



Emerging



Existing



Exporting

# 2020 KANSAS SMALL BUSINESS AWARDS



# Table of Contents

## **The Sweet Granada | Page 10**

2020 Existing Business: Emporia State University SBDC  
Advisors: Lisa Brumbaugh & Tom Byler  
State Legislators: Rep. Mark Schreiber & Sen. Jeff Longbine  
Federal Legislator: Rep. Roger Marshall

## **EMP Shield, LLC | Page 11**

2020 Emerging Business: Emporia State University  
SBDC Advisors: Tom Byler & Laurie Pieper  
State Legislators: Rep. Eric Smith & Sen. Bruce Givens  
Federal Legislator: Rep. Steve Watkins

## **Paisley Pear Wine Bar, Bistro & Market | Page 12**

2020 Existing Business: Fort Hays State University  
SBDC Advisors: Rick Feltenberger & Ron Newman  
State Legislators: Rep. Barbara Wasinger & Sen. Richard Billinger  
Federal Legislator: Rep. Roger Marshall

## **Mind Sculpt Games, LLC | Page 13**

2020 Emerging Business: Fort Hays State University  
SBDC Advisor: Rick Feltenberger  
State Legislators: Rep. Tory Marie Arnberger & Sen. Mary Jo Taylor  
Federal Legislator: Rep. Roger Marshall

## **Blue Valley Physical Therapy | Page 14**

2020 Existing Business: Johnson County Community College  
SBDC Advisor: John Addressi  
State Legislators: Rep. Sean Tarwater & Sen. John Skubal  
Federal Legislator: Rep. Sharice Davids

## **LC BioPlastics, LLC | Page 15**

2020 Emerging Business: Johnson County Community College  
SBDC Advisor: Jack Harwell  
State Legislators: Rep. Stephanie Clayton, & Sen. Barbara Bollier  
Federal Legislator: Rep. Sharice Davids

# Table of Contents

## **SkuTouch Solutions | Page 16**

2020 Exporting Business: Johnson County Community College  
SBDC Advisor: John Addressi  
State Legislators: Rep. Brandon Woodard & Sen. Dinah Sykes  
Federal Legislator: Rep. Sharice Davids

## **Young Sign Co. | Page 17**

2020 Existing Business: University of Kansas  
SBDC Advisor: Will Katz  
State Legislators: Rep. Jeff Pittman & Sen. Kevin Braun  
Federal Legislator: Rep. Steve Watkins

## **Julie Bear Don't Walk, LAC, Acupuncture & Integrative Health | Page 18**

2020 Emerging Business: University of Kansas  
SBDC Advisors: Will Katz, Taylor LaRue, & Kristina Mease  
State Legislators: Rep. Barbara Ballard & Sen. Marci Francisco  
Federal Legislator: Rep. Steve Watkins

## **ADI, Inc. | Page 19**

2020 Existing Business: Pittsburg State University  
SBDC Advisors: Tom Byler & Dacia Clark  
State Legislators: Rep. Kent Thompson & Sen. Dan Goddard  
Federal Legislator: Rep. Steve Watkins

## **Smallville CrossFit | Page 20**

2020 Emerging Business: Pittsburg State University  
SBDC Advisor: Dacia Clark  
State Legislators: Rep. Trevor Jacobs & Sen. Richard Hilderbrand  
Federal Legislator: Rep. Steve Watkins

## **Progressive Products, Inc. | Page 21**

2020 Exporting Business: Pittsburg State University  
SBDC Advisor: Randy Robinson  
State Legislators: Rep. Monica Murnan & Sen. Richard Hilderbrand  
Federal Legislator: Rep. Steve Watkins

# Table of Contents

## **Dodge City Brewing Company | Page 22**

2020 Existing Business: Seward County Community College  
SBDC Advisors: Maria Dennison, Cheryl Schmale, & Loretta Heft  
State Legislators: Rep. Bradley Ralph & Sen. Bud Estes  
Federal Legislator: Rep. Roger Marshall

## **The Red Rock Experience & Venue | Page 23**

2020 Emerging Business: Seward County Community College  
SBDC Advisors: Maria Dennison & Mike O’Kane  
State Legislators: Rep. Martin Long & Sen. John Doll  
Federal Legislator: Rep. Roger Marshall

## **Connie’s Mexico Cafe | Page 24**

2020 Existing Business: Wichita State University  
SBDC Advisors: Frank Choriego & Will Katz  
State Legislators: Rep. Ponka–We Victors & Sen. Oletha Faust–Goudeau  
Federal Legislator: Rep. Ron Estes

## **Ember Technology, LLC | Page 25**

2020 Emerging Business: Wichita State University  
SBDC Advisor: Frank Choriego  
State Legislators: Rep. Ponka–We Victors & Sen. Oletha Faust–Goudeau  
Federal Legislator: Rep. Ron Estes

## **The Marie Antoinette Gluten Free Baking Co. | Page 26**

2020 Existing Business: Washburn University  
SBDC Advisor: Mary Ann Riederer  
State Legislators: Rep. John Eplee & Sen. Dennis Pyle  
Federal Legislator: Rep. Steve Watkins

## **Anneal Initiative, Inc. | Page 27**

2020 Emerging Business: Washburn University SBDC  
Advisors: Karl Klein, Tom Byler, & Laurie Pieper  
State Legislators: Rep. Fred Patton & Sen. Vic Miller  
Federal Legislator: Rep. Steve Watkins

# About The Kansas Small Business Development Center

Our clients tell our story best.

Every year we choose two or three clients from each of our service regions that exemplify small business success. Our objective is to honor them at the Kansas SBDC Existing, Emerging, and Exporting (E3) Small Business Awards. Our goal is to highlight both the impact of small business in our Kansas communities and the impact of our work with these same businesses. This program includes summaries of their stories along with information about the Kansas Small Business Development Center (Kansas SBDC).

## WHO WE ARE

The Kansas SBDC is part of America's Small Business Development Center Network, the most comprehensive small business assistance network in the United States. Since 1983, we've helped tens of thousands of businesses just like the ones featured in this program with a variety of services: access to capital, business plan development, and financial analysis, including cash flow projections and evaluations. We provide service through effective one-on-one advising at no cost to the business as well as low-cost, high-impact training, fee-based consulting, and responses to vital requests for resources and information.

## SERVICES

Following our guidance through strategic planning, market evaluation, and more, our clients have reported a significant impact on their businesses in the form of profitable business expansion and increased sales, as well as job expansion and retention - outcomes that show in their stories. Some of the key areas where we consistently help our clients include marketing, business planning, and financial analysis. In addition to advising, we refer and connect businesses to the resources they need to succeed. Our core and specialty services include, but are not limited to:

### Marketing

We can offer help to business decision makers who have questions about social media, websites, and advertising. Our goal is to help our clients support their sales with effective marketing. When clients want their marketing to look professional and deliver results at a reasonable cost, they can call on our team for help.

### Business Planning

Did you know that companies that have a written business plan are four times more likely to succeed? Individuals in business or thinking of going into business who have been told to develop a business plan can come to us for help. Our team at the SBDC listens, helps them clarify the plan, and connects small business owners with the people that can help them move their ideas forward.

### Financial Analysis

While people often assume we just work with those interested in getting into business, we actually work often with business owners that are preparing financial projections for loans as well as business owners that are trying to improve their business performance. We help with business financial checkups, benchmarking, identifying funding, as well as managing profitability.

### Succession and Exit Planning

We assist our clients through the challenge of leaving their business. By working with owners on how to make the most of their business value, we address their retirement or exit financial needs, and help them plan for what happens after they sell.

### Technology Commercialization

We work with clients to give them the ability to run their existing business while expanding through research and development. We assist clients interested in working with the U.S. government and private enterprise by helping them develop meaningful connections to move forward with commercialization.

### Strategic Planning

We work with our clients by providing a customizable approach to fit their specific business needs. When our clients need a team to provide a fresh look and outside perspective, we step in and help small business owners develop strategies that allow them to meet their current obligations and future goals.

To learn more about the services we provide, visit our website, [kansassbdc.net](http://kansassbdc.net).

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **How can you help my business?**

We can help in a variety of ways. The primary way we help is by working with you to find out what your needs are and helping you develop a strategy to reach your goals.

## **How do I use your services?**

Start by contacting the center nearest you. A map can be found on the back of this material. To learn more about our services and how to contact your nearest SBDC, visit [kansassbdc.net](http://kansassbdc.net).

## **Is there a charge for Kansas SBDC services?**

Kansas SBDC advising services are provided at no cost to our clients. Workshops, seminars, and online training are offered at low-cost or no-cost to clients as well. However, we do offer specialized fee-based consulting if you need something beyond general advising.

## **Why do you provide advising at no cost? Why don't you charge?**

When the SBDC was established in 1983, the federal government decided that they would not charge for advising. Essentially, since our government is funded by the taxpayer, they decided that the taxpayers had already paid for the service.

## **Can I see a business advisor without an appointment?**

We would suggest scheduling an appointment to meet with us. As a first-time client you can complete some helpful forms before you meet with an advisor to make the most of your time together. Learn about how to become a Kansas SBDC client at [kansassbdc.net](http://kansassbdc.net).

## **Do I have to become a client to attend one of your online or in-person classes?**

No. Online classes and in-person classes, workshops, and seminars are open to anyone that is interested in improving their business performance, starting a business or exploring a business idea.

## **How do I learn more about a class I might be interested in taking?**

Your best option would be to contact the regional SBDC office that is hosting the event. They can provide you more information on workshops in

your area. Find your local SBDC on the back of this program, or visit [kansassbdc.net](http://kansassbdc.net).

## **I already own a business. Can I still use the Kansas SBDC?**

Absolutely! We encourage it. As of 2017, approximately half of the businesses we serve are already in business when they seek out our help. We can help with marketing, management, operations, expansion, cash flow analysis, inventory control, strategic planning, and pricing your products and services.

## **Does the Kansas SBDC loan money for my business startup?**

The Kansas SBDC does not provide loan or grant money. However, we will assist you in developing your business plan and financial projections and identifying potential sources of capital.

## **Will a Kansas SBDC advisor help me write a business plan?**

The Kansas SBDC will provide resources and guidance in the process of writing your business plan. Many centers have accelerated business plan training courses that can help as well.

## **How confidential are your services?**

Our services are highly confidential. We can't even confirm with your business partners if you are our client without your written permission.

## **How do I find a center in my area?**

Look on the back cover or visit us online at [www.kansassbdc.net/contact](http://www.kansassbdc.net/contact)

## **What kind of impact do you have in Kansas?**

A huge impact. For every \$1 that was invested in 2018 by the state and federal governments as well as our local funders, we returned \$30.8 to the tax base. By helping our clients increase sales, more sales tax was paid. By helping our clients grow to hire more employees, more federal and state employment tax was paid.

## **What if I have more questions?**

Call your local center, visit our website at [kansassbdc.net](http://kansassbdc.net), or email [info@ksbdc.net](mailto:info@ksbdc.net). We'll be happy to help!

# Our Impact

We know that helping small businesses in Kansas pays dividends to every citizen living in the state. But did you also know that our work puts money into the federal government?

## Why do we care?

Since each and every person that works at the Kansas SBDC is a taxpaying citizen, we take a very concerned interest to ensure that the dollars invested in the Kansas SBDC are well-spent, flowing back into our communities many times over. Why? Because we live and work and take our kids to school in these communities as well. We hold ourselves to the highest level of accountability and measure the difference we make in our clients' businesses every day.

We know that everything we do to help grow small businesses in Kansas needs to make a difference in the short term, interim term, and long term. It needs to make a difference in the small business owner's life, in his or her business, immediate community, county, and beyond.

## How do we know that we've made a difference?

Our small business clients tell us.

Each year we conduct a series of surveys to measure impact. Clients are asked to respond and report the difference that the Kansas SBDC has made in their business. We ask how we've helped them grow and retain employees, increase sales, and secure capital to grow their businesses.

Basically, we're measuring a return on your taxes as they are used in the SBDC program.

To understand how we calculate our impact, return is measured by calculating sales and income tax on client revenue, jobs created, and jobs retained. Numbers are calculated based on self-reported and affirmed client surveys, independent scientific study, and legislative audit. And even though our

return on investment is impressive, keep in mind that our impact is a conservative estimate with 43% of our clients completing survey requests in 2018.

Additionally, we compare the performance of our business clients with all of Kansas businesses. We use information from the Kansas Departments of Labor and Revenue to compare our performance. Since we started measuring this in 2002, our clients have consistently outperformed all Kansas businesses when comparing average annual sales and jobs growth.

## Our 2018 Results

Through these surveys we found that in 2018 (the most recent year for which we've collected data) for every \$1 invested in the Kansas SBDC network \$30.8 was generated in new taxes at the federal and state levels.

Collectively the clients we surveyed in 2018 generated an increase of \$11.9 million in tax revenue to the Kansas state economy through the help we provided them in the previous year. We're not just using taxes, we're assisting in the generation of new funds for the state.

In 2018, 278 respondents indicated that they started new businesses. And, as you might guess, starting a new business translates to new jobs, new sales, and new investments.

A total of 3,834 jobs were created or retained in 2018. It's estimated that these jobs would have generated \$5,421,166 individual income tax revenue for the state of Kansas and \$64,640,385 individual income tax revenue for the federal government in 2018.

## More on the Math

It is estimated that the increased sales and created and retained jobs would have generated a total of \$17,337,490 sales and income taxes to the State

of Kansas. The Kansas SBDC spent \$718,536 from the Kansas Department of Commerce (KDOC) in 2018. The return on investment from the KDOC was 24.1 to 1, which means for every dollar that the Kansas SBDC spent from the KDOC, Kansas small businesses in the study returned \$24.1 income and sales tax revenue to the state government.

The Kansas SBDC spent \$1,112,200 from the Small Business Administration (SBA) in 2018. The created and retained jobs reported by the businesses in the sample would have generated \$64,640,385 individual income tax revenue for the federal government. The return on investment from the SBA was 58.1 to 1, which means for every dollar that the Kansas SBDC spent from the SBA, Kansas small businesses in the study returned \$58.1 income tax revenue to the federal government.

The total tax revenue generated from sales increase and job creation and retention was estimated to be \$81,976,698.

The Kansas SBDC spent a total of \$2,662,524 local, KDOC, and SBA funds in 2018. The return on the combined local, state and federal investment was 30.8 to 1.

Questions?

Contact Greg Panichello, Kansas SBDC  
State Director, 785-296-6514 or  
panichello@ksbdc.net.

# Partners

Partners provide the funding and substantial resources that make it possible for the Kansas SBDC to provide no- and low-cost services to small businesses across the state of Kansas.

We'd like to thank our partners listed on this page as well as many other businesses and organizations that sponsor training programs and provide resources at no cost to our clients.

## **Our training sponsors and resource providers in 2019 include:**

Adams, Brown, Beran and Ball  
Apex Business Advisors  
Arvest Bank  
B2B CFO  
Bank Midwest  
Bank of Hays  
Better Business Bureau, Inc.  
BizBuySell  
Booz Allen Hamilton  
Central National Bank  
Commerce Bank  
Core Bank  
Country Financial  
CrossFirst Bank Wichita  
Ennovar  
First Business Bank  
First Citizen's Bank  
First National Bank  
FranNet  
Friends University  
Greater Wichita Partnership  
H&R Block Hays  
Kansas Air National Guard  
Kansas Department of Agriculture  
Kansas Department of Commerce  
Kansas Department of Labor  
Kansas Department of Revenue  
Kansas PTAC  
Kaw Valley State Bank  
Keller Leopold Insurance  
K-State School of Business  
Kyle Danner Family Business Advisor  
Lyon County State Bank  
Meritrust Credit Union  
Payne & Jones Chartered  
Salina Chamber of Commerce  
Salina Economic Development Organization  
Small Business Bank

Sunflower Bank  
Wichita State University  
Workforce Alliance of South-Central Kansas  
TriCorps Security  
UBS  
USDA  
U.S. Small Business Administration  
Westar Energy

### **Federal**

U.S. Small Business Administration

### **State**

Kansas Department of Commerce

### **Host**

Emporia State University  
Fort Hays State University  
Johnson County Community College  
Pittsburg State University  
Seward County Community College  
University of Kansas  
Washburn University  
Wichita State University

### **Local**

City of Iola  
City of Lawrence  
City of Liberal  
City of Marion  
Colby Community College  
Dane G. Hansen Foundation  
Dodge City Ford County Development Corporation  
Douglas County  
Glacial Hills RC&D  
GrowHays  
Junction City Chamber of Commerce  
Manhattan Area Chamber of Commerce  
Montgomery County Action Council  
Neosho County Community College  
Lawrence Chamber of Commerce  
Peoples State Bank  
Pottawatomie County Economic Development Corp.  
Thomas County Economic Development Alliance  
Seward County



# The Sweet Granada | ESU Existing

In 2004, Kim Redeker partnered with her mother, Toni Bowling, and opened The Sweet Granada in the heart of the growing arts and entertainment district in downtown Emporia, Kansas. Specializing in handmade gourmet chocolates as well as other confections and gifts, Redeker and her team take pride in offering a large selection of gourmet confections made with premium ingredients. Even though Redeker wasn't experienced in chocolate or candy making, she knew that she wanted a business that would fit into the thriving and energetic downtown area.

The business experienced success quickly and became a popular downtown destination. Along the way, Redeker's mother and partner retired and the business became totally owned by Redeker. In 2007, Sweet Granada was the Emerging Business of the Year for the Kansas SBDC at Emporia State University. Over its first fifteen years of existence, the business has experienced continued growth, which required more and more production space. The business has moved its production space twice and its retail space once, and in 2013 it landed in its beautiful current location one door south of where it began.

Over the years, Kansas SBDC advisors have helped the business

owners at Sweet Granada better understand the business's production and overhead costs and its profit margins. Recently, with the help of the Kansas SBDC and a Jumpstart grant from the State of Kansas, Sweet Granada was able to re-engineer some of its equipment to improve efficiency and speed production of their signature product, Pop-Choc. This enabled it to increase production by 40% with no increase in labor hours. The business has also expanded into online sales, and now Redeker is considering some creative alternatives for her future transition plan in an effort to preserve the legacy of The Sweet Granada and ensure that the business will continue to be successful for many years to come.

Nearly all of Sweet Granada's goods are made in-house by the employees—a major advantage. The high-quality chocolates stay consistent, and each chocolate has that "made from the heart" aspect that customers love. The Sweet Granada produces nearly 200 varieties of handmade chocolates in addition to Pop-Choc, many varieties of fresh fudge, and a number of other specialty items. "Hump Day" Cupcakes

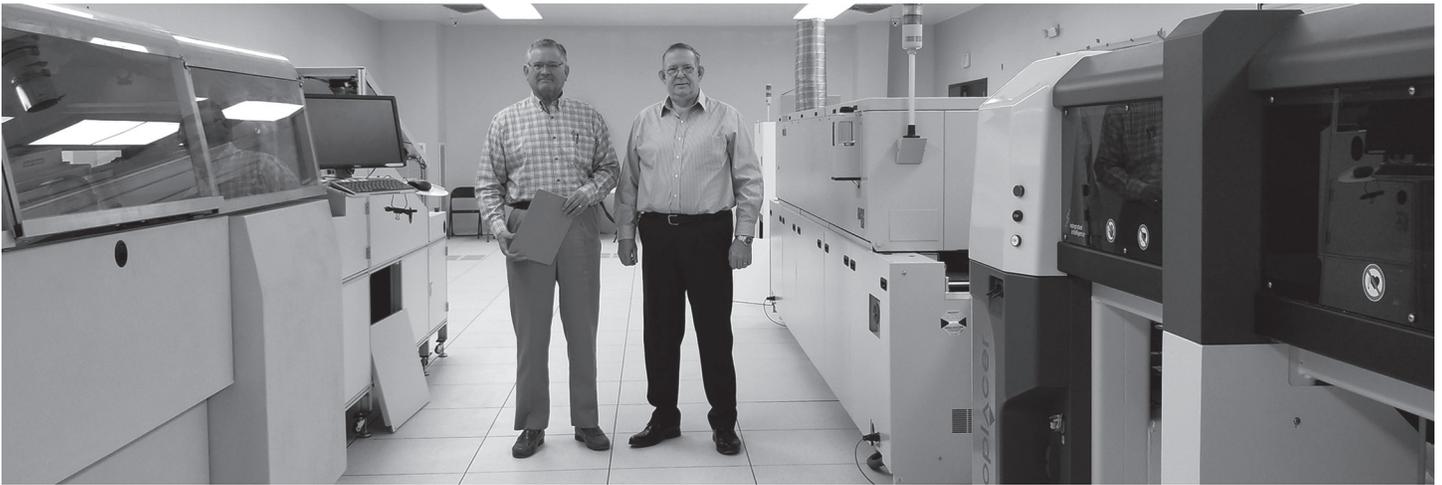
are one of the newest additions to the line-up. Each Wednesday, a different flavor of cupcake is offered, oftentimes produced by guest bakers in the Sweet Granada kitchen. Redeker and her staff are committed to being innovative and are always willing to change for the better.

Kim Redeker has some advice to new business owners; "Stay on the balls of your feet," Redeker recommends. "Be prepared to adjust and react quickly when you need to in order to keep your business relevant, dynamic, and profitable."

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The Kansas SBDC at Emporia State University serves the following counties: Butler, Chase, Chautauqua, Coffey, Cowley, Elk, Greenwood, Lyon, Marion, Morris, and Osage. Contact the team at [ksbdc@emporia.edu](mailto:ksbdc@emporia.edu), or call them at (620) 341-5308. Kansas SBDC Advisors: Lisa Brumbaugh & Tom Byler



# EMP Shield, LLC | ESU Emerging

EMP Shield, LLC, is an engineering design company and manufacturer of the world's first devices to protect houses, businesses, and larger installations from high-altitude electromagnetic pulses—such as those that can be generated by solar coronal mass ejections—as well as from more ordinarily occurring power surges and lightning strikes. They have developed and tested technology that can defend electronics in less than a billionth of a second.

Tim Carty founded EMP Shield in 2017 when he was trying to develop a new energy source based on the capture of solar electrostatic waves. This led to his researching existing surge protectors and discovering that there were none on the market that could protect against all three phases of a high-altitude electromagnetic pulse, a.k.a. HEMP. This inspired EMP Shield's original product design—a surge protector that could defend electronics from all phases associated with a HEMP and protect the property of the everyday public. Developing real solutions to potentially devastating problems is core to EMP Shield's mission.

The team at EMP Shield first contacted the Kansas Small Business Development Center in July of 2018 because they had heard about the upcoming Encountering Innovation

conference. Within hours of being assigned to work with Tom Byler as their Tech Coach, Tim and Peter Keegan, General Manager of EMP Shield, were sitting in his office, eager to get to work on whatever they needed to do to succeed at Encountering Innovation. The team heeded Tom's advice and also took full advantage of every opportunity at the conference. The significance of the company's technology and the management team's ability to back up its claims were well received by the tech scouts, and the conference was such a positive experience that the team attended again in 2019.

2019 was a big year for EMP Shield. The company added over 20 full-time employees, leased a building in Burlington, KS, and by the end of the year was in the process of expanding and upgrading the manufacturing facilities with a \$1.25 million fully automated pick-and-place line for building circuit boards in a clean-room environment. After completion of this state-of-the-art facility in the HUB Zone of Coffey County, EMP Shield plans to expand into a second building in 2020.

According to Tim, one of the things that makes the EMP Shield team so strong is that they hold each other mutually accountable to their purpose. "When we finish a meeting, having gone through our checks and balances, we have tasks to be done, actions to report back on, solutions that we have agreed on. We have a lot of accountability. Everything is purpose-driven and mission-driven." Advisors at the Kansas SBDC round out that team. "The whole support of the SBDC to us has been impeccable, and we are so very, very blessed to have them as an extension and part of our team at EMP Shield and are very grateful for that."



@EMPShield



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## Paisley Pear Wine Bar, Bistro & Market | FHSU Existing

The Paisley Pear Wine Bar, Bistro & Market is different from the usual downtown shop in Hays, KS. Shaun and Heather Musil had a dream to start their own business, and through the help of the Kansas SBDC at FHSU, they were able to build their dream. One night when Shaun and Heather were deciding upon the type of business they wanted, Heather was having a glass of wine. Then an idea hit Shaun...why not a wine bar? Paisley Pear is a customer-service-oriented bistro and wine bar. Customers can enjoy a tasty homemade sandwich or shop in their market which is full of Kansas-made products. Day or night you are also able to enjoy a glass of wine from over 50 wine selections, including local wines. Paisley Pear is also known for their wine flights, which has a selection of four choices of wine to taste and enjoy.

“Downtown Hays has struggled over the past few years to attract and retain retail businesses,” Rick Feltenberger, Kansas SBDC Regional Director at FHSU, said. “Having an anchor like The Paisley Pear not only generates revenue for Hays; it also gives people a place to hang out and relax with friends and family.”

Shaun Musil asked the Kansas SBDC for help on drafting a business plan to secure funding. He had a location picked out, but banks did not

want to talk until a business plan had been fully developed.

“The SBDC and Commerce Bank worked hand in hand in guiding us to build a good business plan,” Musil said. “Because we were a small business starting from scratch, SBDC and Commerce Bank worked with us step by step, providing us the best options.”

Initially, former SBDC advisor Ron Newman helped to analyze profit-and-loss statements, as well as customer trends and other areas that helped promote business and profits.

One of the biggest challenges for Shaun and Heather stretched far beyond just business plans and funding; it was keying in on what their target customers wanted and expected from The Paisley Pear.

“Executing the plan with precision and a focus on remaining profitable is crucial. Many entrepreneurs miss that aspect,” Feltenberger said. “Shaun and Heather are totally customer focused, which makes them totally business focused.”

Their customer-service-focused business, as well as the excellent product selection, has been a major component for the Paisley Pear’s growth and customer support.

“Most business owners believe that they are customer focused, but it just isn’t the case. Shaun and Heather are the exception,” said Feltenberger. “The Paisley Pear is a warm, friendly environment that makes you want to come back again and again.”

“My tips for success are numerous,” said Musil. “Always make time to listen to your customers and never forget to listen to your employees. We have always tried to listen and be very clear on our decision making. Consistency is key, and if you want to be successful, you have to put the time in. This is the hardest part, but it will pay off.”



@thepaisleyppear



@thePaisleyPear



@hayswinebar



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The Kansas SBDC at Fort Hays State University serves the following counties: Barton, Cheyenne, Cloud, Decatur, Ellis, Ellsworth, Gove, Graham, Jewell, Lincoln, Logan, Mitchell, Norton, Osborne, Ottawa, Pawnee, Phillips, Rawlins, Republic, Rooks, Rush, Russell, Saline, Sheridan, Sherman, Smith, Thomas, Trego, and Wallace counties. Contact the team at [ksbdc@fhsu.edu](mailto:ksbdc@fhsu.edu) or call (785) 628-5615. Kansas SBDC Advisors: Rick Feltenberger & Ron Newman



# Mind Sculpt Games | FHSU Emerging

Settlers of Catan. Dungeons and Dragons. Magic: The Gathering. Some might say that game nights are a dying tradition, but Darcy Leech at Mind Sculpt Games has proven otherwise. In rural Kansas, compared to more urban areas, there is an obvious gap in the card and board-game market. Leech spent a lot of time researching. She went to various trade shows, visited other game stores, and really analyzed the board-game industry to nail down how best to enter into the market, as well as make her business thrive in the area. One of the goals for Mind Sculpt Games was to establish a place where the community could gather in a safe, educational, and fun space for challenging games.

When Leech first contacted the Kansas SBDC at Fort Hays State University, she needed help developing three-year financial projections and building upon her business plan. Mind Sculpt Games grew, and 2019 brought new opportunities.

Leech contacted the Kansas SBDC at FHSU again to help her plan for renovations, as well as create floor plans for new commercial spaces that the store

will move into in December of 2019. Rick Feltenberger, Kansas SBDC Regional Director, scoped out the new location and offered valuable insights to improve the new storefront. Feltenberger also helped Leech evaluate the best product categories, as well as plan the best way to utilize the new floor space. Through extensive market research, Feltenberger also helped Leech to narrow down the target demographics for the game store in order to meet the needs and interests of the community.

Leech also credits the consistent communication and mentorship from Feltenberger for Mind Sculpt Games' growth. "It is awesome that not only can I call and email with Rick, but he has visited in Great Bend multiple times," Leech noted. "This in-person connection allows for very tailored and personalized advice from a mentor who has known our business before we were a business."

Leech also noted that she can rely on Feltenberger to help her fill in her gaps of knowledge as she continues to grow her business.

Commenting on the success of Mind Sculpt Games, Feltenberger said, "The 'secret sauce' behind Mind Sculpt Games is clearly the passion and market knowledge Darcy brings to the table. I've worked with clients who were very knowledgeable in one or two areas. Darcy built upon a career in education to become a successful retailer."

-  Mind Sculpt Games
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The Kansas SBDC at Fort Hays State University serves the following counties: Barton, Cheyenne, Cloud, Decatur, Ellis, Ellsworth, Gove, Graham, Jewell, Lincoln, Logan, Mitchell, Norton, Osborne, Ottawa, Pawnee, Phillips, Rawlins, Republic, Rooks, Rush, Russell, Saline, Sheridan, Sherman, Smith, Thomas, Trego, and Wallace counties. Contact the team at [ksbdc@fhsu.edu](mailto:ksbdc@fhsu.edu) or call (785) 628-5615. Kansas SBDC Advisor: Rick Feltenberger



## Blue Valley Physical Therapy | JCCC Exisiting

Growing up on a farm, Ann Todd-Cooper was no stranger to hard work. Her father was an entrepreneur, and Todd-Cooper regularly attended stockholder meetings as a child. She credits her time on the farm as a strong influence in her decision to take control of her future and pursue owning her own business.

Todd-Cooper and her business partner, Ryan Klusman, started Blue Valley Physical Therapy (Blue Valley PT) in 1996. With four clinics in Overland Park, Olathe, and Westwood, Blue Valley PT specializes in diagnosing musculoskeletal injury. They provide a variety of services ranging from aquatic rehabilitation and certified hand therapy to post-operative rehabilitation and sports medicine. Providing high-quality customer service is serious business for Blue Valley PT.

“Our product is the patient experience. We watch our product very closely and are constantly looking at ways to improve it,” said Todd-Cooper. “We are proactive and encourage our employees to develop professionally to better serve our patients.”

When Todd-Cooper and Klusman were looking to grow their business and open additional locations, they turned to the Kansas Small Business Development Center at the suggestion of their clinical director, Melissa Church. While they were eager to expand their business, they expressed

concerns about being a small business in a sea of corporate-owned physical therapy companies growing in the Kansas City area.

“These corporate-owned companies had almost unlimited budgets and were coming into town, acquiring small practices, and smartly keeping the acquired practice’s name to appear local,” said Todd-Cooper. “As small business owners, we did not have those deep pockets to compete at the same level.”

With the assistance of Kansas SBDC advisor John Addressi, Blue Valley PT was able to determine the best locations for two additional clinics, putting their total number of clinics now at four. Additional assistance from Addressi included working with Blue Valley PT to put together a three-year financial projection. This helped Blue Valley PT strategize and plan for long-term financial success and set reasonable goals and expectations. Despite having already owned two clinics when they approached the Kansas SBDC, Todd-Cooper and Klusman revisited business basics when working with Addressi, learning what they could do to improve the odds of achieving their goals.

Blue Valley PT soon saw tremendous success. They opened their

third clinic in 2016, which was profitable within six months of opening, with sales up nearly 29% from the previous year, allowing them to bring on several new part-time and full-time employees. With the rising success of their third clinic, Todd-Cooper and Klusman opened a fourth clinic in 2018. Things are looking bright, and more growth and success are expected for 2020.

What has Blue Valley PT taken from this experience? Todd-Cooper has a few words of advice for anyone looking to grow and expand their business: “Hang on. Sometimes the things that look like they are going to sink your business will open other doors that will drive your business. Be smart and plan. Work hard and sacrifice early for long-term rewards. Be honest, fair, and reasonable, and treat others well. Of course, use all resources available to you, including your SBDC!”



@BlueValleyPT



@BlueValleyPT



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The Kansas SBDC at Johnson County Community College serves the following counties: Johnson, Miami, and Wyandotte. Contact the team at [ksbdc@jccc.edu](mailto:ksbdc@jccc.edu), or call (913) 469-3878. Kansas SBDC Advisor: John Addressi



# LC BioPlastics, LLC | JCCC Emerging

Every day approximately eight million pieces of plastic pollution make their way into our oceans, and plastic production has more than doubled in the last 50 years. When it comes to environmental challenges, where some may see hopelessness, Paul Black only sees opportunity.

Black, an entrepreneur at heart, is always seeking solutions, and his company, LC BioPlastics, provides creative, effective, and cost-competitive solutions to reduce the effect plastic waste is having on our environment.

“The purpose for LC BioPlastics is to identify plastic products for which we can create a functional alternative to meet the demand for environmental—or “green”—solutions,” said Black. “We participate in the supply chain where we bring the most value, including plant-based resins for manufacturers, developing the finished product, sourcing the manufacturing, branding, and bringing the product to market. For our own brands, we will establish a business unit for each unique category, develop the product, bring it to market, and grow the company with the intent to sell the business unit. This can include products for the hunting industry and biodegradable single-use plastics, such as a marine degradable

drinking straw and plastic bags made from plant-based materials.”

Through their work with resin formulators and manufacturers, LC BioPlastics collaborates with consumers to find innovative solutions for their ideas. Currently, they are making e-commerce poly-bags and plastic containers and have earned a USDA BioPreferred Certification for “bio-based can liners and bio-based courier bags.”

Black has found a lot of success in his entrepreneurial endeavors, but being a “one-man band” can present its challenges. Reaching out to the Kansas SBDC at Johnson County Community College, Black was in search of an outside perspective to provide him with new ideas, considerations, and assistance in identifying new opportunities. With the assistance of Kansas SBDC advisor Jack Harwell and the Student Agency at Johnson County Community College, Black gained an in-depth understanding of his customer persona, marketing, and commercialization of his technology.

“The SBDC has provided

knowledgeable ‘sounding boards’ to vet out problems and solutions, to identify hurdles, and to openly discuss resolution,” said Black. “They helped me think through direction and then execute with more confidence and success.”

With products in 3 retail locations in 2018 and 92 locations as of 2019, LC BioPlastics has grown a staggering 1500% over the past year, with an eye on growing even larger in 2020.

For any entrepreneur wanting to learn the secret to success, Black has a few tips on the subject. “It is a strength, not a weakness, to ask for help. Be thoughtful in your actions, and be diligent in your efforts! Lastly, maintain your humility. If you don’t, you will be harshly reminded!”



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# SkuTouch Solutions, LLC | JCCC Exporting

When most people think of exporting, they imagine large-scale corporate conglomerates engaging in massive multi-million-dollar contracts all over the world. While this may represent a small portion of exporters, a surprising 97% of U.S. exporters are actually small- and medium-sized businesses, with 67% of those having fewer than 20 employees. SkuTouch Solutions, LLC, based out of Lenexa, Kansas, is one such successful exporter.

In 2003, brothers Doug and Terry Obershaw established SkuTouch Solutions, LLC. Initially serving as a reverse-logistics service and asset-recovery software provider, the company later morphed into an international manufacturing source for material collection and transportation. Today, SkuTouch is well known as an export management consulting company. Doug and Terry, with their decades of experience overseas, have a keen ability to provide clients with valuable insights into markets around Southeast Asia and Europe, as well as the timelines, costs, risks, and rewards clients can expect. With a cornerstone expertise in product-returns management as a function of customer service, SkuTouch has been established as an international supply-chain logistics provider and a USPS Global Direct Entry partner.

SkuTouch first reached out to the Kansas SBDC in 2005. At the

time, they had installed their software into a leading 3PL logistics provider in Canada, and they were seeking financing to take their company to the next level. They wanted to know more about the potential market for their services and how to leverage networking opportunities to gain a financial foothold to build up their company. After working with Kansas SBDC advisors regarding investors and financing options, the Obershaw brothers decided to spend some time focusing on their sales.

In 2017, Doug attended The Riddle of the Exporter, a class taught by Kansas SBDC advisor John Addressi. The following year they received a \$100,000 loan, and in 2019 they worked with Addressi to diversify their markets.

With that in mind, Addressi made the decision to reach out to Samira Hussein, professor of business administration at Johnson County Community College. Hussein teaches an international business class, and Addressi felt that Hussein's students and SkuTouch would be an ideal collaboration. Professor Hussein had been awaiting an appropriate case study that could be used in the international business class, and SkuTouch Solutions fit the bill perfectly.

"The professor of the class is very pleased to have a real-world case study and the in-person connection, while the students enjoy working on a project which is timely, interesting, and very real," said Kansas SBDC advisor John Addressi. "SkuTouch Solutions, LLC, benefits from hundreds of research hours under the guidance of the professor and the Kansas SBDC."

Doug and Terry both participated in setting up the initial project with the class. With the assistance of the Kansas SBDC and the students of the JCCC international business class, SkuTouch will have 14 additional sets of eyes and ears to research quantitative indications of market potential, giving SkuTouch the information needed to diversify their markets and grow their sales.

"The SBDC listened to our needs and helped us to put a plan into action," said Doug Obershaw.



[www.skutouch.net](http://www.skutouch.net)



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# Young Sign Co. | KU Existing

Young Sign Company in Leavenworth, Kansas, was launched in 1978 by Gene Young. Like many small business owners, Gene started with two family members as employees—his daughter, Ann, and his son-in-law, John Hoins. The business started out with small hand-lettered signs and screen printing.

Over the last forty years, Young Sign Company has grown into a full-service electric sign manufacturing business. With Gene retired, Ann and John run the business with the help of their sons, the third generation involved in the family business. Young Sign Company produces a variety of sign types, including electric signs, channel letters, and dimensional signs, and offers large-format printing on vinyl and rigid substrates.

As stated on their website, “We truly are sign people that live and breathe signs and displays. We pride ourselves on having an eye for artistic design and having the ability to develop quality creative solutions on any project that comes our

way. We are extremely dedicated to producing quality work that is attractive, effective, and durable.”

Young Sign Co. has seen a number of major changes over the last four decades. Technology has driven major changes in the industry. Approximately five years ago, Young Sign Co. was given the opportunity to sign on as Yesco’s Kansas City–area lighting-and sign-maintenance franchise. As a result of this affiliation, Young Sign Co. is now partnered with area technicians who work with businesses to keep their signage in shape for many years to come.

After many years with the business, John was ready to start slowing down and step away from the business. This prompted Young Sign Co. to contact the Kansas SBDC at the University of Kansas regarding succession planning and business growth. Kansas SBDC advisor Will Katz assisted by offering objective financial and

valuation analysis. Katz also helped Young Sign Co. connect with other professional service providers for planning and preparation.

Ann Hoins believes that the advisor’s objective analysis, support, and great resources have helped the company immensely. “[We have] seen significant growth,” said Hoins. “[We] recently completed a significant renovation of the building we have been in for years, which helps us move employees in preparation for our succession plan.”

Young Sign Co. is active in several trade organizations. They are committed to professional development, training, and industry leadership.

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The Kansas SBDC at the University of Kansas serves the following counties: Atchison, Doniphan, Douglas, Franklin, Jefferson, and Leavenworth. Contact the team at [ksbdc@ku.edu](mailto:ksbdc@ku.edu) or call (785) 843-8844. Kansas SBDC Advisor: Will Katz



# Julie Bear Don't Walk, LAC | KU Emerging Acupuncture & Integrative Health

Integrating holistic health into the day-to-day life of a person may be a challenge, but that's the mission of Julie Bear Don't Walk, LAC, Acupuncture + Integrative Health in Lawrence, Kansas. With a focus on meshing modern and traditional health care through acupuncture and integrative health practices, Julie and her team aim to bring their patients' lives back into balance.

As stated on their website, "We are deeply committed to bridging Eastern and Western medicine, and collaborate with each patient to find the best health approach for your life. We use acupuncture, supplements, nutritional advice, and lifestyle recommendations to help our patients feel great in their bodies—physically, mentally, and emotionally."

In her quest to develop and grow her business, Julie learned about the Kansas Small Business Development Center from her community lender, in conjunction with the Kansas E-Community program. In October of 2017, Julie decided to reach out to the Kansas SBDC for assistance with accessing capital.

Julie has continued to work with the Center on a variety of

strategic initiatives. According to Julie, the Kansas SBDC team helped her develop a smart strategy, including the development of interviewing skills to attract, hire, and maintain ideal employees.

"[The Kansas SBDC] helped me really figure out smart strategy," Julie began. "Like strategy for our online store and the products we would offer. And really strategizing about how to sustainably grow our practice to best serve the needs of our community."

Julie also went on to add an anecdote about a colleague from Colorado who asked her how she was able to be successful in attracting and hiring the right people for her business. Julie explained that her success in finding great hires came from training and resources provided by the Kansas SBDC. In two years, Julie Bear Don't Walk, LAC, Acupuncture + Integrative Health has grown from one full-time employee to three part-time and three full-time staff members.

"A huge thing was actually adding clinical staff," Julie said. "I

remember talking to [the Kansas SBDC] a lot about interviewing skills, the timing of hiring, and understanding the strategic needs of the business."

The Kansas SBDC also helped Julie diversify the services offered outside of acupuncture. Julie Bear Don't Walk, LAC, Acupuncture + Integrative Health, now offers food sensitivity testing in addition to acupuncture, psychotherapy services, and an online supplement store. The clinic is planning to offer more in-depth nutrition-counseling services in 2020. Julie has also started to offer business consulting to others in her industry.

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# ADI, Inc. | PSU Existing

ADI, Inc. is the story of a family business. ADI has been family-owned and operated since Merrill Cunningham founded it in 1990. Merrill and his wife, Wendy, worked together for many years running the company. ADI is now in its second generation with Merrill's sons, Scott and Stuart, now taking the lead as CEO and Plant Manager. Scott's wife, Staci, runs Accounting and Stuart's wife, Becca, is the Office Manager.

ADI is a value-added electric wire and cable distributor based in Chanute, Kansas, with customers world-wide. ADI provides a variety of services from bonding PVC wire to letter printing wires for custom identification. For anyone inquiring about a service that is not listed on the website, ADI is willing to work with their customers to provide personalized service and customized solutions.

ADI does not exclude its customers from being a part of their family. They build relationships with their customers and customize their solutions on a case-by-case basis. They understand that no sale or interaction will be the same as a previous one. Many of ADI's services were established because a customer had called and asked if the company would be willing

to perform a particular service for them. Due to the relationships ADI has built over the years, they have several long-standing customers who have trusted the company for over 20 years.

ADI has worked with the Kansas SBDC for a number of years, working with advisors to explore collaborative opportunities with other businesses as well as taking advantage of the educational workshops offered by their local branch in Pittsburg, Kansas. The Kansas SBDC has also worked with ADI on keeping them in compliance with any changes in how business is conducted in the state of Kansas.

"The SBDC has been very helpful in overcoming challenges," said Scott Cunningham. "When we were looking into purchasing a new technology the SBDC got us in contact with a company that was already using it to answer our questions."

New technology has been brought to ADI, allowing them to work with more customers across the country. Through assistance with

the Kansas SBDC, ADI updated their employee handbook in order to establish better employee relations and conducted a business analysis that allowed them to hone in on priorities within the company that require more focus. Currently sitting at 35 full-time and part-time employees, ADI is flourishing.

"We enjoy the relationship we have with the SBDC. They are more than willing to help even if it isn't something they do regularly," said Scott. "The extra training has been extremely helpful as well as the analysis data we have gotten access too. We will continue to use the SBDC as long as we can."



@A.D.I. Inc.



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The Kansas SBDC at Pittsburg State University serves the following counties: Anderson, Linn, Woodson, Allen, Bourbon, Wilson, Neosho, Crawford, Montgomery, Labette, and Cherokee. Contact the team at [ksbdc@pittstate.edu](mailto:ksbdc@pittstate.edu), or call (620) 235-4921. Kansas SBDC Advisors: Tom Byler & Dacia Clark



# Smallville CrossFit | PSU Emerging

For those who are interested in the world of CrossFit, the thought of walking into a gym of seasoned veterans can be quite intimidating. Most are familiar with the stereotype – CrossFit is for, well, fit people. Aaron and Lindsey Watts, owners of Smallville CrossFit in Fort Scott, Kansas, want to smash the stereotype and let the world know that CrossFit is for everyone. The Wattses are on a mission to build a well-balanced, healthy, and fully capable community. No matter what your fitness background may be, Smallville’s atmosphere allows for anyone to come through their doors and start on their better health journey with no judgement.

The Wattses purchased Smallville CrossFit in 2016 and the business quickly grew. Smallville offered the community special events, classes, and personal training. With their business garnering more interest, the Wattses were looking to purchase a new facility that would

allow them to grow and offer more services, such as yoga, for their members. Interested in securing an SBA guarantee and a loan for the purchase of their new facility, in 2019 Lindsey Watts reached out to the Kansas Small Business Development Center for assistance. Working with Kansas SBDC advisor, Dacia Clark, the Wattses were able to pull together the necessary costs for their future facility.

“Laying out a detailed list of all of the costs we needed to address and be prepared for was huge for me,” said Watts. “I am a planner; however, there were still many things that were not even on my radar. Dacia explained each and every cost and asked questions that helped me to question ways to do things better with future spending.”

In conjunction with Clark’s

assistance in creating cash flow projections, Watts began working with Katie Casper, Loan Officer at Union State Bank, on securing additional financial assistance. In July of 2019, Smallville CrossFit obtained a \$320,000 loan, and the Wattses are currently in the process of remodeling their new space.

“Without Dacia and the SBDC I do not believe we would have been as prepared as we are to take on this move,” said Watts. “I do not know if we would have been able to secure the funds to make this purchase.”



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# Progressive Products, Inc | PSU Exporting

A pneumatic conveying system is a process by which dry bulk materials are transported from a source to a destination utilizing a gas. Use of this system is imperative for multiple industries, carrying anything from feed in grain-handling facilities to hazardous materials in chemical plants. For over 40 years, Progressive Products, Inc., in Pittsburg, Kansas, has been helping businesses throughout the United States and internationally to streamline and maintain their conveyor systems.

According to their website, Progressive Products has one goal in mind: “Ensure the information you receive from us is accurate and timely and gives you exactly what you need to make your pneumatic conveying system work better by reducing downtime, maintenance, and waste and improving the performance of your system. Tell us your challenges. We’ll help you find solutions.”

Todd Allison, president of Progressive Products, Inc. (PPI), contacted the Kansas Small Business Development Center seeking assistance with general sales strategies to help reinvigorate the business.

“We needed to reorganize our sales team, change the focus of sales efforts, and establish appropriate metrics and accountability,” said Allison.

PPI had been witnessing a de-

cline in sales on the pneumatic conveying side of their business. Power plants had given PPI a huge boost in sales in trying to meet a 2015-2016 compliance date, but after that wave, sales began declining, PPI needed to redirect its efforts.

Kansas SBDC advisor Randy Robinson worked with Allison on analyzing the marketplace and finding simple and consistent changes to improve sales. Robinson also helped to analyze the appropriate metrics and accountability, which helped to reorganize the sales team.

“I think reorganizing our sales team territories has been most helpful,” Allison said. “It allows us to spend more time finding new clients and working on our international reach.” The additional effort towards their international reach is already showing, as exports are up over 300% and now make up 7% of overall sales vs. just 2% a year earlier.

Progressive Products, Inc., is not a single-faceted company. APEX Stages, a division of Progressive Products, Inc., provides the large, mobile hydraulic stages that concert goers see at outdoor concerts and festivals. An APEX stage was also used for a na-

tionally televised U.S. vice presidential debate. According to Robinson, Allison always keeps a stage handy for community events.

“Todd keeps a stage available for city events and other charitable functions, and provides this at no charge,” Robinson stated. “He and his company are a great asset to Pittsburg. In fact, the recently opened Jolly Fox Brewery in Pittsburg named a beer to honor their generosity, the APEX Ale.”

“[The SBDC] has been really helpful and brought new focus to the sales team,” said Allison. “Randy has been working with us fairly consistently over the last year, and his advice has improved our efforts to increase our gross sales, establish ourselves with more new clients, and reduce internal processing errors.”



Progressive Products, Inc.



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# Dodge City Brewing | SCCC Existing

Dodge City brings to Southwest Kansas something that no other area community can—hand-crafted beers paired with New York-style brick oven pizza under one roof. Located in historic downtown Dodge City, Dodge City Brewing Company, LLC, opened in July of 2017. The brewery has a taproom that includes a variety of creative beverages and food that bring a modern twist to the area. Larry and Sheri Cook are the proud owners and brewers and put their utmost effort into every creation. The Cooks' background and expertise in the art of pizza making comes from classes attended on Staten Island, New York. They continuously want to explore ways to improve their recipes and provide an environment that is family friendly. The consistent hard work and dedication from the owners only make Dodge City Brewing bigger and better by the day.

"I wanted to start this business because I had an obsession to make great beer, and the desire to share my passion with other beer lovers," said Cook. "Our beer and pizza are both unique. There is no place you can get beers that taste like ours, and our pizza is certainly unique in Dodge City. While you can find other places that make New York-style pizza, we put our own twist on it."

Before the brewery became

what it is today, the Cooks had to find the funding to get it open in the first place. They sought the assistance of the Kansas Small Business Development Center in an effort to find solutions to gain additional capital for the brewery. Although they had contributed \$300,000 of personal investment to the brewery, they needed additional capital before they could finish construction. In 2017, the SBDC introduced the Cooks to Bob Wetmore from Great Plains Development Inc., who assisted with connections to a local lender and with SBA application processes. With Wetmore's help, the Cooks secured a \$365,000 SBA loan. Wetmore also helped the Cooks secure additional financing needed in the form of a \$60,000 line of credit. The brewery project costs in total equaled roughly \$1,000,000.

Throughout 2018, Dodge City Brewing was growing. They had successful food sales and started wholesaling product to other businesses. In addition to the funding assistance received, the Cooks were also working with the Kansas SBDC

on their marketing strategy, seeking ways to generate more buzz about the brewery and become a destination location for tourists. For the Cooks, the help they received from the Kansas SBDC was immeasurable, and they continue their work with the Kansas SBDC today in their collaboration with Regional Director Maria Dennison.

"With the financing that the SBDC and Bob Wetmore assisted us with, which included an SBA loan, we were able to complete construction and open. It wouldn't have happened otherwise," says Larry.



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The Kansas SBDC at Seward County Community College serves the following counties: Greeley, Wichita, Scott, Lane, Ness, Hamilton, Kearny, Finney, Hodgeman, Stanton, Grant, Haskell, Gray, Ford, Edwards, Kiowa, Comanche, Clark, Morton, Stevens, Meade, and Seward counties. Contact the team at [ksbdc@sccc.edu](mailto:ksbdc@sccc.edu), or give them a call at (620) 417-1955. Kansas SBDC Advisors: Maria Dennison, Cheryl Schmale & Loretta Heft



## The Red Rock Experience & Venue | SCCC Emerging

Traditionally, haunted houses are restricted to the month of October with Halloween being the grand finale to the spooky festivities. Tammy Lane-Reese, along with daughter Jessica Reese, had other ideas in mind after hearing the haunting history behind Red Rock Elementary School in Ulysses, Kansas. Their vision was a year-round, paranormal entertainment destination and venue that would bring sustainable tourism to the area. From this idea, The Red Rock Experience & Venue was created. What was once just a haunted elementary school has now become a host for events and a haven for ghost hunters across the United States. Lane-Reese's priority was not only to provide a unique variety of products and services for the surrounding communities, but also bring in outside tourism dollars into the rural area.

To make this happen, she came to the Kansas Small Business Development Center in search of counseling and assistance with fine-tuning her business plan. Her goal was to revise the plan in order to apply for a \$25,000 Business Revitalization Plan Grant from Grant County.

Despite currently owning and operating another local successful business in Ulysses, building a business around a paranormal event venue was new to Lane-Reese, and she came to the table eager to take advantage of the expertise of Kansas SBDC advisors Maria Dennison and Mike O'Kane. For Lane-

Reese, her hard work was driven by her desire to reinforce the vision of the Red Rock Experience & Venue in capturing outside tourism dollars and filling a gap in entertainment options benefiting not only Grant County but the surrounding communities as well.

Unfortunately, Lane-Reese did not receive the grant money she was hoping for. Despite that, the work and effort of both Lane-Reese and the Kansas SBDC inevitably paid off in the long run, as The Red Rock Experience & Venue has brought together the community in more than just the typical manner. All the effort devoted to this company has made a difference in the community even without the grant. Not only that, but The Red Rock Experience & Venue has been named one of the 13 must-see locations on the Haunted Kansas Road Trip.

During her time working with the Kansas SBDC, Lane-Reese was able to learn a great deal about grant writing. This new-found knowledge may still be applied. "[We] intend to attempt more of this in the future," she says, always keeping an eye out for ways to expand and grow The Red Rock Experience & Venue. Although she did not achieve the original goal she had in mind when she set out

to work with the Kansas SBDC, Lane-Reese appreciates the knowledge and skills acquired through her experience in working with her advisors.

"[The Kansas SBDC] was very open-minded, supportive, and always there for us just a phone call away," says Lane-Reese. "We have also called upon Maria several times to look over brochures and have asked her for marketing ideas. She has always been very upbeat and helpful to us. I have really enjoyed working with her a lot!"

Kansas SBDC advisor Maria Dennison felt very much the same way about her partnership with Lane-Reese.

"There was a great collaboration between both parties," said Dennison. "This was a partnership that provided support in the necessary areas, and she was quick to respond and motivated to make a difference!"



RedRockExp



@TheRedRockExperience



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The Kansas SBDC at Seward County Community College serves the following counties: Greeley, Wichita, Scott, Lane, Ness, Hamilton, Kearny, Finney, Hodgeman, Stanton, Grant, Haskell, Gray, Ford, Edwards, Kiowa, Comanche, Clark, Morton, Stevens, Meade, and Seward counties. Contact the team at [ksbdc@sccc.edu](mailto:ksbdc@sccc.edu), or give them a call at (620) 417-1955. Kansas SBDC Advisors: Maria Dennison & Mike O'Kane



# Connie's Mexico Cafe | WSU Existing

There are no shortages of restaurants to choose from when you visit Wichita, Kansas. From fast food to fine dining, you can always find something to sate your appetite. One place in particular, nestled on a side street near Interstate 135, is Connie's Mexico Café.

Carmen Rosales is the proprietor of the oldest Mexican café in Wichita. Connie's, having been in business approximately 60 years, serves the Wichita area with delicious dishes ranging from quesadillas and enchiladas to their famous king-sized burritos. Connie's is not just well known for their food, but being a family business, they also bring to the table respect for their customers, dedication, and family values.

They have always been and continue to be a portal from the mainstream community to the Latino community in Wichita. Connie's is an icon of credibility and social responsibility, allowing many young people to enter the labor force by providing a good place to work and close mentorship from the owners to the employees.

Though Connie's is well received by locals, a lot has changed over the last six decades, and Rosales felt it was time to adapt. Rosales is nearing retirement, and now that her daughters, Adele, Carla, and Carmen, were taking the reins, they were eager

to bring in new and exciting changes to the business while providing their mother the support she needs to successfully transition the ownership of Connie's to her children.

"We needed another point of view, someone to guide and direct and assist us in finding new and innovative ideas," said Adele Jordan, daughter of Rosales. "Our restaurant has been in business since the 1960s, and things have changed since then—changes such as digital marketing, food trucks, and food delivery services. We needed an advisor to give structure and provide resources and tools to improve."

The Rosales family reached out to the Kansas Small Business Development Center for assistance in strategic and succession planning. Frank Choriego, Kansas SBDC advisor at Wichita State University, worked with Connie's to create a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis to look at the current state of the business and what opportunities were available for growth.

Choriego also brought in Kansas SBDC advisor Will Katz to assist in business valuation for Connie's. In collaboration with the Kansas SBDC, Adele, Carla, and Carmen worked to further develop Connie's catering

department and to manage their costs and pricing efforts to increase profits. The Rosales family participated in a business transitions conference in 2018 and attended several Kansas SBDC workshops that helped the team become more motivated than ever.

"In our strategic planning, we took a step back to analyze our expenses and discovered ways to save money and increase our revenue. Since then, our cost of goods has decreased, thus saving us money. We now have a total of four delivery services," said Jordan. "[Frank] really made us take a step back to look at how the business is run as well as pushed us out of our comfort zone in expanding the business with new and innovative ideas. We now have bigger goals to reach for, such as opening a second location. Most importantly, we gained a friend that we trust with business ideas."



@ConniesMexico



@ConniesMexicoCafe



2227 North Broadway Street  
Wichita, Kansas 67219



(316) 832-9636

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The Kansas SBDC at Wichita State University serves the following counties: Barber, Harper, Harvey, Kingman, McPherson, Pratt, Reno, Rice, Sedgewick, Stafford, and Sumner. You can contact the team at [ksbdc@wichita.edu](mailto:ksbdc@wichita.edu), or call (316) 978-3193. Kansas SBDC Advisors: Frank Choriego & Will Katz



# Ember Technology, LLC | WSU Emerging

According to a 2016 Healthcare Industry Cybersecurity Report, over 75% of the healthcare industry has been infected with malware. Not only that, but overall, more than 77% of organizations do not have a cybersecurity incident-response plan, leaving them vulnerable to attack and increasing their odds of shutting down business. Jonathan Sanchez and Tariq Azmi, owners of Ember Technology, LLC, provide businesses a helping hand in technology and cybersecurity management.

Ember Technology is in the business of staying one step ahead of cybersecurity attacks. Project design, discovery, and management constitute a big part of what they do. Working with businesses in the healthcare and finance industries, Ember Technology assists in refining existing tech infrastructure and business needs through analysis, process development, coordination, and review.

Before becoming the premier technology operations partner they're known as today, Ember Technology, like all businesses, had to put a plan in place before

they could launch.

Sanchez and Azmi together have several years of experience in IT, and, having already owned and operated other small businesses and provided IT contract work, they were ready to dive in with Ember Technology in 2018. Before doing so, they needed to know what steps to take to work with federally regulated businesses in the healthcare and finance industry. With this in mind, they decided to seek the help of the Kansas Small Business Development Center.

Working with advisor Frank Choriego from the Kansas SBDC at Wichita State University, Ember Technology identified local companies that needed cybersecurity services and worked on producing timelines and processes to bid on any work stemming from government contracts. Choriego also aided in startup processes, such as marketing and financial projections.

Within a year, Ember Technology had several contracts

and began taking on clients, resulting in current annual sales totaling around \$250,000. Not only that, but Sanchez and Azmi were able to grow their team to three full-time and two part-time staff.

"[Frank] really understood our needs and helped us create the process to get the results we wanted," said Azmi. "We are now being branded as experts on cybersecurity and regulated industries, namely HIPAA and ITAR."

"It's rewarding to see them grow and become well known in the community," said Choriego. "They're a young company filling a strong role in cybersecurity and are receiving a lot of speaking engagements and work."



Ember Technology, LLC



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Kansas SBDC Advisor: Frank Choriego



# The Marie Antoinette Gluten Free Baking Co. | WU Existing

The Marie Antoinette Gluten Free Baking Co. is an artisanal food-manufacturing company that uses proprietary house blends and recipes along with real ingredients such as whole milk, sour cream, and butter to create amazing gluten-free foods. From richly sweet cinnamon rolls to savory biscuits and gravy, their food product lines include something for everyone.

In 2011, Rani Navarro-Force began creating recipes for her daughter, who had been diagnosed with severe gluten allergies. Her daughter felt depressed because she couldn't enjoy eating anymore, so Rani decided that she was going to find a way to make food fun for her daughter again. Rani developed her very own recipes, with combinations of ingredient blends and processes, to create delicious gluten-free products that had the same taste and texture as foods containing wheat and gluten. These delightful recipes helped to create a solution for many people diagnosed with celiac disease, and thus The Marie Antoinette Gluten Free Baking Co. was born.

Rani and her husband, Shawn Force, approached the Kansas SBDC in 2012 for financial assistance. Kansas SBDC advisor Mary Ann Riederer stepped in to provide the support the Forces needed. Through their work with Riederer, the Forces secured funding through the Northeast Kansas Glacial Hills Rural Business Development Loan Program to start their business and opened in January of 2013 as the premier gluten-free eatery in downtown Wathena, Kansas. As visitors

became aware of their business, wholesale orders began exceeding retail sales. The Forces responded by renovating their building to accommodate bulk production, establishing Marie Antoinette's as a wholesale business in 2016.

"The SBDC worked hard to find the right resources that we needed when we required assistance," said Rani. "Sometimes they found resources that we didn't even know we needed—which is awesome!"

The strategic and thoughtful pivot in their business model to grow through wholesale distribution allowed Marie Antoinette's to reach many more gluten-free consumers and considerably increase their sales and brand recognition. Shawn believes in the importance of knowing the people with whom they do business. With that in mind, he personally visits stores across the region, building relationships and literally carrying their brand into seven Midwest states.

The company has evolved from a unique, highly niched, retail storefront eatery in the heart of downtown Wathena to an ever-growing wholesale manufacturer of gluten-free products with reach throughout the Midwest. Rani credits the SBDC with helping her and Shawn change the way that they do business.

"In the past, we have been reactionary in making decisions," said Rani. "Now, we are taking the reins to run

it using a strategic plan for growth. We review the Value Builder Report often and try to implement a recommendation every few months. I am able to review financial analytics and understand the company's strengths and weaknesses."

Her advice to other small businesses: "Seek out services that are there to help you succeed. We learn from our failures and mistakes. Don't ever give up."

The Marie Antoinette Gluten Free Baking Co. currently serves more than 150 retail establishments with their products, and Rani and Shawn are not ready to slow down anytime soon! They seek to be the catalyst that proves that high-quality, gluten-free food products can be created and sold at reasonable costs.



@MariesGlutenFree



@TheMariesGlutenFree



www.mariesglutenfree.com



316 St Joseph St  
Wathena, Kansas 66090



(785) 989-2366

The Kansas SBDC at Washburn University serves the following counties: Brown, Clay, Dickinson, Geary, Jackson, Marshall, Nemaha, Pottawatomie, Riley, Shawnee, Wabaunsee, and Washington. Contact the team at [ksbdc@washburn.edu](mailto:ksbdc@washburn.edu), or call (785) 215-8375. Kansas SBDC Advisor: Mary Ann Riederer



# Anneal Initiative, Inc. | WU Emerging

Anneal Initiative, Inc., is a woman-owned and veteran-owned intelligence analysis and cybersecurity firm. Its mission is to improve how people, infrastructure, and government in the United States are defended by effectively utilizing information for the earliest possible detection and mitigation of threats. Analysts work to identify risks and employ rigorous analytical processes to best provide advanced-decision support for the protection of our nation. Anneal Initiative utilizes unique threat perspective and analytical skills to drive risk-based decision making for its services in order to help clients prioritize defensive strategies and move beyond compliance to actually improving their network security.

Amy Billinger and Jeremy Jackson, two of the company's founders, have performed intelligence analysis to support military missions overseas and have extensive experience developing and operating intelligence-analysis capabilities of terrorist, cyber, and biological threats potentially impacting the United States. Jennie Jackson, the third founding partner, came to the team with a strong project-management background. Looking for ways to serve both national security and private business needs with leading-edge services and technology, the three partners founded Anneal Initiative in 2017. Amy, Jeremy, and Jennie believe that innovation is the only thing that can strengthen U.S. defenses by making them flexible and adaptive enough to protect our country from

rapidly changing threats.

After starting the business, the trio discovered that their original legal structure was not the right fit for their firm; they were having difficulty bringing together initial operating capital. Realizing they needed expert advice from someone who wasn't trying to take an equity stake in their company, the ownership team came to the Kansas SBDC at Washburn University for confidential advice on financing their venture, guidance in business planning, and assistance with financial projections. Kansas SBDC advisors Karl Klein, Tom Byler, and Laurie Pieper were able to help with these issues and also to connect the owners with legal resources to restructure the business.

Anneal Initiative saw that the Kansas SBDC could also be a resource for a broader range of assistance, such as providing advice on how to market the value of their commercial cybersecurity offerings.

"The Kansas SBDC has been a champion for the importance of cybersecurity and business continuity for small businesses," according to CEO Amy Billinger. "They know how important those issues are for the survivability of small businesses and helped us understand the market for providing cybersecurity support to small businesses."

In turn, the Anneal Initiative team

has generously shared their knowledge about cybersecurity issues to help educate the small business resource community and has been instrumental in assisting with cybersecurity events hosted by the Kansas SBDC.

This past autumn, Anneal Initiative participated in Encountering Innovation. The team reports that they have likely developed "more interested clients for our capabilities in that one SBDC-sponsored event than we have on our own for the previous three years combined." Developing new pitch materials for the conference, getting feedback from their Kansas SBDC advisors, and then interacting with the technology scouts "was so helpful that it will have a positive impact on all of our contract pursuits going forward."



Anneal Initiative, Inc.



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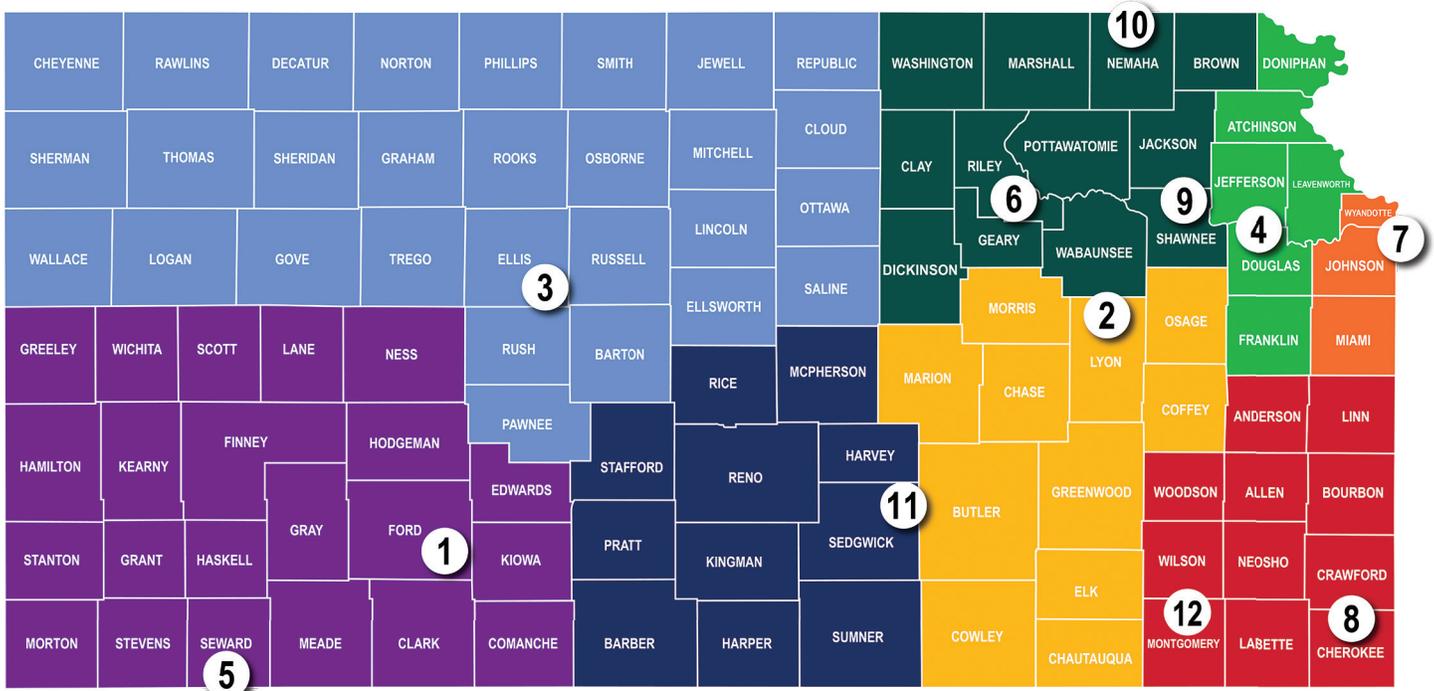


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The Kansas SBDC at Washburn University serves the following counties: Brown, Clay, Dickinson, Geary, Jackson, Marshall, Nemaha, Pottawatomie, Riley, Shawnee, Wabaunsee, and Washington. Contact the team at [ksbdc@washburn.edu](mailto:ksbdc@washburn.edu), or call (785) 215-8375. Kansas SBDC Advisors: Karl Klein, Tom Byler & Laurie Pieper

# Kansas SBDC Locations



## 1. Dodge City. (SCCC region)

101 East Wyatt Earp, Dodge City, KS 67801  
 ksbdcc@sccc.edu | 620-789-0292

## 2. Emporia. Kansas SBDC at ESU

1 Kellogg Circle, 104 Cremer Hall, Emporia, KS 66801  
 ksbdcc@emporia.edu | 620-341-5308

## 3. Hays. Kansas SBDC at FHSU

600 Park Street, Custer Hall 110, Hays, KS 67601  
 ksbdcc@fhsu.edu | 785-628-5615

## 4. Lawrence. Kansas SBDC at KU

718 New Hampshire, Lawrence, KS 66044  
 ksbdcc@ku.edu | 785-843-8844

## 5. Liberal. Kansas SBDC at SCCC

2215 North Kansas Ave. Liberal, KS 67905  
 ksbdcc@sccc.edu | 620-417-1955

## 6. Manhattan. (WU region)

501 Poyntz Ave. Manhattan, KS 66502  
 ksbdcc@washburn.edu | 785-587-9917

## 7. Overland Park. Kansas SBDC at JCCC

240 Regnier Center, 12345 College Blvd. Overland Park, KS 66210  
 ksbdcc@jccc.edu | 913-469-3878

## 8. Pittsburg. Kansas SBDC at PSU

402 North Broadway, Suite B, Pittsburg, KS 66762  
 ksbdcc@pittstate.edu | 620-235-4921

## 9. Topeka. Kansas SBDC at WU

719 South Kansas Ave. Suite 100, Topeka, KS 66603  
 ksbdcc@washburn.edu | 785-215-8375

## 10. Wetmore. (WU region)

334 2nd St. Wetmore, KS 66550  
 ksbdcc@washburn.edu | 785-207-0267

## 11. Wichita. Kansas SBDC at WSU

5015 East 29th St. N, Wichita, KS 67220  
 ksbdcc@wichita.edu | 316-978-3193

## 12. Montgomery County Action Council. (PSU Region)

115 S 6th St, Independence, KS 67301  
 tpurdon@actioncouncil.com | 620-331-3830

