

2023 ANNUAL REPORT



402-228-5869
info@ngagegroup.org
www.ngagegroup.org



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

What a year 2023 was! A strategic planning session was held in March where the NGage Board members and staff sat down for a six hour session to brainstorm and design the strategies NGage will focus on over the next three years. As a result, the following strategies were developed:

- Maximizing opportunities for business and industry recruitment, retention, and expansion efforts to boost Gage County's economy.
- Cultivating relationships to increase engagement from key stakeholders.
- Engaging our area youth by connecting them to career opportunities to increase their sense of place in the community.
- Creating partnerships to address childcare availability and affordability, allowing our workforce to be utilized at its full capacity.
- Examining our current housing stock and identifying needs.

NGage staff remained busy with many conferences and recruitment events to connect with peers, leaders, and businesses throughout the United States to promote Gage County but to also gain more resources, garner new connections, and foster existing relationships. Conferences included: Community Venture Network (Minneapolis, MN), National Rural Economic Developers Association (Myrtle Beach, SC), Nebraska Economic Developers Association (Lincoln, NE), Governors Ag & Economic Development Summit (Kearney, NE), Thriving Children, Families, and Communities Conference (Kearney, NE), Heartland Economic Development Course (Blue Springs, MO), Connecting Young Nebraskans (Kearney, NE), and others.

We have successfully secured several projects and assisted on many others throughout the county. A couple of the highlights: Nixon properties is developing a multi suite building with the anchor tenant being Jimmy John's. Our industrial park is seeing massive expansions totaling over 100,000 square feet of additional manufacturing space, in addition to two new businesses in the data industry. These are heavy power users and are a great addition to our industrial park. A new U-Stop gas station, Beatrice Community Hospital expansion, a livestock facility in the northern part of the county, a much needed road project in Wymore, and an upgrade to McCandles Park are just a few of the many investments in our communities in the last year.

Despite inflation, Gage County saw strong and steady growth, with a total of new investments at just under \$31 Million in 2023. With a lack of housing being an issue, we set to work on our strategic plan and are working to improve the housing stock. New homes alone totaled \$7.1 million in 2023!

A quote I heard at a conference this year that has stuck with me was that "economic developers are individuals charged with taking risks to create opportunities." We are the disruptors in a community, the catalysts for change, the visionaries seeking out and creating opportunities. We should all be proud of what we have and take part in improving our home for the better. I believe in our communities and I believe in this important work. I am thankful for the opportunity to serve as the director of this organization and proud to serve you!



2023 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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2023 MEMBER INVESTORS

Founder

City of Beatrice
Gage County

Leader

Beatrice Community Hospital & Health Center

Champion

Black Hills Energy
Pinnacle Bank
Security First Bank

Catalyst

BluCor Construction
Caspers Construction
Clabaugh Pharmacy
Diode Communications
Echo Electric Supply
Exmark Manufacturing
First National Bank
First State Bank
Garnett Investment Strategies
Landmark Snacks, LLC
Lammel Plumbing
Midwest Livestock Systems
Neapco Components
Norris Public Power District
Precise Fabrication Inc.
Premier Chevrolet Buick GMC
Rosene Machine
Smith Schafer Davis LLC
Stonebrook Exteriors

Catalyst continued...

Tallgrass Energy
Tredz Central
Unite Private Networks
Village of Adams

Advocate

Homestead Land Co
Nebraska Public Power District
Southeast Community College
Terracon Consultants, Inc.
Worldlawn Power Equipment

Associate

Beatrice Chamber of Commerce
Blackburn Technologies
Bryant & Associates, PC
Easley State Farm
Jones Group
Krista Wiedel, Brick & Mortar Realty, LLC
LeRoy & Doreen Janzen
MembersOwn Credit Union
Mosaic
Nebraska Department of Labor
Dave & Betty Norton
R.L. Tiemann Construction, Inc.
Schuster's Outdoor & RV Inc.
Village of Cortland
Willet & Carothers
Woods Bros Realty

NGAGE MISSION

To sustain and grow our region's economy and quality of life by providing leadership and resources for business retention, expansion, recruitment, and community development.

In other words...

At NGage, we work to improve communities and lives in Gage County by retaining and growing local businesses, increasing and improving a skilled workforce, and attracting new investments to the area. We collaborate with key partners in our area and beyond to form partnerships and drive meaningful economic development.

THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC GOALS



Expanding Business & Industry (page 5 & 6)

Maximizing opportunities for business and industry recruitment, retention, and expansion efforts to boost Gage County's economy.



Building Business Relationships (pg. 7)

Cultivating relationships to increase engagement from key community stakeholders.



Youth Engagement & Talent Attraction (pg. 8)

Engaging area youth by connecting them to career opportunities to increase their sense of place in the community.



Gage County is a Community for Kids (pg. 9)

Creating partnerships to address childcare availability and affordability, allowing our workforce to be utilized at its full capacity.



Housing is Abundant, Diverse, and Affordable (pg. 10)

Examining our current housing stock and identifying needs.

EXPANDING BUSINESS & INDUSTRY



NGage is a county-wide economic development group in Gage County, Nebraska that facilitates the growth of a healthy local economy. Primarily, NGage helps recruit new businesses, retain new and existing businesses, and helps existing businesses to expand. No matter the industry, NGage has the resources and knowledge to help with site selection, securing funding, and utilizing local programs and resources for any project.

Last year, NGage submitted six Requests for Proposal for new recruitment projects totaling \$1.5 billion in new investments and with the promise of adding 1,110 jobs to the local labor market. Of these six projects, three are ongoing and three are now classified as "wins", with investments totaling \$5.6M and 35 new jobs:

Project Goldenrod | A testament to Beatrice's low-cost electricity, NGage helped secure Moonraker Mining I, LLC, a colocation data services company.

Project Value-hash | Further proof of Beatrice's low-cost electricity, NGage helped secure Radiant Tech, LLC, a colocation data services company. This project will bring 5 new jobs to Beatrice.

Project Monroe | Utilizing the City of Beatrice's LB840 program and Tax-Increment Financing (TIF), Project Monroe will bring a new development along 6th St. & HWY 77 in Beatrice. A two to three-tenant building will be constructed to house Jimmy John's and one or two other future businesses.

In addition to recruitment projects, NGage has been involved in other economic development support projects throughout 2023, including:

- **Hotel Feasibility Study** | Totaling \$17,500, NGage partnered with Gage County Tourism to complete this study which will help determine the need for additional lodging and create a compelling narrative with which to recruit a new hotel chain to the area.
- **New development** | New development throughout the county totaled just under \$31 million in 2023; \$18 million invested in Beatrice and \$11.8 million invested throughout the county.

HICKORY INDUSTRIAL SITE



Nebraska's Biogenic CO2 Industrial Park

Development began on this site in 2020; today, it is a site promoted and shown at tradeshows across the United States, thanks to the foresight of our board and our partners at Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD) and Tallgrass Energy. The Hickory Industrial Site boasts 260 acres of green space off US HWY 77 with potential for rail and CO2 pipeline that transverses the property. Paired with state and local incentives, this site is a lucrative opportunity for the right company.

NPPD Site Readiness Grant (\$4,350 grant funding awarded)

Doing due diligence on a site helps contribute to shovel readiness that creates interest from developers and favorable conditions for additional improvements. NGage applied for the NPPD Site Readiness Grant as a next step in site readiness and was awarded funding in the amount of \$4,350 to assist in getting the site ready for market.

ALTA Survey (\$8,700 invested)

An extension of site readiness, an ALTA survey was requested for this site, which will indicate boundaries, grass land areas, vertical relief, setback requirements, and underground utilities, among other site-specific information. The findings of the survey will confirm accurate size, utility capacities, any title encumbrances, physical encroachments, and depth and condition of agricultural wells. In other words, this survey helps ensure our site is truly "shovel-ready".

Requests for Proposal (\$1.5 billion investment proposed)

Last year, NGage submitted one Request for Proposal (RFP) for a new recruitment project on the Hickory Industrial Site and is actively working a Project initiated in 2021. Currently, there is a total potential investment on the site of \$1.5 billion, with the addition of 180-200 new jobs.

BUILDING BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS



A priority strategy in the NGage Strategic Plan, building business relationships is key to growing Gage County. Through the cultivation of strategic relationships, the goal is to generate engagement from local stakeholders. The following projects were completed or started last year by the many partners and communities we serve and are only a sampling of the many community development projects happening throughout Gage County:

Business Expansions | Broadband expansions (NextLink, Diode, PinPoint), SCC Welding Center, Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO), Accumia, Beatrice Mary Family YMCA, Farmers Cooperative; a combined investment totaling \$10,500,000 to date.

Community Development | Wymore Road Improvements Project (a CDBG project with grant funding of \$450,000); McCandless Park improvements (over \$350,000 total investment)

EDA Travel, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation & Marketing Grant | Funding was given through this grant opportunity to go towards projects targeted at stimulating the local economies within Qualified Census Tracts (QCTs) through direct investments in events, promotion, and marketing. This strategy would simultaneously help attract visitors into adjacent communities to patronize restaurants, museums, and other traditional tourist locales. A total of \$150,000 was granted for this project.

Support Letters | NGage wrote a number of support letters in 2023 for Gage County road projects, the City of Beatrice Downtown Revitalization CDBG grant, broadband projects, and more.

TALENT ATTRACTION

YOUNG PROFESSIONALS GAGE COUNTY

The inability to find enough qualified workers is a consistent storyline everywhere today; its prominence has pushed the ongoing issue to the forefront for many communities. In Gage County, [NGage](#) and the [Beatrice Area Chamber of Commerce](#) have joined together to relaunch the [Young Professionals Gage County \(YPG\)](#), a networking and support organization for young professionals in the area. This group is a coordinated effort to increase civic engagement by providing opportunities to empower, connect, and develop future leaders of the Gage County area. "As we seek to help foster the younger working population into these leaders, we hope to help them feel a sense of place in their community, which we hope will ultimately increase civic engagement and retention within our Gage County community," said YPG leadership member and local business owner Erin Chadwick. So far, a total of 44 members have joined the group.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

MANUFACTURING DAY

Many manufacturers have realized success due to the favorable economic climate in Gage County. Dynamic companies like Kinney Manufacturing (J&J Wire), Rare Earth Salts, Neapco and Landmark Snacks are leaders in combining the latest technology and good workplace practices to produce high-quality products and consistently innovate to progress their industries. One of the keys to their success is their willingness to educate the community about their opportunities. One example is the Manufacturing Day Event that was held on Thursday, October 5th, as a partnership between NGage, area public schools, and manufacturers. Attendees totaling 130 students from five schools toured the above manufacturing facilities to better understand the career possibilities at each.

JOB FAIR & CAREER EXPO

There are [four main factors](#) of economic growth: land, labor, capital, and entrepreneurship. Economic development implements a series of progressive ideas and changes to help ensure economic growth happens. The benefits of economic growth stabilize a community, foster identity, help strengthen generational roots, and secure a sense of hometown pride. NGage put two of the four factors at the forefront in April 2023 by collaborating with Beatrice Public Schools for a job and career fair for high school students. The event provided an opportunity for employers to fill part-time, full-time, and seasonal positions and connected students to the plentiful career options in the area. There were 224 students in attendance at this event who each visited with at least 5 of the 29 businesses present. Of those students, at least 9 participated in a job shadow or internship, or secured a job!

GAGE COUNTY IS A COMMUNITY FOR KIDS

NGage has actively sought out partnerships to address childcare availability and affordability, allowing our workforce to be better utilized and at a fuller capacity. Childcare is a critical piece of community infrastructure, one that needs a dedicated effort to continue towards sustainability. Because of the great need expressed below, the NGage Board of Directors elected in 2023 to create a stand-alone non-profit organization that will house the Gage County C4K initiative and take it to the next level.



339

CAPACITY DEFICIT

This number represents the number of children without access to licensed childcare due to a shortage of providers; it illustrates the great need for additional providers and the retention and expansion of existing facilities.

24%

DEFICIT TACKLED

With the grant funding, capacity was increased by 43 spots in Gage County, reducing the deficit by 24% since the start of C4K; however, due to multiple providers closing their facilities, the capacity decreased by 42 spots, for a net gain of 1 spot.

\$700,000+

IN GRANT FUNDING

This federal and state funding went either directly to providers for operations/equipment or for provider training opportunities.

HOUSING IS ABUNDANT, DIVERSE, & AFFORDABLE



Though NGage is not directly involved in the creation or rehabilitation of the local housing stock, it's certainly a priority to ensure activity is occurring. Through indirect support and championing, NGage remains at the table to encourage development, connect developers with incentive and grant programming, and offer support letters as needed for projects to happen.

One such example is that of Blue Valley Community Action, which was awarded \$661,000 through the Nebraska Affordable Housing Trust Fund (NAHTF). NGage is working with numerous housing developers to assist in increasing housing stock throughout Gage County.

Overall, Gage County saw over \$7 million in housing investments in 2023.

"Living here is just as important as working here. That's why business isn't our only focus. When you get right down to it, the strength of our communities and the people living in them are Nebraska's foundation. It's where it all starts."

-Nebraska Department of Economic Development

STAFF



Rachel Kreikemeier

rachelk@ngagegroup.org

Rachel and her family have been residents since 2015 and are active in the Gage County area. Rachel completed her Masters in Business Administration (MBA) through Bellevue University. Rachel's purpose-driven personality and passion to help others grow and harness their own potential, motivates her to see her Community and County grow and thrive. Rachel says, "I am so blessed to have landed in the Beatrice area, I can not imagine raising my family anywhere else. I love meeting new people in the area and helping to make this community and county a better place to live, work, play and stay!" In her free time, Rachel finds joy in chasing her kids around to their activities or enjoying the calm that comes from a cup of coffee.



Megan Wicht

meganw@ngagegroup.org

Megan and her husband Dalton moved to Gage County in the fall of 2021. She is president-elect of Beatrice Noon Kiwanis, a Chamber Ambassador, serves on the Young Professionals Gage County board, and is active on committees such as the Catch the Glow, Gage County Tourism Branding, and Government Affairs. She holds a bachelor's degree in Marketing and Management, Google Analytics certification, and has excellent communication skills that she uses towards the growth of Gage County.

In her spare time, you'll nose deep in reading a good book, at the YMCA, talking someone's ear off, or playing with her dog Beckett.