



GREAT BEND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Great Bend Economic Development Inc. (GBED) is only three years old and is already stacking up the success stories. Two of the most gratifying for President Sara Hayden are downtown revitalization and expanded childcare.

The downtown successes include the much-anticipated kick-off for the loft-apartments project and the Great Bend Alive monthly festivities.

"These two projects bring the best of two worlds to downtown," Hayden commented. "The apartments bring capital investment and Great Bend Alive adds to our quality of life by bringing the community together for food, drink and live music on Forest Street."

Just as important, Hayden anticipates the groundbreaking for the new childcare center will occur late in 2022 at Farmers Plaza on West 10th.

"This effort was successful because of the unified efforts of a private foundation, childcare providers, other local residents and governmental support," Hayden said.

The Patterson Family Foundation awarded a \$500,000 grant; Barton County Commissioners kicked in \$435,000; and the state of Kansas

offered \$250,000 in tax credits. GBED, a non-profit entity, is filling the gap.

The near future also looks quite promising.

"We are working with several big retailers and developers," Hayden reported in early August. "We hope things come to fruition and we can welcome new business ventures to town."

"Along with this," she continued, "we are always working on more housing and childcare options."

When Hayden takes a crystal-ball view of Great Bend 10 years down the road, she sees a prosperous city with a bright future. "If we can keep this momentum going, maybe we can match the 20,000 in population we had in the early 1980s – before the oil bust.

"In addition, with new manufacturers, we could be a sustainable utopia. Oil and agriculture have been and always

will be crucial to our growth but we cannot rest. There is strength in manufacturing and we must nurture it."

For example, Fuller Industries, Primus Sterilizer and Superior Essex are making and shipping vital products every day, while Great Bend's Industrial Park near the airport is an attraction for newcomers.

"One goal is to cultivate our existing manufacturers," Hayden noted. "We ask them what they need to make things easier and more efficient.

"And, of course, our retailers are vital to any economic-development effort. They should be commended for finding ways to re-invent themselves with all the challenges of Covid. They learned new ways of doing things and continue to accommodate their customers in any way they can."

When factoring all these elements together, "Great Bend is a small community on the verge of great things," Hayden summarized. "The formation of GBED allows a separate entity to focus on economic development, which is crucial to our growth.

"Everyone can be assured that we continue to work closely with our board of directors, chambers of commerce