

71 Projects and Going Strong . . .

KAN STEP Helping Rebuild Rural Communities in Kansas

The Kansas Small Town Environment Program (KAN STEP) has been assisting communities and Rural Water Districts in Kansas since 2001. Funded by the Kansas Department of Commerce, the program provides the resources including purchase of materials, the architect or engineer, the grant writer and inspection services and assistance by Kansas Rural Water Association. It's the volunteer services of local citizens that then construct community facilities. The KAN STEP program has enabled the construction of 22 community centers, 35 fire stations, four (4) "combination buildings" (e.g., a fire station/library in Enterprise, KS) and the rehabilitation or replacement of waterline projects in 10 communities and rural water districts. The Community Development Block Grant program has provided more than \$18 million in professional services and materials with communities providing \$14.3 million in labor or donated services! The result? It's a 44 percent reduction from retail.

With numerous facilities in use in some communities, the intent of this article is to learn how those facilities are benefiting or affecting the communities.

Bentley Senior Center

Citizens in Bentley, which is located about 20 miles northwest of Wichita, constructed a new senior center under the KAN STEP program. Previously, seniors met in the city building but it was too small and there were always



KAN STEP has provided funding to enable installation of waterline projects in 10 communities and rural water districts. Above, the city of Corning installed an entirely new distribution system and 100 services in 2006. The total grant expended for the project was \$234,189.

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other events scheduled that prevented the seniors from staying to chat with others. With the city building, the only available meeting place in town, scheduling its use was extremely competitive. Bessie Black, President of the Bentley/Eagle Township Senior Center, says, "With the new senior

center completed, we now we have card parties, various dinners, crafts, breakfast every Tuesday, bingo, quilting parties, exercise equipment that is always being used and other events all week long. Free will donations at all of the events pays for utility costs. We have as many as 40 people at any event and a large one, like a big breakfast, brings in many, many more!"

KAN STEP technicians Shane Holthaus and Mike Fisher spent many hours in Bentley helping the volunteers from the beginning site preparation to the final inspection with the architect.

"We'd like to thank Mike and Shane for all of their hard work, expertise and tools that KRWA provided. We had a wonderful time working with them,"

says Bessie. "They did a wonderful job working on and finishing everything." Bessie's only wish is that the center could have been completed sooner so citizens could have been using it longer. Bessie says, "We're only going through this Life once; we better make a difference while we're here."

Corning Water System

The city of Corning, located in Nemaha County in northeast Kansas, used KAN STEP funds to replace the town's entire water system. Concrete/asbestos and ABS pipelines were replaced with larger PVC. Every hydrant and meter pit was replaced. While there may have been some initial skeptics of the capacity of local people to install a quality water system, KRWA staff never had such concerns – and the experiences of the systems is proving the concern to not be necessary. Corning City Clerk Diane Haverkamp commented on that aspect.

"We've actually only had one leak since we finished installation," Diane reports. Diane also is quick to point out that the quality of the water has also improved "immensely". "We don't have any complaints any more of rusty water. That used to be a regular issue as we were having so many leaks and had to shut down our entire town to fix them. That would stir up the water and it never failed, someone on the end of the lines was washing whites and would ruin them."

New fire hydrants were installed in town and flow to those is "great", Haverkamp reports. The fire department regularly exercises and maintains the new hydrants to ensure their performance for many years.

Diane characterizes the completion of the project in 2004 has been, "an awesome benefit. We have a new water system and our sewer system was built in the early 80's AND best of all ... we are debt free. The city of Corning shouldn't have to worry about replacing any utility services for many years. This wouldn't have been possible without the KAN STEP waterline replacement

"The community has a special sense of pride in the project. We hold our heads high when neighboring towns ask, 'how'd you do that?' We know that we've accomplished something great and that we are able to pass on to future generations."

– Marvin Hines, Mayor, Agra, KS

grant. We would have been indebted for another 40 years with a traditional loan/grant, so this was an awesome project and we had a blast doing it. We'll reap the benefits for a long time!! The city council makes a point to remind the community whenever the opportunity presents itself of the financial blessing this project was for the city of Corning."

Incidentally, Corning completed the construction of a new community center and library through KAN STEP in 2009. They are presently working on repairing numerous streets.

Hartford Community Center

In June 2006, the finishing touches were put on Hartford's new community center. The center is frequently used

for wedding receptions, graduation parties, family reunions, funeral dinners and other meetings. In 2009, the center was rented 39 times! It has been rented 10 times this year already! The rates are very inexpensive for the use of such a new and accommodating facility. The \$110 rental rate is enough to cover the utility costs that totaled \$4,191 in 2009. The city has agreed to contribute any shortfall in revenue to cover operating expenses should that be necessary.

Prior to the completion of the new center, community members used a community center located in town, but it was undersized and did not provide the culinary amenities that the new center features.

City Clerk Chris Botterill says, "Although there is a slight acoustic problem (it gets very loud if there is a large crowd), we are able to offer the center as a choice to citizens when a larger venue is needed. Having the community center makes Hartford very attractive to 'outsiders' who are exploring possibilities of holding a regional event in town." Chris would like to see a day when restrictions on the building for "city business" are removed in order to utilize the facility to a fuller potential with weekly meetings to accommodate a community assembly. Overall, the new center is a benefit to the city.



This photo was taken August 4, 2009 on the Bentley Senior Center project as 55 cu. yards of concrete were placed for the parking lot.

Agra Water System

The city of Agra in Phillips County in north-central Kansas completed a waterline project in 2006. The project replaced several thousand feet of Transite and deposit-filled cast iron pipe, 12 fire hydrants and all the water services in town. A new control pit was installed at the base of the water tower as well. Since the completion of the project, the city has experienced only one leak on the new pipelines. A “seeper” was discovered on a service that had been excessively pulled from the house at the time of installation. Mayor Marvin Hines said, “That was a gummy mess to fix.”

City Clerk Lyndi Bell reports that the greatest benefit has been the reduction in water loss from 23 percent to 15 percent, which she adds, “will go down again this year due to the repair of a master meter at the well.” She also attributes the improvement to the new meters in town. “All of the meters are easy to read, easy to access and provide more accurate reporting and billing of customers.” Lyndi adds, “The project was definitely a benefit to the community because it provided much

Volunteers place a section of wall for the Fire Station/Community Building in Morrill, KS. The facility covers 9,040 sq. feet.



needed improvements to Agra that we could not have afforded. It has improved the quality of our water and the system that we use to deliver it to our customers.” Mayor Hines adds, “The community has a special sense of pride in the project. We hold our heads high when neighboring towns ask ‘how’d you do that?’ We know that

we’ve accomplished something great that we are able to pass on to future generations.”

These communities are just a few of the 58 completed and 13 projects presently in construction or under contract. As in Bentley, where a new facility was needed or in Corning where improvements were necessary to continue service, the KAN STEP projects bring community members together, provide a sense of involvement and pride and offer a community facility or water system that will benefit the community now and for generations to follow. These improvements are contributing to the viability of these small communities to help ensure their viability for many years.

More information about KAN STEP can be found on the Kansas Department of Commerce Web site at www.kansascommerce.com. Descriptions and hundreds of photos of completed and ongoing projects are featured on the KRWA Web site at www.krwa.net under ‘technical assistance’.



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Since 2001, the KAN STEP program has provided funding for 71 community facility projects. KAN STEP is funded and administered through the Kansas Department of Commerce Community Development Block Grant program. The Kansas Rural Water Association provides inspection services and technical assistance on KAN STEP projects.



	Projects	CDBG	Labor
Water Systems	10	\$ 2,297,959	\$ 1,962,892
Community Centers	22	\$ 5,385,217	\$ 3,864,690
Fire Stations	35	\$ 9,079,826	\$ 7,602,701
Combination Buildings	4	\$ 1,317,054	\$ 902,231
Total	71	\$ 18,080,056	\$ 14,332,514

Projects completed or funded

Fire Stations	Morrill	Altoona	Miscellaneous	Carbondale	Horton
Formoso	White City	Woodson Co.	Buildings	Onaga	Damar
McFarland	Mitchell Co.	Reno Co.	Williamsburg	Lincolnvile	
Tescott	(Asherville)	Labette Co.	Lucas	Arcadia	Water Systems
Russell Co. (Waldo)	Enterprise	Miltonvale	Junction City	Seldon	Formoso
Rawlins Co.	Glasco	Caney	Rice Co.	Granola	St. Paul
Saline County	Uniontown	Mitchell Co.		Hartford	Chase RWD 1
(Hedville)	Westmoreland	West Mineral	Community Buildings	Bunker Hill	Nemaha RWD 1
Washington	Winona	Pratt Co.	Melvern	Tipton	Enterprise
Axtell	St. Francis	Mankato	Morris County	Auburn	Corning
Downs	Highland	Anderson Co.	Goff	Bentley	Agra
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