within the company. "I think local schools have done a great job in recognizing that by giving students an opportunity to explore different career paths they are potentially opening up avenues for future success that may not have been considered before," Dreiling said.

Currently Earp Distribution opens its doors to host on-site visits and hands-on activities for students. They partner with Jobs for America's Graduates- Kansas to offer tours and elective class options that provide unique learning opportunities. "We need an abundance of skilled professionals to work with our technology," said Dreiling. "Working with schools firsthand will help develop entry level employees with a great work ethic and these much needed skills. These kids will be able to problem-solve and adapt as technology continues to develop."

Opportunities like these that allow students to engage in work-based learning for postsecondary success are rare everywhere else in the nation, but they are becoming the standard in Wyandotte County. Some students are even able to earn an associate degree or to achieve professional certifications and begin work directly upon graduation.



"Some examples of these hands-on experiences that lead to certifications and degrees include our CNA or Fire Safety partnership programs with KCKCC-TEC. Our Agricultural Ecology students are working in a greenhouse on campus, and our Woodworking students are even building a tiny house," Snyder said of real-life examples of these successes. The students in Wyandotte County are actually doing the work, not just reading a textbook about it. "Our Teaching & Training pathway allows students to complete teaching internship hours in the classroom at our middle and elementary schools. We have had students successfully participate in internships with the Bonner Springs Fire Department or with an HVAC company. Those students have since gone on to pursue careers in those given fields," Snyder continued.

Endless opportunities await students in Wyandotte County. WYEDC and local businesses alike continue to foster their connections with schools to raise up a future of talent in the region. "We have made some incredible industry partnerships and last year we had students onsite at Schier Engineering, ALIGNance Chiropractic, Universal Construction, Ag Hall of Fame, Basehor Veterinary Clinic, JE Dunn, Nebraska Furniture Mart, Cerner/Oracle, TNR Hills, Range 23 Brewing and Incite Design Studio," said Dr. Dain.

A well-rounded education is truly a collaborative effort.

"Businesses working with schools to develop a skilled workforce for the future is the new norm in Wyandotte County, and we anticipate the economic success it will bring to our people and our region,"

said Greg Kindle, WYEDC President.

"WYEDC continues to listen to the needs of local businesses and will work with education partners to ensure students have access to the training programs necessary to succeed in high-demand jobs."



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ENTREPRENEURS RECEIVE THE SUPPORT THEY NEED TO GROW IN WYANDOTTE COUNTY

Wyandotte Economic Development Council (WYEDC) and its partners support entrepreneurs and recognize them as an integral part of the community and its long-term economic growth.

"Entrepreneurs face the challenging task of taking an idea or concept, turning it into a reality and then learning how to manage a business. Without support that can be difficult to do. Fortunately, we have a wealth of resources in Wyandotte County and partners that are dedicated to helping them succeed," said Greg Kindle, President of WYEDC. "NetWork Kansas is one of the organizations providing the hands-on support entrepreneurs need to launch and grow their business."

NetWork Kansas, a 501c3 nonprofit organization, is one of the many systems Wyandotte County has in place to support our growing entrepreneurial environment. The organization's goal is to connect emerging and established businesses through a wide network of resource entities that extend across the state and beyond. These resources start, grow and expand small businesses in Wyandotte County.

"Wyandotte County has incredible potential for growth in both the rural communities and the Urban Core, and we will be right beside WYEDC and our other partners as they uplift and empower the talents and assets within this amazing community," said Jenn Laird, Manager of Urban Engagement, NetWork Kansas.

WYEDC partners with organizations like NetWork Kansas to connect small to mid-size companies with funding opportunities to assist in start-up endeavors and expansion efforts. One way WYEDC and NetWork Kansas accomplish this is through the Empower Fund. "NetWork Kansas has 12 gap financing loan programs for entrepreneurs of all ages and stages across Kansas and has been very successful in deploying those funds in rural and less populated communities across the state of Kansas for over 15 years.

Over the past couple of years, our organization recognized that our funding was not reaching entrepreneurs of color and, after listening to our community ESO partners on the ground, identified that there was a lending gap for minority entrepreneurs when attempting to access traditional capital. In June 2021 we created the Empower Minority Loan fund, in partnership with

the Kansas Health Foundation, to address this gap and reduce barriers to funding that had previously prevented the start-up and growth of minority businesses," said Laird.

"To date the program has loaned just under \$800,000 to 55 minority entrepreneurs. In WYCO we have invested \$349,000 to 24 minority businesses since March 2022."

One Empower Fund recipient has a particularly interesting success story: Nelson's Flavorades. As a youth entrepreneur, it can be a challenge to be taken seriously in the corporate world, but Nelson McConnell, Owner of Nelson's Flavorades takes the challenge head on. He started his businesses at age 8, and five years later, he has already expanded to store shelves. His business curates freshly squeezed lemonade or tea with 20 flavors to choose from, and they also provide customized catering options for private events.

"The idea for Nelson's Flavorades started in 2018. My mother was organizing the annual flea market at our church. I wanted to do something to make money and the thought of selling lemonade came to me... We started experimenting right in my mother's kitchen. Mixing and blending flavors was only natural because my great grandmother, my grandmother and my mom always did. So, you could say I am a fourth-generation mixologist. Once we identified that thirst quenching formula, we tested them on friends and family and got great feedback. They loved the flavors and so did our newfound customers at the flea market," recalled McConnell.

McConnell's idea quickly gained traction as he participated in a local entrepreneurial program called E-Ship Rising. E-Ship Rising is a program available to any youth that resides in Wyandotte, up to the age of 25. Essentially, it is a 12 week course that covers the ins and outs of starting and running a successful new business. "E-Ship Rising helped me understand that running a business takes a lot of work. It showed me how to break down pricing and helped me understand more about marketing and branding my business! I also learned to always press forward," McConnell said.

And press forward he did. "I went on to become the first Young Black Mastermind BootCamp Graduate through The Black Mastermind Group where I learned how to consider the numbers when running your business. They helped me understand operational and organizational strategies, along with marketing, sales, financial and funding strategies," he continued.

By January 2023, Nelson's Flavorades was ready to pick up production speed. The business was awarded a \$9,000 micro loan and a \$1,000 grant from the Empower Fund and WYEDC. With this capital, Nelson's Flavorades was able to purchase bottling and labeling supplies, a commercial juicer and a large mixing tank and stand. This equipment has helped McConnell's business expand. "We are currently working with Hy-Vee, a grocery store with over 280 locations, to sell our bottled drinks. We are also relaunching our website to do online sales," McConnell said.



Small to mid-size businesses in Wyandotte County can easily find success and growth like Nelson's Flavorades has. "If a business in WYCO is able to access capital, our other gap financing loan programs can come alongside a lender to fill that riskier gap that, oftentimes, lenders are not able to fund. These programs are designed to match alongside lenders' investment for uses including working capital, inventory and equipment," said Laird of the Empower Fund and other gap funding programs offered by NetWork Kansas.

The Empower Fund is open to For-Profit and Non-Profit businesses at any growth stage, and it is just one of the many resources available to small and mid-sized businesses in Wyandotte County. "Wyandotte County is one of the best places to start a business because of the high level of support offered by WYEDC and our partners," said Kindle. "When combined with our low cost of living and diverse business ecosystem, there are a lot of opportunities for entrepreneurs to grow their businesses here."

IMPROVING HEALTH OUTCOMES IN WYANDOTTE COUNTY IS NECESSARY FOR EQUITABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH

Wyandotte County ranked 103 of the 104 counties in Kansas for health outcomes in 2023, according to County Health Rankings & Roadmaps. Higher than average smoking and obesity rates contribute to poor health outcomes, as do a lack of physical activity and exercise.

Wyandotte Economic Development Council (WYEDC) is working with partners to tackle this challenge and improve health outcomes for residents. "A healthy Wyandotte County benefits everyone," said Monica Brede, Senior Director of Business Retention & Workforce Solutions at WYEDC. "People's quality of life goes up when they are healthier. And for businesses, a healthier workforce is a more present and productive workforce."

The KCK Community Education, Health and Wellness Center is one of the solutions being implemented to improve health outcomes in Wyandotte County. Dr. Greg Mosier, President of Kansas City Kansas Community College (KCKCC) says it will change a lot of lives. "Areas like KCK's Urban Core have been underserved for more than 30 years. We are trying to lift that burden," he says. "The Center will provide access to local and affordable healthcare, quality education and financial planning services, all in one central location. The joint efforts of Kansas City Kansas Public Schools, Swope Health, CommunityAmerica Credit Union and Kansas City Kansas Community College will make the project a reality."

The Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) is another collaborative plan to improve health in Wyandotte County.

"Good health goes beyond health care and is most impacted by things like the affordability of our housing, access to good jobs with fair pay, and the safety of our neighborhoods,"

said Susan Beckman, Unified Government Public Health Department, CHIP Coordinator.

CHIP is composed of community partners who understand that in order to move the needle on health outcomes, it will require all of our coordinated efforts and bold solutions. Through CHIP, the community identified barriers to accessing high opportunity jobs in Wyandotte County.

These barriers include access to childcare, having a criminal record, language (not speaking English fluently), transportation to work, and post-secondary training. "WYEDC and other partners have launched programs to address these barriers," said Beckman. They include a Business ESL program, Industry Driven Career guide, and fair chance roundtables for businesses interested in hiring people coming out of the justice system. WYEDC has also helped to raise resources for a workforce transportation route in Edwardsville. "We are proud to partner with the WYEDC on these efforts," she added.

CHIP has also implemented a strategy for post-secondary and the education to employment pipeline. They are focused on connecting youth to local career and training opportunities, through bus tours and a series of career guides. "It's important to showcase the high wage, high opportunity careers available right here in our community so youth can see themselves in those fields," said Beckman.

"Wyandotte Economic Development Council has been a core partner of the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) since its start. The work of our CHIP Jobs and Education area, and the many initiatives and collaborations that have resulted from it, have been made possible because of the WYEDC's leadership and the time and expertise of our partners," said Susan Beckman, Unified Government Public Health Department, CHIP Coordinator.

Beckman, Mosier and WYEDC look forward to the continued success of CHIP and community programs designed to improve health outcomes and increase opportunities for WYEDC residents.

"Through CHIP, the Health Department works together with other organizations, such as the Wyandotte Economic Development Council, to make progress towards better health outcomes and quality of life, for everyone in our community."

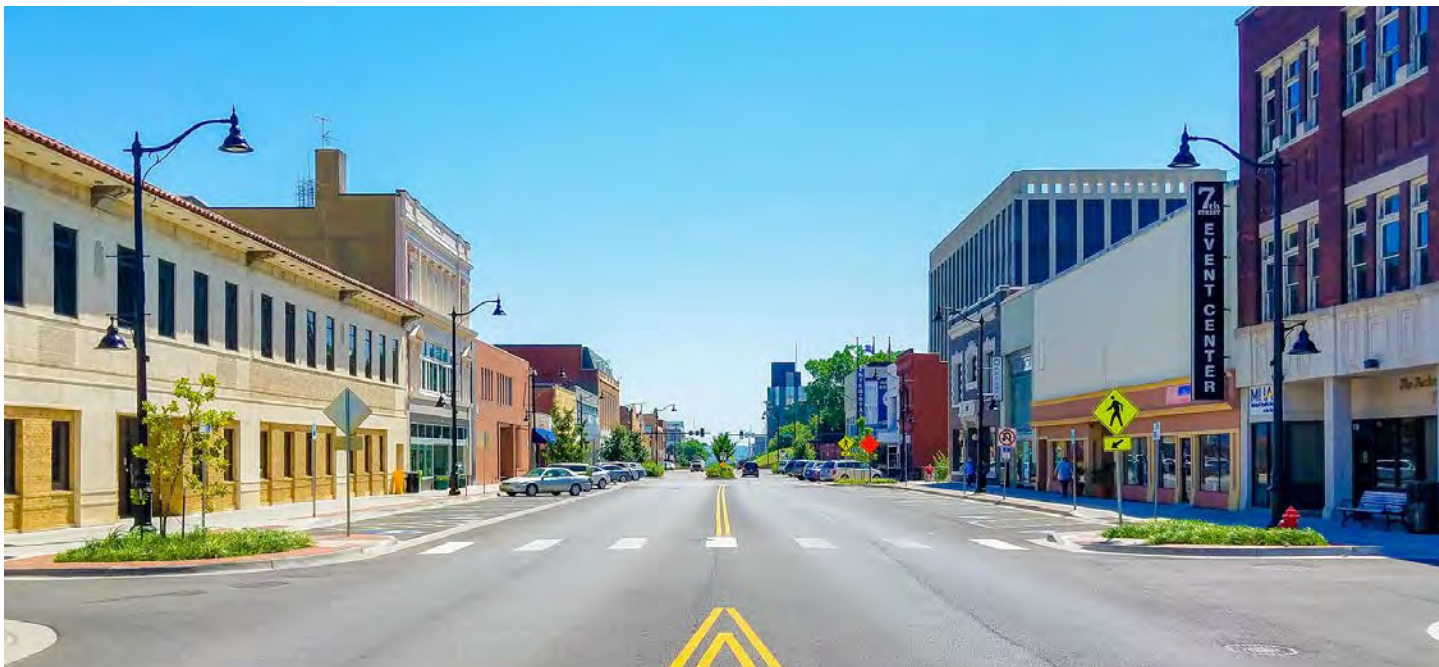
The Tie That Binds Us Together:

Wyandotte Economic Development Council

Wyandotte County is the bustling heart of the Kansas City metro area, where a dynamic mix of over 2 million residents, thriving businesses, and robust healthcare and education systems converge. Well-established employers like the University of Kansas Health Systems, KU Med, BNSF Railroad, Amazon, Urban Outfitters, General Motors, Associated Wholesale Grocers, and CertainTeed are located in Wyandotte County.



The County has witnessed a staggering influx of over **\$6.1 billion in investments** since 2012,
a testament to its growing appeal to businesses.



Wyandotte Economic Development Council (WYEDC) has been at the forefront of this growth and is actively working with community partners to position the county for increased success.

"Wyandotte County Economic Development Council is the tie that binds us together. Since they work countywide and are not a government organization, they can bring partners to the table across all sectors so the entire community can benefit from future opportunities," said Dr. Greg Mosier, President of Kansas City Kansas Community College (KCKCC) and WYEDC Board Chair. WYEDC's mission is to promote and strengthen Wyandotte County's economy through innovative approaches to programs, partnerships, incentives, and leadership in industrial, residential, office, and retail markets.

"Our approach to economic development is all-encompassing because we know that when everyone in the community is supported and given opportunities, we will rise together - that's the 'Dotte way'," said Greg Kindle, President of WYEDC.

By embracing the "DOTTE way," WYEDC looks beyond traditional economic development to assess the strengths, weaknesses, needs, and opportunities within Wyandotte County - both from a business and individual perspective. "Everything is tied together," said Kindle. "The businesses we are helping to expand or attract need talented workers. But, if Wyandotte County residents don't have easy access to health-care, training, childcare, or transportation, they won't be able to fill those positions and be successful employees. We need to address the factors that could impede our county's ability to grow from the individual level - that's what WYEDC is working towards through collaborative partnerships."

Susan Beckman, Unified Government Public Health Department, CHIP Coordinator, spoke to the importance of partnering. "Wyandotte Economic Development Council has been a core Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) partner since its start. The work of our CHIP Jobs and Education area, and the many initiatives and collaborations that have resulted from it, have been made possible because of the WYEDC's leadership and the time and expertise of our partners," she said.

"Wyandotte County has a very diverse population, so supporting the population is a priority. There is a focus here on ensuring everyone has access to the same resources throughout the county," added Marley Eckman, Director of Human Resources, Knit-Rite, Inc.

WYEDC's ultimate goal is to increase the financial well-being of the county's residents. "Business expansion and attraction play a key role because these activities create jobs. Our work has led to creating and sustaining over 19,000 new jobs in Wyandotte County," said Kindle.

Creating those jobs is only half the battle. "We have found that training and preparing our workforce is a critical need. We now have the highest wages in the state but are 62nd in household income. That means we have the jobs here but don't have the ready, trained workforce to take those jobs. In response, WYEDC and our partners have focused on training residents to raise household income," said Kathy Wolfe Moore, WYEDC Board Member and KU retiree. "If we have a trained workforce, it's also easier to attract companies to our community."

WYEDC does not provide workforce training directly but serves as a conduit between the business community and the educational and nonprofit partners who do. This begins at the high school level. The four public school districts employ the future-focused Kaufmann Real World Learning Initiative, and students can also join Workforce Partnership, another program that facilitates the connection between employers and students for work-based opportunities.

Creating connections with local employers is an ongoing process. The WYEDC Industry-Driven Career Guide and Industry-Career Driven Bus Tours are other ways that students in Wyandotte County are able to learn more about the opportunities that are in their neighborhoods, both on paper and in-person. Teresa Snyder, College & Career Student Advocate Bonner Springs High School, said: "These have helped to connect students with future careers and employment opportunities." The early partnerships make Wyandotte County students more likely to enter the workforce as skilled employees.

While important, preparing high school students for the workforce is just one leg of the stool. Wyandotte County's low household income rates indicate that the adult workforce must also be retrained. Made Men is one of the Wyandotte County not-for-profit organizations working with WYEDC to do so. "Made Men is a vocational and workforce development organization that connects families and individuals to sustainable resources, whether that's a job, career or educational experience," says Nelson Gabriel, Founder, President & CEO of Made Men. Graduates of their program have spoken about its life-changing impact. "I have so many more opportunities available to me. If I can do it, anyone can do it," said Kathrine Gomez.

"Wyandotte Economic Development Council brings partners together across industries so we can address the challenges of poverty and a lack of education head-on,"

said Greg Kindle, President of WYEDC.

"It will take powerful partnerships and continued collaboration, but the strides we are making today will have a generational impact."

The new Community Education, Health and Wellness Center is a unique example of these powerful collaborations happening, both for the region and the country. "There is not another community college facility in the country I'm aware of with a private-public partnership like the Community Education, Health and Wellness Center ... This collaborative effort is unique to us and made possible by business, education, healthcare and the government working together," said Dr. Mosier. Once complete, the Center will help to solve common barriers to meaningful employment.

"Business leaders see the vision for Wyandotte County and have a keen understanding of how important it is to train local residents and improve the quality of life for everyone," said Monica Brede, Senior Director of Business Retention & Workforce Solutions at WYEDC. One way businesses get involved is through partnerships and industry-specific organizations like the Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education (FAME).

With over 250 manufacturers across more than 15 industries in Wyandotte County, manufacturing is an important industry employing residents throughout the county. Starting a FAME program in the county was important for WYEDC.

"WYEDC was a key player in starting the FAME chapter in Kansas City. They told INX and other businesses in the corridor about the opportunity, and INX became one of the founding members. This program will enrich our companies while putting students on a path of education. It will also allow more companies to retain workers who want to make a career out of their



training,” said Matt Morrow, Facility Project Manager, INX International Ink Co., a global manufacturer of high-performance printing inks and coatings for commercial, packaging, and digital print applications.

The FAME program is an excellent tool for getting more of Wyandotte County’s residents trained and in the manufacturing workforce. Additional collaborations make it easier for Wyandotte County’s manufacturing sector to grow. Kansas Manufacturing Solutions (KMS), for example, is helping companies to incorporate new technologies and become more efficient.

“We are a statewide organization and work with many other colleges and organizations in the community. Manufacturing companies in Wyandotte County are embracing automation to augment what they are already doing and become even more efficient in the process,” said Tiffany Stovall, CEO of Kansas Manufacturing Solutions. She credits WYEDC for leading on this issue. “The WYEDC team has a success-driven perspective, and the way they work with companies to meet their needs is innovative and inspiring.”

WYEDC’s partnerships extend beyond manufacturing and education to working with infrastructure partners to meet the needs of growing companies. “Wyandotte County’s access to major transportation routes is unmatched, and our infrastructure is keeping up with the needs of expanding companies,” said Kindle. For example, WYEDC works with the Kansas City Board of Public Utilities (BPU) by discussing company requests for green energy. “Some of our large existing customers have corporate goals for green energy,” said Bill Johnson, BPU General Manager. “They want to

become more and more green, so we’re trying to assist them to the best of our abilities. We’re probably one of the leading utilities – especially our size – regarding renewables or green energy.” BPU regularly works with WYEDC to meet specific company requests.

WYEDC has also begun collaborating with companies to support community infrastructure needs. “We are taking a holistic approach to economic development and bringing companies into that process. Urban Outfitters, for example, worked with us to add a direct transit line so their employees could access public transportation,” said Kindle.

Of course, the needs of companies extend beyond infrastructure. “The Wyandotte Economic Development Council has been a great resource. During our expansion in 2017, the team guided us on the right path every step of the way. They helped us get our construction package pulled together from outside engineering to inside tax advantages. They brought all the nitty-gritty stuff into one resource, made us aware of our options, and continued to be a huge support through the process,” said Morrow.

WYEDC works with companies like INX to determine what will be needed to facilitate an expansion or relocation to Wyandotte County and then brings partners together to create solutions. “WYEDC has a good vision because the board comes from different sectors of the economy. We have the mayor, political appointees, healthcare, education, industry and community partners on the board to get diverse input and have multiple perspectives on how to solve challenges,” said Wolfe Moore.

Established businesses benefit from working with WYEDC, but so do entrepreneurs. “Wyandotte County has incredible potential for growth in both the rural communities and the Urban Core, and we are working with WYEDC and our other partners to uplift and empower the talents and assets within this amazing community,” says Jenn Laird, Manager of Urban Engagement, NetWork Kansas. “We are using tools like the Empower Loan program to spur entrepreneurship,” she added.

Beyond funding, the networking opportunities WYEDC and its partners offer make it easier for growing companies to connect to find suppliers and customers. “The businesses here work well together. WYEDC does a particularly good job of fostering growth and bringing the community together on several different fronts. From quarterly roundtable conversations about what is going on in the community to workforce training and attraction chats, they have been instrumental in helping trades get organized and established,” said Morrow.

WYEDC has made an outsized impact because of its ability to bring everyone together for the betterment of Wyandotte County, and this collaboration is paying off. Household income has been rising, 19,000 jobs have been created, and over \$6.1 billion invested in the county since the organization’s founding.

WYEDC is truly the tie that binds the community together,
with Kindle stating,

“We could not do our work without our investors, partners, and an engaged team. We facilitate and bring people together, but the work is done as a cohesive community effort.”

We are grateful for the high level of support and collaboration within Wyandotte County. Together, we will create an even more prosperous future where everyone benefits.”



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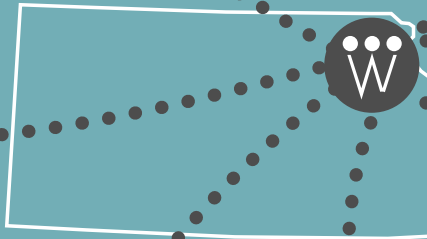


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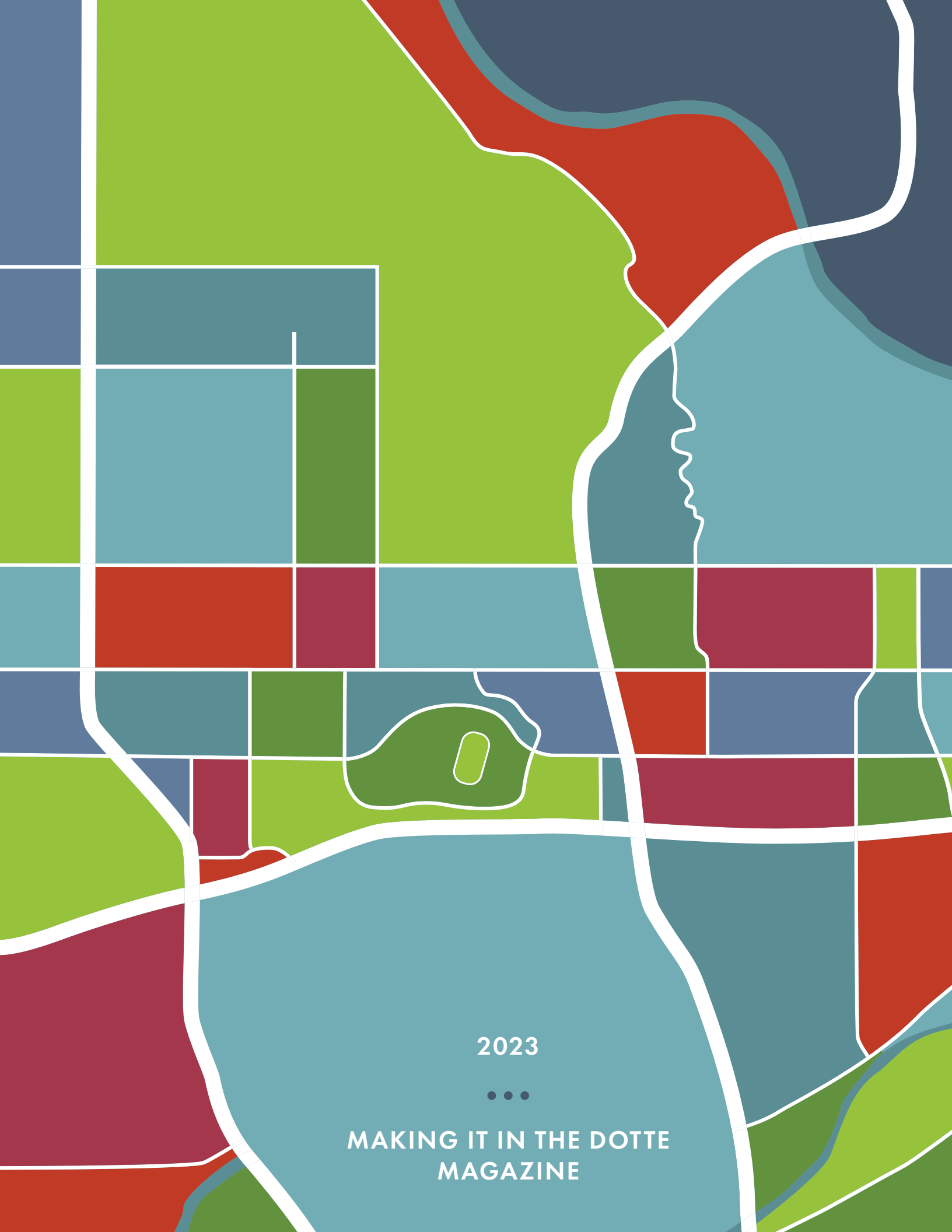
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