

JCED BULLETIN

Jones County Economic Development Newsletter

October/November/December 2023

Welter Seed & Honey Finishes Successful Manufacturing 4.0 Grant

One of the things that makes Jones County so unique is the quality and longevity of quality and innovative businesses. From manufacturing to tourism to agriculture, Jones County is home to over 800 businesses that are vital to the health and success of our communities. These businesses have created ground-breaking products and high quality jobs, showcasing a great quality of life for their workers and communities. Welter Seed and Honey is just such a business. It's a family-owned seed business that operates on the family farm and has since its founding in 1955. Welter Seed conditions many types of seeds, including small grains, alfalfa, clover, hay mixes, pasture mixes, wildlife seed, lawn seed, soybeans, cover crops, and many specialty seeds. They offer one of the widest selections of seed in the tri-state area, stocking over 300 different varieties of seed.

However, there were some labor-intensive elements to this operation. After the seeds are brought in from the fields, they are cleaned to help remove dirt and other things from the fields to make sure there are no impurities. After this process, they are bagged, sewn, and then stacked on the pallets. The stacking on the pallets is where it became labor-intensive because it took three people in order to make the stacking happen more rapidly, especially in their busy seasons. Because of this, Welter Seed has been interested in and researching improving efficiency and investing in equipment and technology to improve workplace ergonomics.

It was with this idea in mind that Jim Welter and Karen Knepper of Welter Seed broached the concept of investing in a stacking robot with JCED Executive Director, Derek Lumsden, who discussed the Manufacturing 4.0 grant opportunity. The Manufacturing 4.0 program was designed to help small-to-mid-size Iowa manufacturers invest in the adoption of and integration of smart technologies with grant funding made available through the federal American Rescue Plan Act. This grant was launched to ensure the state's manufacturers continued to remain globally competitive through emphasis on automation and smart technology.

Derek worked with Welter Seed to understand the grant requirements, coordinating the required visit of Center for Industrial Research and Service (CIRAS), and following up with grant guidelines and timelines. Welter Seed produced a quality grant application, applying for the \$75,000 grant award: \$50,000 for equipment and \$25,000 for technology software for the stacking robot. The grant was awarded in 2022, but could not be delivered or installed until the summer of 2023, giving Welter Seed time to rearrange some of the working areas to allow for this new automation.



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Monticello Main Street Celebrates One Year of Success!

As the old adage states, “Time flies when you’re having fun.” And that would be true if you asked the Executive Director of the new Monticello Main Street program.

Just over a year ago, Monticello was officially designated as an official Main Street program by the State of Iowa. This designation was only offered to two towns that year in a competitive application process where Monticello and Albia were successful.

Since then, the Monticello Main Street program has hit the ground running, wanting to make sure that not a moment was lost in their efforts to revitalize downtown Monticello. Two of their first orders of business were to become designated as a 501 (c)3 non-profit organization and hire an Executive Director. Brian Wolken, member of the steering committee for Main Street, was hired to start November 1st.

Having been involved in Monticello’s first attempt at Main Street designation in 2019 with Jones County Economic Development, Brian was instrumental in helping spread awareness and raise funds for the successful venture in 2022. Wolken met with other Main Street Directors in the area (Mount Vernon and Marion) and went to conferences/information sessions to learn more. His enthusiasm carried over from the application period to his new role as Executive Director and he vowed to waste no time.

Main Street has four pillars that they focus on: Design, Promotions, Economic Vitality, and Organization. These pillars play different roles, but all focus on how to improve and revitalize the downtown. From downtown aesthetics and historic preservation, to business assistance, to having events and festivities in the downtown, these pillars are the lifeblood of the organization and have already had some fantastic successes in Monticello’s first year.

As he officially started November 1st, Brian moved quickly to help promote the downtown businesses as the holiday season approached. Monticello Main Street was involved with signing local businesses up to participate in Small Business Saturday; hosting a Christmas Tree Walk and local singers as part of the City of Monticello’s Holiday on 1st event; and became involved with the Grow with Google project, helping local businesses understand and use Google better through two virtual and two in person workshops.

A major accomplishment for the program was helping Spahn & Rose advance to the round of 12 in the annual Open 4 Business Competition. This competition offers businesses looking to expand a chance to develop and showcase their plan to state experts. They are required to do an application, Zoom meeting, and video for their expansion. If selected, they move on to the next round. The final round is a round of five in front of a live audience where they have the chance to go for even more money. While Spahn & Rose did not advance to the finals, it was a great opportunity to showcase what the future could look like for downtown Monticello businesses.

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Innovation Lab Offers Businesses Learning Opportunities

The Innovation Lab is offering businesses a chance to sign up for the Iowa Venture School, a partnership with the University of Iowa and the John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center.

Have an idea for a business? Want to grow your existing business? Need some professional assistance making those ideas into reality? The Venture School is for idea stage or early start-up businesses.

The Iowa Venture School helps test your business hypothesis immediately through community conversations with customers, partners, and competitors. You will encounter the chaos and uncertainty of commercializing your innovations and creating new ventures.

Additionally, you will be challenged to create your own business model as you make pivots or preserve your original plans based on your findings, not secondhand market research or statistic case studies alone.

The Iowa Venture School is one night a week for seven weeks with the next cohort starting on Tuesday, October 3rd. For more information or to register, go to:

<https://www.innovationlab.us/post/iowa-venture-school-fall-2023-cohort>

WELTER SEED & HONEY GRANT (Continued from Page 1)



Earlier this summer, Welter Seed began planning for the installation of the robot. They had to move around their operations where they currently bagged and tagged to make sure that it would flow easier. They expanded their conveyor belt into a new part of the building where the robot would be. So once the bag is filled, it gets tagged and then goes to the other part of the building to be stacked on the pallet. The robot can do two pallets at once and shuts down immediately when it has finished an order. For safety concerns, the machine also automatically shuts off once anyone steps inside the fence curtains built around it.

One of the worries Welter Seed had when considering the project was “Would it do as good of a job stacking as the human workers?” Knepper noted that Welter Seed stacks pallets with 50 bags per pallet and sometimes three or four pallets high. Any shifting or lack of stability on the stacking and the entire set of

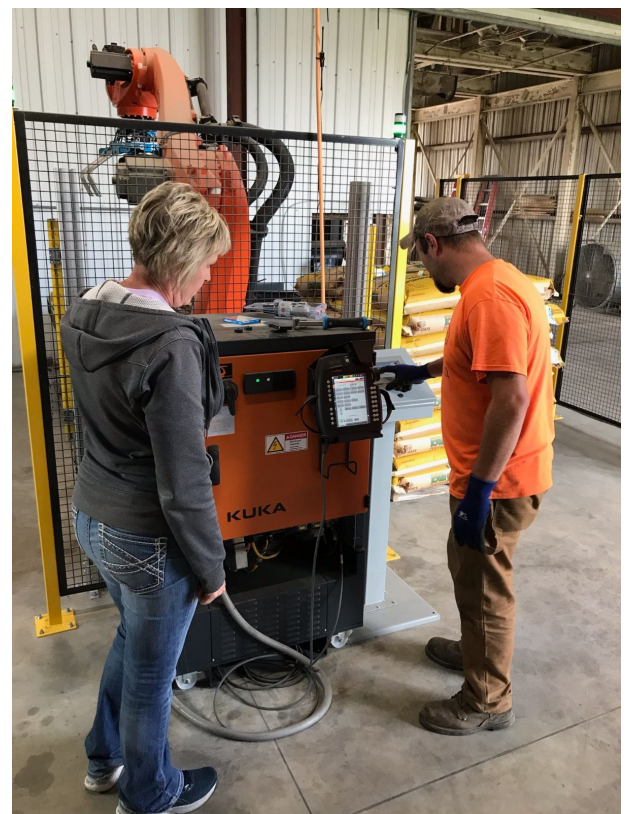
pallets could come down and burst open. Plus, different seeds are different weights so that changes the overall weight on the pallet as well as the bag sizes needed for them.

So far, the machine is working out as advertised. Instead of taking three staff members to do the job, it takes one staff member and the robot to do the work, freeing up staff for other jobs. But according to Knepper, the main reason for the machine was to help with workplace ergonomics. “When you have staff bending, turning, and lifting a lot of heavy pallets for hours on end, that can be very hard on their bodies. We wanted

better working conditions for them without losing the efficiency. It hasn't really sped up the process because the machine is about the same speed, but it's a lot less wear and tear on our workers and we all appreciate that.”

While there is still a lot to learn and experimenting with different load types, weights, etc. for the robot, Welter Seed has been pleased to date, especially as they enter one of their busy seasons with cover crops. “When we ship daily across the state and the country, it's important to make sure we are keeping up with the demand. There is demand right now for cover crops and there will be demand in the late winter and early spring for the spring season. This will just help us fill customer orders easier and with less strain on staff.”

Welter Seed also recognized the important role JCED and Derek played with the help of the grant as well. “Derek made sure we understood what the grant could do and how to get it started. We also really appreciated his resolve and determination in consulting on our project and following up.”



MONTICELLO MAIN STREET (Continued from Page 2)

Additionally, Monticello Main Street worked to make sure the downtown business owners had access to resources, including each other. The organization restarted the downtown retail meetings, now called the Retail Round Tables. This helps get businesses in a room together to talk about challenges as well as ways to partner together. The organization also worked with businesses to utilize the State of Iowa's design services to help six building owners reimagine how their properties could look. This free service is provided to Monticello due to the Main Street designation.

Also, the Economic Vitality Committee brought in a state expert on succession planning. The committee got to learn about some of the details and best practices, but two businesses got to meet with the expert directly and begin to plan ahead. The Design Committee partnered with the City of Monticello and local businesses to change the sign code in the downtown to help guarantee that the historic integrity of the downtown is not lost.

It's been an exciting year as well for all of the great activities happening downtown. Main Street and the Chamber partnered to host a Business After Hours; the organization took the lead role in the annual Monti Days celebration; and the organization welcomed two new restaurants as well as one outdoor shop to the downtown community. Finally, Board President Deb Bowman was awarded for her Leadership at the Main Street Iowa Awards.

This first year shows that Monticello Main Street is eager and excited to continue its development and the important work that's happening downtown Monticello. The organization will continue to host trainings and workshops for the local businesses while making sure that they stay involved with the state and national organizations. Brian will continue to go to quarterly workshops and hopefully to the National Main Street Conference where he will have a chance to network, share the success of the program, and hopefully continue to learn more ways in which to help the organization thrive.

There are so many great things happening and YOU have a chance to be involved. If you want to learn more about the organization, volunteer on a committee, or even help financially, reach out to Brian Wolken at 319-465-1970 or via email at monticelloiowamainstreet@gmail.com. You can also follow the great work they do on their Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/monticelloiamainstreet>

UPCOMING EVENTS

Jones County Young Professionals Pumpkin Patch Night

Tuesday, October 10th at 6pm
JJH Hansen Farms in Onslow

JCED/IowaWORKS Job Fair

Thursday, October 12th from 1pm-5pm
Berndes Center in Monticello

See attached flyer for more information on the Job Fair,
including registration information

Contact Us

Jones County Economic Development has two convenient offices:

107 S. Ford Street in
Anamosa inside City Hall

200 E. 1st Street in
Monticello inside City Hall

Our Executive Director, Derek Lumsden, can also be reached by Phone at 319-480-7446 or by email at:
director@jonescountydevelopment.com

JCYP ENJOYS A SUMMER OF FUN AND SERVICE!

This summer was busy for the Jones County Young Professionals. Starting with the June event, the organization held a kayak and river clean-up on the Wapsipinicon River. Each year, thousands of people float down the river and enjoy the scenic views in Jones County. However, there can be a lot of waste in the river and the JCYP group decided this would be a great way to give back. Hanging out on the river and cleaning it up before stopping at the General Store for a well-deserved dinner and drink!

The July event was a professional development opportunity for our members. JCYP met at the RISE Counseling office in Anamosa. Melissa Paulsen Oberbreckling gave some great tips on how to care for ourselves when dealing with the stress of work other life events and some general mental health tips as well. It was a great way to learn about how to handle stress and anxiety as we work to move forward in our careers! July also saw members of JCYP partner with the Monticello Chamber. A small group worked a four hour shift in the Jones County Fair Beer Tent where we got to see some fun rodeo events and talk to people visiting from all over the country!



Our August event was just a night of networking and fun. We stopped by Savor the Barn in Langworthy. They have so many great items for sale, including chesses, breads, honey, meats, and so much more! We also had a chance to participate in a wine-tasting and able to bring our own beverage if they were lacking something that we preferred. A great local business and a beautiful night for networking.



JCYP closed out our summer of service and fun with a volunteer activity in Monticello. Partnering with the Anamosa and Monticello Rotary clubs, our group headed to Camp Courageous to do some fall clean-up of the property. Afterwards, we got to enjoy some of the great amenities of the camp, including their zip-line and their newly installed mini golf course.

Another great day and a great chance to give back to our communities!

Meet the Member!

My name is Grace Alber and I am a Senior Vice President at Collins Aerospace in Cedar Rapids.

I believe Jones County Young Professionals is an effective tool and opportunity for young professionals to grow their networks and learn from their peers in order to be successful leaders in the future.

JCYP allows you to do all of this while giving back to the community as well!

In my free time, I enjoy taking care of my chickens and cats with my husband.



We will see you at the next event!

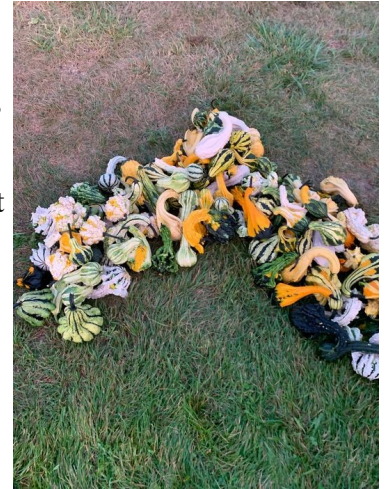
Don't forget to like our Facebook page:

Jones County Young Professionals!

CLOSE OUT THE YEAR WITH JCYP EVENTS!

The Jones County Young Professionals are ready to close out the year strong! With three meetings left before the end of the year, here is what's on tap so you don't miss a moment of it!

On Tuesday, October 10th, the JCYP group will be meeting at the JJH Hansen's Family Farm. We are going to do some shopping for fall (pumpkins, gourds, decorations) and learn some about their family farm as well. If anyone gets the urge, you can carve your pumpkin on site! After the pumpkin patch, we are heading to Lalo's Mexican Restaurant in Wyoming to network and relax. This event is a networking/social opportunity so make sure to bring a friend along. It's a great night to learn more about JCYP and how they can be involved!



Our November event is always a fun one! It's our annual Friendsgiving event. We celebrate the season with friends, food, fellowship, and fun. And that is just the start of it. We get to know other people in our networks, play games, and just have a good time for the Thanksgiving season. This year, we are opening it up to ANYONE that wants to take part. It is on Friday, November 10th at 6pm at the Amber Community Club. We will be putting out a Google Doc a little closer to time so we don't all end up bringing the same item. It's a potluck and we want you to show off your cooking skills in addition to getting to know you!



Finally, we close out the year with our December meeting. This is our annual holiday meeting where we look back on the year to remember all the success we had while also trying to figure out what we can do better. This also gives us a chance to hear input from our membership as well as first-time attendees on what they would like to see and do in the coming year. We collect feedback all year long, so this is another chance to get those ideas into the hopper! Also, feel free to enjoy the season by wearing a holiday-themed outfit or ugly sweater. After all, it's not the holidays until THAT happens. The meeting will be in Monticello on Sunday, December 10th at 4pm. The location is still up in the air at the moment, but follow us on the JCYP Facebook page to stay up-to-date on all of our events and information. And don't forget to bring a friend to learn more about JCYP!

The Jones County Young Professionals are an organization that thrive on learning more about themselves, the world they live in, and the communities where they work and reside. The organization focuses on three different areas of need to develop the next generation of leaders: Volunteerism, Professional Development, and Networking. Every month, JCYP focuses on one or more of those areas to try and develop the best leadership for the coming generations. If you are between the ages of 18-40 and either live/work in Jones County or Cascade, you are eligible to join.

We know the word "professional" can sometimes be intimidating, but if you are working, you ARE a professional and we want to get to know you. For any businesses reading this, please help us by identifying young talent at your businesses so we can get them involved with our organization and the community as a whole. This is a great chance to get them connected locally, so hopefully they stay and become lifelong contributors to Jones County.

To reach out to the Jones County Young Professionals, you can message us on our Facebook page or you can email at us at: jonescounty.youngprofessionals@gmail.com



JONES COUNTY YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

**DO YOU LIVE OR WORK IN JONES COUNTY
OR CASCADE?**

**ARE YOU 40 YEARS OLD OR UNDER?
DO YOU HAVE A JOB?**

**IF YOUR ANSWER IS YES, COME JOIN
JCYP!!**

JCYP is an organization focused on
developing networks and friendships
and leaders among community
members.

Join JCYP the 10th of EVERY Month for
networking, professional
development and volunteering!

For more information on events and locations,
scan the QR code or contact Bri Langdon at
(319) 310-5078 or blangdon2013@gmail.com



SCAN ME