

kcff

keith county
foundation fund

dedicated to the improvement and
long-term viability of the community

Spring 2025 Newsletter

Our MISSION

Enhance Keith County's ability to grow as a community where people want to live, work, learn, have fun and prosper.

Our VISION

Provide leadership
that promotes collaboration, cooperation, and partnerships within the Keith County community

Encourage charitable giving
to build endowments and other community-focused funds

Provide stewardship
in partnership with Nebraska Community Foundation
that provides guardianship and investment of funds

Make impactful grants
addressing community needs and opportunities through high-impact, sustainable grant-making



"Our Story, Told by Us" Artwork

Keith County residents participated in "Our Story, Told by Us," a project intended to locate hidden assets in Keith County while creating community art. Caleb Most, Keith County's 2024 Hometown Intern, visited community organizations, asking individuals involved to design a small canvas to represent the people, places, activities, and memories in Keith County that are special to them. Tiles were combined to make a single work, showcasing the assets that exist in the community, tangible or otherwise. "It was so exciting to watch the creativity be unleashed and to learn about what Keith County's residents enjoy about where they call home," Most said. ■



The Keith County Foundation Fund
is an Affiliated Fund of the Nebraska Community Foundation



keithcountyfoundation.org



Keith County Foundation Fund

Passing on the Giving Spirit



A message from KCFF's Chair, Mary Pierce

I wish you could have met my parents: the late Emiel and Agnes Ysebaert. Immigrants from Belgium in 1949, the couple arrived at Ellis Island in New York City, stepping off a boat that carried hundreds of people, all eager for the opportunity to live the American dream.

Their journey was not easy. In their 20s, they left their home country, parents and siblings. While they were welcomed with open arms by relatives who invited them to share their small apartment, everything else was unfamiliar. Yet, strong work ethics - you work for your keep - had them seeking employment immediately. Dad got a job in a shirt factory while mom worked in a cafeteria, scooping cottage cheese and peach halves onto plates, making sandwiches and slicing cakes for the working folks' lunch.

Lessons of the value of education and perseverance through arduous work was learned at those first and subsequent jobs. Proudly they learned English through conversations with family, workmates, and by reading. The newspaper was as important to them as step-by-step readers are to elementary school students. Dad pursued an associate degree in drafting, and mom, with her eighth-grade education, mastered the classics with weekly trips to the New York City library.

After becoming citizens, they gained their independence financially. Dad's job with a telecommunications company took them first to New Jersey, where their six children were born, and then to Colorado. Mom's role continued as caregiver of the children and manager of the household while dad's responsibility was to provide for the family.

As a teenager, I struggled with the manner in which I was raised. While we always had enough, there was not enough for extras. My parents practiced frugality, a philosophy I didn't understand at that time. Yet, they also practiced generosity. Conflicting, I'd think, when I yearned for the latest fashion boots only to be told there wasn't room in the budget. Yet, dad always had funds to put in the envelopes that were dropped weekly in the basket at church. And mom's financial support to those struggling was never questioned and her favorite

charity, St. Jude's Children's Hospital, never forgotten.

Mom and dad's generosity exceeded dollars. For years, my parents had a route through their city collecting food from stores and bringing it to pantries for distribution.

Later in life, dad used his talents and love for cycling to not only fix bikes for children and adults, but to donate them to anyone in need of two-wheeled transportation. Mom used her talents to knit blankets and hats for hospitals to distribute to newborn babies.

Beyond gracing others with treasures and talents, mom exuded an altruistic spirit. She'd hold doors for others, let someone step in front of her in the grocery store line, and even as a senior citizen, mom would rise from her own seat on the bus to offer it to another senior who might not have been as mobile. On her daily walks along the city streets, she greeted everyone who passed with a "hello" and a big smile. Some would respond, some wouldn't. "It doesn't matter," she'd say. "Smiles are free, and I have a lot of them."

My parents, who died in 2020, shaped my philosophies on generosity, altruism, and philanthropy. Sometimes you can throw a dollar in the plate at church. Other times, you can use your talents and create something for someone else. Still, at other times, if there's work to be done, you can do it. And for those who are planners, sometimes you can leave gifts to your communities that continue giving for future generations.

I hope to continue my parents' legacy by giving what I can - whether time, talent, or treasures - and that my mother's smile is seen in my own, my child's and my grandchildren's. ■



Agnes and Emiel Ysebaert

"Mom and dad's generosity exceeded dollars."

Securing a Legacy

Give like Guy



Guy Bechtel, a longtime supporter of Keith County, contributed to the Keith County Foundation Fund for nearly two decades. From 2003 until his passing in 2023, Bechtel gave a monthly donation of \$10 to the Keith County Foundation Fund, ultimately reaching the Gold Level donor status.

Bechtel, a graduate of Perkins County High School, continued his support beyond his lifetime. He designated his life insurance policy to be shared between the Keith County and Perkins County Foundation Funds.

His daughter, Kerri Anderson, warmly noted that her father's commitment to giving never wavered.

Bechtel's contributions highlight the lasting impact of consistent giving and his lifelong dedication to philanthropy in his community.

See the October 2019 newsletter on our website for Bechtel's story. ■

Investing in Quality Childcare

Caring for our community's youngest residents

Since 2020, early childhood education and quality childcare have been a focus area for the Fund Advisory Committee (FAC), the group that identifies the strategic direction of the Keith County Foundation Fund, with the community's needs in mind. The fund has supported the following efforts:

- FAC members serve on committees that are focused on the promotion of the importance of early childhood education and are also exploring the community's needs in relation to the initiatives.
- A three-year funding program for the Keith County Community for Kids (C4K) to employ a part-time coordinator
- Provided funding for multiple programs that provide equipment and supplies to local childcare providers and preschool programs.
- Provided funding for an activities trailer that can be checked out by early childhood professionals to engage in the state's Early Learning Guidelines and to offer a variety of materials and activities for their use. The trailer can also be used at community events to engage young children and families with educational activities.
- Hosted a public showing of *No Small Matters*, a documentary that explores early childhood.
- Funding the Step Up to Quality incentive program. The program provides financial incentives to childcare providers who complete various levels of the state's Step Up to Quality program. ■



Keeping Keith County Covered

An emergency need sparks community collaboration



From left, Keith County Emergency Manager David Kling, Keith County Commissioner Joan Ervin, Keith County Foundation Fund former Chair Angie Kolste, Keith County EMS Chief Jordan Meininger, Ogallala City Council President Steve Krajewski and Ogallala City Manager Kevin Wilkins pose with a check from Keith County Foundation Fund to purchase EMS equipment.

When he first received Regional West Medical Center's notice that it would terminate Keith County's emergency medical services in 180 days, Ogallala City Manager Kevin Wilkins chose to view it as an opportunity.

"We're not alone in this," he told the Keith County Board of Commissioners during an April 2023 meeting.

Nearly 8,300 people call Keith County home. Lake McConaughy State Recreation Area draws roughly one million visitors a year. About 18,000 vehicles pass through the county daily on the interstate, according to the Nebraska Department of Transportation. Getting the City of Ogallala and Keith County on the same page was important to securing the safety of residents and visitors alike.

"Otherwise, the system as we know it is going to collapse," said Ogallala Fire Chief Dell Simmerman at a Keith County Board of Commissioners meeting. "When you dial 911, you won't have a medic. Period."

With the clock ticking, officials sprang into action and drafted an interlocal agreement to keep emergency medical service in Keith County, delegating staffing, facilities, and vehicle management between Keith County and City of Ogallala offices.

The city and county found what they needed to get the service up and running, but came up short for the resources for emergency transportation. Thankfully, they had a willing partner in Keith County Foundation

Fund, which happily granted \$155,000 to the partnership for the purchase of emergency vehicles.

This is not the first time KCFF has awarded a grant to local emergency services, having invested in Paxton's, Brule's and Keystone-Lemoyne's fire and rescue departments in the past.

Ogallala City Council President Steven Krajewski said KCFF's support was integral to the creation of the service.

"Keith County Foundation Fund's support to our EMS literally has a life-or-death impact," he said. "We owe them a great deal of gratitude for their support of our efforts to organize and equip a permanent service for Keith County."

The new ambulance service began October 18, at the exact moment Regional West's contract expired. Keith County residents can rest easy knowing they will be cared for if needed, and Wilkins credits the city, county, and KCFF for ensuring there wouldn't be a lapse in service.

"But for Keith County Foundation Fund, within the time constraints we were under, this would've been impossible," he said. "This is a role going beyond amenities. It's helping provide a critical service." ■

*"Keith County
Foundation Fund's
support to our EMS
literally has a life-or-
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Keith County THE BIG GIVE

Building a better community, together.

The Big Give is two weeks of generosity when Keith Countians come together to GIVE BIG and make transformational impact through dozens of local nonprofits.

Thanks to everyone who donated in 2024!
We look forward to another successful
Big Give June 1-15, 2025

IN 2024, OUR COMMUNITY RAISED \$317,512 FOR 37 NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS!

2024 marked the fourth year of the Keith County Big Give, where we exceeded our \$300,000 goal by raising \$317,512. This brings our four-year total to \$944,734 raised for local nonprofits. These organizations play a vital role in enhancing the quality of life in Keith County, and we are proud to support their efforts. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the sponsors and donors who helped make the Big Give a success. Together, we are building a better community!



Participating Organizations

Big Mac Sports Club
Brule 1st Impressions via KCAD
Brule Lions Club via KCFF
Brule Volunteer Fire Department
Communities for Kids via ESU #16
Dolly Parton's Imagination Library of Keith County
Families 1st Partnership
Friends of Ogallala's Trees
Friends of the Kenfield Petrified Wood and Art Gallery
Front Street Cowboy Museum, Inc.
Keep Keith County Beautiful Inc.
Keith County Historical Society
Keith County Senior Citizen Center
Keystone Women's Library Association
Lemoyne Senior Center
Nebraska State Historical Society
Ogallala Baseball Association
Ogallala Community Hospital and Health Foundation
Ogallala 1st Impressions via KCAD
Ogallala Garden Club
Ogallala Lions Club via KCFF
Ogallala Public Schools Foundation (OPSD)
Ogallala Regional Arts Council
Ogallala Rotary
Ogallala Volunteer Fire Department
Ogallala Youth Trap Club
Pathways Pregnancy Center formerly OG Women's Resource
Paxton 1st Impressions via KCAD
Paxton Optimists
Paxton Public Library
Paxton Volunteer Fire Department
Sandhills Crisis Intervention Program, Inc. SCIP
South Platte Early Learning Program
St. Luke's School
Teammates Mentoring Program of Ogallala
Trails West Casa
Wild West Soapbox Derby



MEET THE BIG GIVE COMMITTEE!

Pictured from left to right in the back row: Caitlin Fuller, Gentri Welsh, Laura Kemp, Mandy Hoover, Jon Holzmaster, Angie Kolste. Front Row: Ken Snyder, Shirai Armstrong & Gary Pfeifer

presenting sponsor



presenting partner



gold sponsors



silver sponsors



THANK YOU TO EVERYONE WHO DONATED!

KeithCountyBigGive.org

f KeithCoBigGive



"We had a remarkable experience with the Big Give! It was easy to set up our page and promote our cause. The volunteers were always there to answer any questions we had. The most rewarding part was seeing the smiles on the kids' faces. Our students were beyond excited for the new playground and iPads," said Corina Kaskey, St. Luke's Catholic School teacher.

THE BIG GIVE

Keith County

We're thrilled by the funds our nonprofits have raised, making a meaningful impact in our community! Here are two examples of how your contributions are making a difference!



A special thank you to the donors of the Lemoyne Senior Center for new kitchen appliances!

SAVE THE DATE: BIG GIVE 2025- JUNE 1ST-15TH



Enhancing Local Generosity



Matching funds “power up” donations to important local causes

With the impressive success of the Big Give campaign, some local citizens have asked the Fund Advisory Committee “Why does the Keith County Foundation Fund support the Big Give?”

The answer can be found in the vision, mission and values statements adopted by the Fund Advisory Committee: The foundation aims to enhance Keith County’s ability to grow, to provide partnerships within the community, and to encourage charitable giving. KCFF seeks to build relationships and engage with all people, organizations, and groups.

Nonprofit organizations are a key ingredient to the success of a community. They address local needs, foster individual growth and fuel development through investments and programs. They play a fundamental role in shaping what is possible through the creation of a more equitable and prosperous community.

The support given to the Big Give reflects that importance by highlighting nonprofits in our community. It gives them the ability to tell their story and demonstrate what their work accomplishes in Keith County. Local citizens are then able to easily donate to the entities that are close to their heart and gifts are magnified through the matching funds granted by the Keith County Foundation Fund.

The matching funds are a powerful strategy to leverage community dollars, reflecting what Keith Countians see as critically important to sustaining and increasing our quality of life. The Fund Advisory Committee follows a complementary strategy, allowing for substantial, sustainable

grants. One recent example is a \$154,900 donation to Ogallala and Keith County to fulfill the need to acquire two ambulances.

“The matching funds are a powerful strategy to leverage community dollars.”

The Big Give is living up to its name with healthy growth every year in the number of donations, how many nonprofits are participating, and dollars donated. The number of donations increased from 612 in its inaugural year in 2021 to 879 in 2024. When the Big Give started, 31 nonprofits were served, rising to 37 in 2024. In 2021, \$152,346 was raised, and the gift tally doubled just three years later to \$317,929.

Matching funds saw growth too, rising from \$40,000 to a total of \$85,000, a 112 percent increase.

Hats off to the Big Give Committee, the well-deserving nonprofits and the many generous people who support Keith County. ■





Rediscovering Home

Uncovering community assets with the Hometown Internship program

Nebraska Community Foundation's Hometown Internship program began in 2019 as a partnership between community-based affiliated funds (like Keith County Foundation Fund) and the statewide organization. Interns are college students who live in their hometown for the summer and carry out community development efforts in collaboration with their community. The experience increases young Nebraskans' connection to Greater Nebraska and their understanding of asset-based community development. Since 2019, 95 interns have participated in the program from all corners of the state.

KCFF has hosted three Hometown Interns: Rachel Orth in 2021, Miah Hoppens in 2022 and Caleb Most in 2024. Orth has continued work with Nebraska Community Foundation as the Hometown Intern Coordinator for the 2022, 2023 and 2024 summers.

The 2024 Hometown Internship kicked off with a visit in Keith County. All 22 Hometown Interns from across the state, along with their supervisors, met in Ogallala to get oriented with the asset-based community development ideology that they would be utilizing throughout the summer. Stops in their tour of the community included Front Street, Second Chapter Brewing and Cedar Point Biological Station.

As the summer progressed, Hometown Interns were immersed in their hometown communities during "Operation Discovery," the asset-based curriculum

that allows interns to rediscover what's good in their places while giving them the platform to share their findings with older adults in their communities.

Caleb Most shared a reflection on his summer experience: *Serving as the Keith County Foundation Fund's Hometown Intern in 2024 was*

an impactful and eye-opening experience. The internship allowed me to view Keith County from an entirely new paradigm and refreshed my appreciation for this community. Going into the internship, I wasn't entirely sure what to expect from the experience. Having lived in Ogallala my entire life, I felt like I knew the community pretty well. But, I was unprepared for all the connections to wonderful people I would make and the insight I would gain into all that people are doing to improve Keith County.

In addition to "Our Story, Told by Us", I spent my time conducting asset-mapping interviews, collaborating with other Hometown Interns in the state, and learning about how KCFF impacts our community. These experiences gave me the opportunity to network with so many amazing individuals in Nebraska and sparked an interest in community development in me. I learned how many awesome individuals in Nebraska are devoting their time to their communities and how much we have to be thankful for in Keith County.

Through conversations, collaborations, and co-creation, the Hometown Internship program truly allowed me to gain a deeper love for my community, and I'll forever be grateful for the experience. ■

"Through conversations, collaborations, and co-creation, the Hometown Internship program truly allowed me to gain a deeper love for my community, and I'll forever be grateful for the experience."



From left, Rachel Orth, Caleb Most, and Howells Community Fund's Hometown Intern Blair Fiala share their reflections during their time at Second Chapter Brewing at the kickoff event in May.

Supporting Higher Education

Berryman Scholarship Recipients

Congratulations to the five recipients of the 2024 Berryman Scholarship: Amanda Hoffman, Ariana Mungia, Eideann Tuttle, Cissy Zeigler, and Ashley Beamon.

The Berryman Scholarship is administered through the Keith County Foundation Fund. Applicants must reside in Keith County and be starting post-secondary education following a break in education or continuing directly from high school. The scholarship was established in 2012 with donations from the estate of rancher Charles Wilton "Bud" Berryman.

A graduate of Ogallala High School in 2018, Hoffmann is pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Clinical Health Counseling from Colorado Christian University. Upon completion of this degree, Hoffmann plans to work as a licensed mental health practitioner in Keith County.



Amanda Hoffmann

Mungia graduated from Ogallala High School in 2015. She is pursuing a degree in criminal justice from Purdue Global. She plans to use her degree to bring a nonprofit organization to Keith County that focuses on rehabilitation.



Ariana Mungia

A 2024 graduate of Ogallala High School, Tuttle attends the University of Nebraska-Omaha in pursuit of a business administration degree. Tuttle said she hopes to have her own business in the future, perhaps in the Keith County area. ■



Eideann Tuttle

Cliff and Ruth Hermance Scholarship Recipient

Grace Knoke, an Ogallala High School graduate, was the 2024 recipient of the Cliff and Ruth Hermance Scholarship. Knoke is attending the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and studying pre-physical therapy with the hopes of becoming a physical therapist one day.

Knoke hopes to return to Ogallala after college as it is "a perfect place to live and raise a family."

The Hermance Scholarship is administered through the Keith County Foundation Fund.

Cliff and Ruth Hermance and their children are a great example of active hope when it comes to the future. Through the Hermance Scholarship, they are demonstrating the belief that an investment in knowledge pays the best interest.

The Hermance Scholarship was initially funded in October 2002 with a gift from Cliff and Ruth Hermance's children.

Preference for the scholarship is given to a student pursuing a teaching career or related education field. ■



Grace Knoke



Five to Thrive



Leaving 5% Can Help Keith County Thrive

Imagine an extra \$28 million invested in Keith County over the next decade—funding local projects, strengthening communities, and improving quality of life. That possibility isn't far-fetched. The resources already exist. The challenge is keeping them here.

If you love the community you call home, this is your opportunity to enrich its future."

A 2021 Transfer of Wealth Study by Nebraska Community Foundation revealed a staggering trend: across Nebraska, an estimated \$100 billion will transfer from one generation to the next over the next 10 years. Keith County alone is expected to see \$565 million change hands between now and 2035.

As assets pass from one generation to the next, much of it will be left to heirs. With many families moving out of the area, those funds often leave the community for good—along with the opportunity to give back.

A small shift in estate planning could change that. If Keith County residents designated just 5% of their estates to local charitable causes, the impact would be transformative. Over the next decade, that simple act could direct \$28 million toward Keith County's future. Endowments, like the one held by the Keith County Foundation Fund, offer a way to ensure local wealth continues to benefit the community. As the fund grows, so does its ability to support projects that strengthen Keith County—creating a lasting impact for generations to come.

Those interested in learning more about legacy giving can visit www.fiveto thrive.org for resources, success stories, and planning tools. Consulting a financial advisor is also a good step in exploring how to include Keith County in an estate plan.

When even a small percentage is set aside for the community, the difference can be significant. When more people choose to leave five, Keith County thrives. ■

Keith County Thrives With YOUR SUPPORT.

Please use the form below to donate, pledge, or let us know you would like to learn more about giving opportunities.

Enclosed please find my gift to the Keith County Foundation Fund.

NAME(S) _____

EMAIL _____

PHONE _____

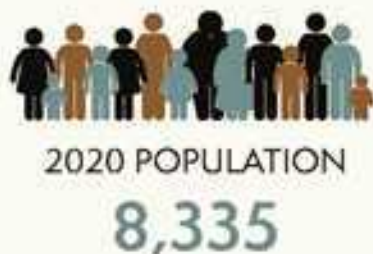
MY GIFT IS (CIRCLE ONE) IN HONOR / IN MEMORY OF _____

Please direct my gift to ☐ General Fund ☐ Legacy Fund ☐ Other (specify) _____

☐ I would like my gift to be anonymous.

☐ Please contact me to discuss a legacy endowment, a gift of securities, or to set up a one-time or recurring contribution via a withdrawal from my bank account.

THE TRANSFER OF WEALTH IN KEITH COUNTY



As of June 30, 2024



As of November 2021



Over the next 10 years in Nebraska, more than **\$100 billion** will transfer from one generation to the next. In 50 years, that number exceeds **\$950 billion**. This phenomenon has come to be known as the intergenerational transfer of wealth. There is always a transfer from generation to generation, as parents pass away and leave their estate to their children. But if the heirs no longer live where they grew up, that wealth may leave as well.

WHAT WE KNOW

1. Nebraska has incredible wealth and ALL Nebraska communities have wealth to give.
2. The wealth is transferring NOW and we must act with urgency.
3. Our communities need these assets and many are already successfully putting them to work.
4. When we leave some of our wealth to the places where it was made and accumulated, we can ensure a more prosperous future for our Nebraska hometowns.

THE OPPORTUNITY IS MASSIVE

Over the next 10 years in Keith County, \$565 million will transfer from one generation to the next. In 50 years, that number exceeds \$4.5 billion. The wealth may be held in real estate, securities, retirement accounts, and other assets. Some will go to taxes. Most will go to heirs. Due

to outmigration, many of those heirs no longer live where the wealth was built and may no longer feel connected to those places. Once wealth leaves our communities, the opportunity for give-back becomes more and more unlikely.

THE TIME IS NOW

Many Nebraska counties are approaching or are already in the midst of their peak transfer years. In other words, there is real urgency to act now. The opportunity will never be greater.

TIMING OF PEAK ESTATES



■ 2021–2045 ■ 2046–after 11



Mark Your Calendars!

OCTOBER 25, 2025



The Keith County Foundation Fund is celebrating 25 years of community service on October 25, 2025, along with special events to honor local generosity.

They invite contributions and memories to shape the anniversary; interested individuals can contact info@keithcountyfoundation.org. ■

Hometown Intern 2025

We saved your seat!

A Hometown Intern is a high school graduate who returns to their hometown for the summer after spending a year away. They collaborate with the Foundation Fund Committee to identify and utilize community assets.

Key qualities include curiosity and a desire to contribute to the community's future. Interns are compensated and co-create local projects based on their interests. For more information, visit keithcountyfoundation.org or info@keithcountyfoundation.org. ■



Keith County thrives on your support. Contribute at www.keithcountyfoundation.org or scan for a secure donation link.

