

Hello

Thank you for having me in your state and towns. There were a lot of similarities in each area and plenty of ideas, wants and needs! I'm sharing stories and ideas that will work for Jackson County and Grayson. I'll send the individualized reports to Betsy and Ruthie. They will be in touch! Also, at the end of this presentation are the highlights of what you told me you wanted. You'll be able to download this presentation (and my notes). Now, let's get started.

What do you want?

There were six topics that rose to the top.

Business

Community

Arts and Beautification

Buildings

Youth

Recreation

We will take a look at each section, hear the details and stories of other communities doing the kinds of things you would like.

Business

You want more businesses, in all areas. You'd also like the stores to stay open later. Most of them close at 5 pm. Today, that's not helpful to the working people to shop locally. Incubator spaces would be helpful as well.

Tourism business

In Jackson County there are 58 different lodging places you can partner with. Kathy, pictured, wants to use her side by side to provide transportation to tourists. She thought she'd need a lot more to begin. Judy offered her canoe for Kathy to use. Others shared ideas of how she could get started right away. This is just one of the benefits of bringing people together to talk about their wants and help each other get started.

Good news in Jackson County too. Tim Truett, the state representative for the region, got the

tourism tax (heads on beds) to be added to the next county fiscal meeting. Kentucky allows counties to charge 3% to visitors who stay in your lodging accommodations. If we average the 58 choices having 3 rooms each available, and they book only 15 rooms a month – that's 2,610 rooms booked each month. If each room is \$100 a night that will bring in almost \$8000 a month in revenue. Now I'm not the best at math, and I don't have a clue what each region will bring in – but you get the idea!

Pop ups

If more people are going to buy locally, that means we need to find ways to fill our empty buildings and to entice shoppers to come downtown.

Karen Anderson set up during a one-night holiday event and sold out her handmade scarves, hats, and gloves. She tested her market and found there was one. She tested her product, and they loved it. She was set up in an empty building for sale.

Here's what she learned also: she didn't want to do business full time in a store, like she thought she had. Too heavy on the production end! She saved a ton of money, didn't she? And she still makes products and puts them in stores around town for sale.

Pop Up Event

Jackson County Creative Community was offered use of an empty lot owned by Kathy right on the highway in downtown McKee. This is Lori Tincher's husband who was helping with his weedwhacker. There's a car show happening May 6 and now there is also a pop-up event happening that day as well!

EV Stations

In Grayson, there was conversation about setting up an EV station in a parking lot downtown. This gets traffic off the highway and into their main street. I've added the link for a program the state of Kentucky is working on to get more EV charging stations.

These two gentlemen are friends of mine that live in Portugal. We were visiting small towns, and there are EV stations all over Portugal. They've placed them near restaurants and shopping. Electric vehicles are already in use, and your tourists are driving them.

Quilting

One lady at Big Hill talked about opening up a quilting shop. There's a wonderful use for an empty building. And quilting brings in people. The Missouri Start Quilt Company in Hamilton MO started 15 years ago in one building on the Main Street of the town with 1500 people. It grew LARGE because the owner made YouTube videos about quilting.

This image is from the Louisiana Main Street page and it is a crocheted ceiling at Church Alley in New Iberia. Their sister city in Spain inspired them.

Shopping Late

In Belle Plaine Iowa the mayor wanted to support later hours. So, he set the example –by keeping city hall open until 8 pm on Thursdays.

Shopping Late

Dr. Scott Dako talks about “time of day” marketing research.

Let’s look at who shops when:

Mornings: Older people, unemployed, ‘non-time pressured’ people, ‘variety-seekers and families with small children.

Afternoons: Youngsters and young adults, people looking for a new experience, those without ‘time-pressure’ and who have no small children.

Evenings: Busy, ‘time-pressured’ people

Succeeding in evening hours is more like starting a whole new store targeting different customers and offering different merchandise in different ways.

Community

If it's a nice place to live, it's a nice place to visit. Creating reasons for locals to stay is vital. They are the backbone of your community.

More Community Leaders

One way to find reasons for locals to stay is to let them lead. Of course, I encourage everyone to run for office if you don't like what's going on. But it is more than that. Because not everyone will want to run for office.

But everyone has ideas. And you've also got people you know who want to work together on creating your ideas. This event above is an example of that. There is a meeting May 8 after dinner and mingling at 5 pm. It's 2.5 hours long. Then the next day is at the Extension Office in McKee and is all day long, lunch provided. For more info reach out to Judy Schmitt. There's a link at the end of this presentation you'll want to go to and register.

Newcomers Gathering

Bennettsville South Carolina and Red Lodge Montana have hosted newcomers' gatherings. It works well because the realtors who sold or rented a place personally invite the newcomer to come for a coffee/snack (or even a meal) and meet their neighbors. They also can ask questions like "can I burn garbage in town?" Or "is there somewhere I can volunteer?" Or "what is there to do around here that the locals know about?"

This is building community. It is building bridges between new folks and old folks.

Involve your students.

It's important that your youth, those still in school, are heard. We know when a student is involved with a project, like painting the streets, or building benches, they see what community means. This also builds a positive connection to their town. I promise you, the young man who helped build a bench that goes downtown will tell you 30 years later "I helped make that

bench.” This involvement in their community helps bring them back when they are adults.

Arts and Beautification

People wanted to see more places to sit downtown, the crosswalks painted, arts to become even more included in each community, more murals, public service announcements around art events happening, support of the area’s history through the arts and to make their main streets even more beautiful.

Anyone can do it.

Give everyone a chance to participate – in a small but meaningful way.

Why couldn’t the county residents cut out paper snowflakes and put inside every empty building in town? Better yet, have the students learn how to make snowflakes from your seniors!

Don’t stop there, take a ton of pictures, post them everywhere. Write a press release and send it to every paper in the state. **MAKE IT A BIG DEAL.**

Have it be about how many snowflakes you have in your county – more than any other county in the state!

2nd story art

The top part of this building is empty and needs lots and lots of work. The old windows were boarded up and looked awful.

The community vitality director found a program involving students at Univ of Iowa and they created this idea. Large pieces of wood were painted by citizen volunteers and they feature important people and things in Webster City, Iowa.

The artist drew a paint by numbers drawing on each window and the boards were kept at the fairgrounds for two weeks – anyone could go out there and help paint.

Small but meaningful steps, and a way for everyone to participate.

Look for spaces.

Paint your alleys, paint your blank walls, add murals, kids' art, tourism related things. This is a nice blank wall in Grayson that is screaming for art!

Create an outdoor museum.

It could be anything! There's old cars in Nebraska buried $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way and they stand up tire to tire.

How about a rusted tractor graveyard? What weather-resistant or happily rusty artifacts would tell the story of your town?

You could have an outdoor museum trail in the county.

Ask those who have junk cars in their yard if you could have them - -what creative things could you do with them?

How could you work with the people who have these relics in their yards to create art?

Bring crafters together.

You can boost creativity while building community with co-crafting events like crafternoons, hacker or maker days.

From tech enthusiasts to crafters, scientists to garage tinkerers, at these kinds of events, novices and experts of all ages come together to show what they've made and share what they're learning.

Once you start looking around, you'll see a lot of crafting and making events.

Lighting

This is in Iowa City and it's just a small trick they use to get people downtown – more lighting! These lights could stay up all year round. You could put solar lights in the some of the windows, in flowerpots and in trees.

Real?

Hollis OK, a population of 2,060 made up this great idea!

Nope, it is not a barber shop, it just looks like one. Even the barber pole wall is just a printed banner hung inside! They created an idea for what was needed in the town.

Columbiana

At least make it look better. Before this broken window was boarded up, it was waiting for a business to come here and looked like this. The building owner didn't want to put in a window until he had a renter so he could build it out to the renters needs.

Painting

A local artist was hired to paint this scene and worked on this painting during an outdoor festival downtown – lots of people enjoyed his work and got to tour the building.

Walls

This was an empty space inside a coffee shop in Minnesota – they used the wall to feature photos from a local photographer until they could rent it out.

You could do this in any business with a blank wall – it doesn't have to be retail – it could be service too!

Old Paint

In Webster City, Iowa, the mayor held a town clean up weekend. It was a bit different, people actually brought their old things, garbage and no longer wanted items to a central location for recycling or proper disposal. Volunteers helped unload cars and trucks. The mayor watched for any paint that was turned in so that it looked like it was still good, and he set that aside. That paint was later used in the Paint the Street Project. For one day the street was closed, and each business that wanted to would pay \$50 to paint any design they wanted in one section. The funds raised went to support another arts event. Each year they paint over the designs with white paint and start again. And the mayor was able to kick this off by getting that usable paint at no cost.

Chalk a Mural

Maybe we can't afford a big-name mural artist but we can take small steps.

Let's make some murals with chalk. Start on the blank side of a building. Or fill in the space where you used to have a mural but it flaked away. Or turn a blank retaining wall into a colorful spot. Any blank surface is fair game.

Divide up the downtown, let lots of people create chalk murals in all the blank spaces. After a couple of rains, it just washes away! But before it does, it's going to generate a lot of interest and conversation around creating more art.

Just do it.

When it's temporary, just do it. Chalk is so easy to wash off, go ahead.

Use your fences.

Lots of towns have chain link fence either downtown or along the major traffic routes. It's a

natural place to hang some art. Indianola, Iowa, was renovating their courthouse square and there was a big hole in the middle of town.

The county made the best of a messy situation by decorating the construction fencing with colorful banners that promote their County.

They opened it up to the community for people to submit or sponsor their own banners. Since it's a multi-year project, they will continue to add more banners over time. They're calling it "Warren County Strong" to reflect the strength that their communities are showing during this tough time!

And it's much more attractive than blank chain link and a busy construction site.

Planters

Almost every town has some flowerpots or planters downtown. Usually there are several planters that don't have anything growing in them!

Let people and groups and businesses take over maintaining one pot. Then encourage them to plant lots of colorful plants.

Jenny Amy told us: “We have Stealth Gardeners in Southampton, Ontario, who come out and water potted plants that are sad and pull-out weeds, and even sometimes spread mulch.” They work in the early morning or late evenings, so few people ever see them. So, they really are Stealth Gardeners!

Those planters don't have to be limited to just flowers. What about some tomato plants or berries for picking? Or other garden items?

The Town of Lumby, B.C., plants herbs in pots on the utility poles downtown. Everyone is welcome to take some!

Selfies

Paint or set up something people will want to take their picture with. You can paint or chalk on blank walls.

For something more durable than chalk but less permanent than paint on walls, you can paint

selfie backdrops on fabric, cardboard, wood or anything you can find. Then bring them out for special occasions. This is in Van Buren County Iowa – and they bring it out every year for their county wide festival.

Hashtags

Want people to use your hashtags? Post them! You'll be getting more people to help promote your community.

When I visited Paulding, Ohio, there was a big sign painted on the wall of an empty building. It was advertising a business that was no longer there. And the building owner lived in China! Before I left, we covered it by painting their favorite hashtag promoting the town. And no, we did not ask for permission! Lots of people honked and cheered when they drove by, including the county sheriff. This was a good way to make more locals aware of the My Paulding hashtag.

Living room.

Make your empty lot comfier and home-like. Hold conversations there. This was a temporary art/community project but makes perfect sense to try for a longer time in a roofless building.

This is Lyons NE – and it could be a place where the mayor, or anyone can set up and invite people to come talk about any topic.

Buildings

There's empty buildings in both locations. Let's visit about why they are empty and what you can do about that.

I love the snowman on the window! lol.

Empty Building Registries and fines

Centerville, South Dakota, adopted a local vacant building ordinance that makes it costly to use empty spaces for cheap storage. Fees are charged for run-down, dilapidated properties.

Fayetteville, North Carolina, targeted vacant commercial properties in their downtown, and

started requiring inspection by the fire department every six months.

Property Maintenance Codes

Callendar Iowa and Stanhope Iowa have changed their city code and added a Property Maintenance Code for both the exterior and interior of buildings. I like it because it sets forth a detailed plan of action, a fine structure, and no nonsense “do this or we will take the building from you” attitude.

Incentives

You may want to talk to your local economic development group or city council and create some targeted incentives to help meet part of the cost of repair. Instead of only having incentives for recruiting business, consider incentives to address the specific costs of compliance.

Loss

In 2013 the Potential lost revenue of an empty building was over \$220,000. I don't think people and owners realize this! These numbers

are from 10 years ago in Iowa. Imagine what they are now!

Inventory

Start a list of empty and vacant buildings. You can keep track of them. The mayor in Grayson shared the site Land Glide. This inventory can be posted publicly on a website, available at your county offices or anywhere folks go to find a place to rent.

Clean up.

There are empty buildings that need SOMETHING in the windows! This is an advertisement for Bennettsville, SC anniversary – but you can put artwork, murals, signage --- all kinds of ideas!

Tour

I went for an interview and counted 14 empty buildings downtown. I knew my new job would be to fill them.

I got the job. Their one big manufacturer, Electrolux, had moved to Mexico two years

before. 2000 people out of work. 2000 people without the money to shop at the stores downtown. Their worst fears had materialized.

And the town had the negative belief that this would never get better, our 'savior' company had left.

Businesses closed because they couldn't see a way forward. Building owners began to see how they could use their empty buildings as a tax write off or fill it with storage. No one wanted to talk about all the empty buildings. No one. They were a sign of loss and who wants to focus on that?

I knew we couldn't continue to ignore those buildings – we needed to showcase them in some way. I believed that we could fill the buildings, and that RIGHT NOW there were people who wanted to fill them. I knew that we needed to show the buildings off, tell their stories, and dream about their futures.

It would need to be a project filled with lots of people involved in small ways and very transparent.

We needed to stop talking about 'it used to be this way' and start talking about the positive ways to fill the buildings going forward.

Results

The day of the tour came, and 44 people attended. We considered it a success. Several people talked about buying buildings and starting new buildings. At the wrap up coffee gathering, everyone was excited.

But the small steps didn't stop there. During the tour, our chamber champions not only told the history of the building but shared their ideas about what could be in them in the future. It sparked conversations and ideas, and they continued to follow-up with people they spoke to.

Some of our local businesspeople shared the list of buildings with people they knew and

encouraged them to move to a town 'that was moving forward.'

I wrote press releases from our chamber and sent them to other chambers, and economic developers and state contacts.

In 18 months 10 of the buildings were filled.

Incubator

We created an informal incubator project. We had a building owner that had several buildings downtown. I approached them with the incubator project idea. Put your buildings in the program and you offer 3 months free rent and reduced rent the rest of the year. The chamber agreed to help the businesses that went into those buildings with marketing, and the SBDC (Small Business Development Center) came in to help the business with creating a valuable business plan.

Benefits to the owner: at the least someone was paying their utilities else. Every building needs love, and this provided that. The business could leave at any time (remember,

it's a way to test out the business idea) or they could stay as long as they wanted!

Did it work? Yes. First there was an Italian restaurant and boy was it good. They lasted a year and had to move because the husband got a much better job. No worries, the Mexican grocery store across the street wanted to open their own restaurant in their store. They were saving money for a commercial hood. In the meantime, they tried the incubator space out. They got to experiment with different recipes, hours, and servers. They tested their idea out and found out it was a good one. Today they are open in their own store.

Divide and share!

Make a space that multiple businesses can divide and share. It can be a space carefully designed for compatible small retail shops, like Cathy Lloyd shared from Washington, Iowa. It was too big for one retail store and it set empty for quite a while. Then a group of women

brainstormed and created (made up) The Village.

Try it.

The table, the wall, the tree, the boutique – they are all stores. It is a perfect way for a person going into business for themselves to try out their idea and test the market. Low investment and not thousands of dollars to buy a building, fix it up, purchase inventory and hope someone comes in and buys.

Set up a farmers' market.

You could house an indoor farmers market. I really like how this would bring your farmers market right downtown and be available year-round.

Porterdale

Porterdale Georgia had a huge community center and gymnasium, 12,000 square feet. It was built in 1939, burned in 2005 and was stabilized in 2012 and 2013. It's now an event space that has hosted concerts, food festivals, and weddings. For a town with only 1,281

people, it's now a huge asset instead of a huge eyesore.

Same place

What a great transformation!

Empty lot

Small towns don't have to settle for business as usual. And entrepreneurship is the best way to support small towns. When local people start their own businesses and prosper, they help their towns to prosper, too. Rural entrepreneurs are exploring new shapes, new locations, and new ways of doing business.

This block size empty lot used to have a business there. Tionesta, PA population five hundred saw the building burn down. The lot sat empty for 10 years.

Until someone had an idea. What if they took garden sheds, dressed them up, and put them on this lot?

Empty Lot Today

This is what it looks like today! Use inexpensive garden sheds to create a bunch of tiny business spaces.

It's a kind of business incubator. It would work in a roofless building just as well as an empty lot.

From the Back

They really are garden sheds!

Tiny Stores

Pascagoula MS had a big ol' dirty lot in town. After Hurricane Katrina, somebody had a great idea to use the leftover housing from FEMA to build out this Anchor Square. Put a deck around it too. You know, they just made this idea up.

Anchor Square

and they have green space too and room for pop ups and small vendors to try their ideas out.

Youth

Through decades of hearing about the "brain drain" of young people graduating and leaving small towns, we missed noticing a significant return flow of young adults. It was easy to miss, because we don't have anything like a graduation ceremony to draw our attention to our Brain Gain families.

Dr. Ben Winchester with University of Minnesota found these 30–44-year-olds arrive with college degrees, years of experience in the workplace and large professional networks. Often, they are families with young children, boosting rural school enrollments. Frequently, they are picking a small community that they have never lived in before, so they represent a recruiting opportunity.

Younger families today are picking where they want to live first and finding their work second. Frequently they're finding it online or starting their own business. Ben says there are three reasons young people 30-44 move to rural

communities: Slower pace of life, Safety and security, and Low cost of housing.

Jobs didn't even make the top 8 reasons for moving back. Because they are often making their own jobs by working online.

So, if you're focusing on creating jobs to help with recruiting new residents, you're missing the key motivators.

Student entrepreneurs

One terrific youth entrepreneurship program happens in Norfolk County, Ontario. They have a summer project for kids in grades 6 through 12, called the Student Start Up project, or SSUP.

Kids can apply for real money to start a real business. They submit a quite simple explanation of what business they want to start, following an elementary level "business plan" template. Over the years Norfolk County has offered anywhere from \$50 to \$200 in start-up grants to the kids, depending on how much funding is available.

Then kids run their businesses all summer. And during the summer, Norfolk County holds a special marketplace event, where the young entrepreneurs can feature their businesses in booths and displays. I'm sure people in the county look forward to this every year.

At the end of the summer, kids can earn a small cash bonus by turning in a final report that looks a lot like a simple profit and loss statement.

City Council

Why not add a non-voting student to your city council? What a wonderful way to get insight from young people.

Keep kids home.

Want your kids to stay home, or come back home?

Go to the local schools and tell them what you do.

Bring kids on tours of your workplace.

Hire them as interns (and pay them)

Don't make them guess what kind of work you do, let them see and do it.

Recreation

Many rural places I travel have natural resources, trails, and fun recreational things to do. You are no different. But what I do notice is that rural folks don't recognize all they do have!

Folks said they wanted more things to do (for all ages). They want to make their parks even better. Use history as a place for tourists to have some fun. Some of my favorite requests were a homecoming parade for the students and the college (in the same week), and heck, why not a parade for all the sports? Also, an access point for kayaks on Sandy River downtown is a great idea too.

Make your parks even better.

How could you create small groups of ninjas that just do things? Trim edges, pull weeds, clean statues – and it could be adults and students!

They could paint picnic tables, build new ones, repair, or even build a new overhead shelter! Getting our kids invested in these kind of projects is the kind of work you want them to do. It also commits them to our community and helps bring them back.

I live in Gulfport MS and just read a comment on Facebook, “why is there so much trash on the beach?” One person said “just pick up what’s around you. It takes a few minutes. Do your part.”

And really, that’s a great first step.

Rock Creek CO

Rock Creek Colorado took an empty lot and created a min golf course. They also added a mural on the side of the building. Where could you do this in your town?

Events

Jeepin Jackson is coming to town. Did you know about it? May 6 there’s a car show and the Creative Community has found a way to pop up in an empty lot in that time frame.

Events are a lot of fun, aren't they? But I have a secret about how to make them even more successful.

Don't plan them all out. If you do all the planning, the only choice you give people is whether they should come or not. Instead leave room for locals to do some things. I had to plan a big event for a 12-hour day. Instead of planning it all out, I just asked people what they wanted to do. Then I put them in charge of that. Just that. One guy wanted a chili cookoff. I said go for it, and here's your spot. A local youth group wanted to bring their human foosball game to the event. Of course, we said yes! The secret is if you let people be a part of the fun with what they want to do, they bring their family and friends with them!

A wild idea

Do you have to do fundraising? Well, here's an event idea. It's a no pancake pancake breakfast. I heard about a local service organization who ALWAYS made the pancakes

at their annual fundraiser. But they were getting old. And tired. So instead, they sold tickets at \$5 apiece. You bought your ticket and on the day of the event you made your own breakfast and posted pictures on their Facebook page. Not only did everyone have fun, but the old pancake makers were thrilled with the event, and they made more money than when they actually made pancakes.

Taco Tuesday

The students almost always say they want a Taco Bell. Don't tell them no! Instead start with a trial run. Declare Taco Tuesday, have them shop, make the food, learn the value of the products, and learn how to be a good salesperson. Let them do the math, figure out what to buy, make the promotional pieces and create \$5 meal deals. Finally, feed everyone. Whether they can afford it or not. Let the kids learn the value of giving too.

Benches

Make benches. This is an art piece made out of an old propane tank. Who could do that in your towns? Or ask the shop class to design and make benches for downtown. You could just budget the monies and let the city buy benches from the standard bench place. Then they would be more uniform. Maybe last longer.

But how does that build community? Things don't always have to match. Involving local artists, students and just regular folks gets the community involved. There is a piece of ownership in it. Make it a project where many people can be involved, in large and small ways. Have some fun.

A few more things

We're almost done.

Better Paying Jobs

You're only as good as your employees. Some say you get what you pay for. So how do you get better paying jobs in the county?

Start with exploring the trades and trade schools. Get the information you need from them to get their graduates into your towns.

Even more important, talk about the intangible benefits of living in rural America. What are they?

Smaller schools

Safer communities

Slower pace of life

Quality of life

Your money goes a lot further.

Remote workers

As young families come home to small towns, remote workers are right on their heels.

Stanford economist Nicholas Bloom says “We see an incredible 42 percent of the U.S. labor force now working from home full-time.”

Mainstreet. Org says at the end of the day, the strength of this trend will be determined by how

communities position themselves to leverage this growing interest in rural and small towns.

Use what you have.

When I was with the group trying to save the local theater, we needed ideas for ways to raise money besides the usual bake sales and begging. Alumni clubs are kind of a big deal in our town, so we made up the idea to sell the seats at \$300 a pop to lots of individuals, nonprofits, alumni clubs, and businesses. The local newspaper posted photos of everyone who bought a seat! It was a substantial chunk of funds raised.

Don't forget your alumni!

Coffee and Calendars

Invite the nonprofits and organizations that plan activities to an hour or two of coffee and calendars. Ask them to bring their calendars. You'll find out things about the organizations you didn't know. You'll figure out how to create a day of events, instead of a day of events all at

the same time. And you will be building community by working together.

Need more volunteers?

Stop requiring volunteers to commit to a yearlong committee (or longer)!

Ask for volunteers to step up for a two-hour shift and you'll get more help.

Listen to their ideas and let them try it out.

Involve students – and don't just make them responsible for the garbage! What else can they do?

Reward your volunteers! Make it worth their while. Acknowledge their hard work in a public way.

Your attitude about your town matters.

Leave the committee of negativity alone, they won't help you anyway. Start by talking to people like you – who want to save your towns! You'll hear lots of ideas, and you want to encourage all the ideas! So, what if one or two

fail, it's just a test of what works and what doesn't.

Carry your positive attitude forward – don't be dismayed. Show off what you have and keep people dreaming.

Thank you!

As a gift from Becky McCray and me, this is a link to a 30-minute video about the Idea Friendly Method.

<https://www.BuildingPossibility.com/KY>