



RECONNECTING TO KANSAS ROOTS.

PROGRESS —2024— REPORT

Miami County and its cities, Fontana, Louisburg, Osawatomie, Paola, and Spring Hill are not just dots on a map. They are places of opportunity. The Love, KS, campaign focuses on reconnecting former residents with their Kansas roots and encouraging them to take a fresh look at our region.

Economic and community development are core components of quality of life. In support of that, Miami County's Economic Development Department collaborates with partners on efforts to attract investment to our region.



Positioned For SUCCESS

During 2024, tasks and initiatives outlined in the department's strategic plan kept efforts focused on maximizing opportunities for existing and new businesses. Regional cooperation and resource sharing enhanced previous investments and created opportunities for the future.

To maintain accountability, monthly and quarterly updates detailing progress on the plan's more than 60 action steps are provided to the Miami County Commissioners. The annual summary is accessible at www.miamicountyks.org/ecodevstratplan.

Economic development is a component of community development. A place where people want to live is also a place where businesses want to operate.

Tracking The RETURN

Examples of success during 2024 included:

\$ More than \$800,000 was awarded to MoKan Communications by the Kansas Office of Broadband Development for the installation of free public Wi-Fi in Paola. The network is expected to be operable in early 2025. The system creates a service area that covers Park Square before travelling south to the Paola Aquatic Center, Miami County Fairgrounds, Wallace Park and the adjacent ballfields.

\$ Slightly more than \$60,000 from a Patterson Family Foundation assisted with reconnecting local businesses to the job services offered by KansasWorks. An expo and series of roundtable discussions engaged about 100 business representatives. Videos and digital ads were created to promote local jobs and resources. Data regarding needed job skills was provided to local school districts. Funding was also provided to assist with efforts to recruit former Kansas residents back to the area. These potential "boomerangs" were asked to take another look at job opportunities and the county's quality of life.

\$ Planning for improvements to the Mile Zero trailhead for the Flint Hills Nature Trail received a boost with a \$36,000 Planning Sustainable Places grant awarded by the Mid-America Regional Council.

\$ More than \$2,500 was provided to business owners and nonprofits for technical training.

\$ A \$2,000 marketing grant from the Kansas Department of Commerce allowed the county to purchase digital ads promoting events and activities as potential daytrip destinations for person who lived more than an hour outside of the county. Monthly traffic to the county's tourism section of the website increased from fewer than 200 visitors to an average of 1,000.



Three industry specific roundtables and a general business roundtable reconnected business representatives and resource partners.

Collaborations LEAD TO RESULTS

With continued low levels of unemployment, many employers have struggled to fill job vacancies. Meanwhile, resources and programs have evolved. This past year, a grant from the Patterson Family Foundation underwrote a focused effort in this area. The projects required collaboration with employers, resource partners and the local chambers of commerce.

Reconnecting businesses. A Workforce Expo attracted employers representing roughly 12% of the county's jobs. Workforce Industry Roundtables attracted about 100 attendees who were reconnected with about a dozen state and local resources.

Targeting efforts. Data sources were used to identify zip codes where digital advertising would be most effective. It also provided insights on the types of want ads being placed, employers searching for workers, skills being sought and estimated wages.

Promoting jobs. Search engine optimization efforts elevated ChooseMiamiCounty.com to a page one online search result improving the visibility of local jobs and opportunities for employment. A series of videos was created to promote local industries. Social media was harnessed to promote the variety of available jobs and the advantages of working for a Miami County employer.

Attracting talent. Miami County was selected as a Love, Kansas pilot community. The statewide initiative encourages former residents to return to their home state. The chambers of commerce and community organizers presented keepsakes to graduating seniors. Websites and digital campaigns were undertaken in Louisburg, Paola, Spring Hill and Osawatomie to help reconnect alumni and others. In addition, teen panels provided feedback that was shared with community leaders.

Digital CONNECTIONS



Employment Resources

The department's website offers guidance for both workers and employers highlighting resources that help them access incentives and programs offered by KansasWorks, the Kansas Department of Commerce and other partners. During 2024, the Miami County Jobs Facebook group grew about 15% from the previous year by adding almost 1,000 members.

13,000+

The county's digital workforce campaign significantly boosted engagement with the county's on line resources. Digital ads generated more than 13,000 visits to the website's workforce section between April and December.

593% Growth

Digital advertising, promoting local events and attractions to potential visitors outside the county, proved highly effective in driving traffic to the county's tourism website.

The 2024 campaign generated more than 6,000 visits, a substantial rise from fewer than 1,000 visits recorded during 2023.

areas opportunities
**MIAMI
COUNTY**
employees good industry

Leveraging RESOURCES

As an entrepreneur, it's not unusual to feel overwhelmed. Very few individuals are great at all three core areas of business – **product development, finance and marketing**. That's why it takes a team of partners willing to assist.

The eCommunity program is built on teams. Guided by Network Kansas and locally sponsored by the Greater Miami County Economic Development Corporation, Miami County's eCommunity offers assistance to new and expanding businesses.

Gap Financing

Loans offered through the eCommunity program are not a replacement for a traditional bank loan. They are, however, designed to make a potential loan less risky for a bank to authorize. During 2024, the local loan maximum was raised to \$50,000. By connecting an applicant with a lending partner, a Grow Kansas loan assisted a Spring Hill business with a \$50,000 loan to assist with their expansion.

Technical Assistance and Training Mini Grants

A broad network of partners provide support to our businesses. Local contacts with insight on market conditions and processes pair up with resources such as the Kansas Department of Commerce and Kansas Manufacturing Solutions. Funds are also available for technical assistance and training. During 2024, two mini grants assisted entrepreneurs with their start-up costs. Scholarships offered in conjunction with Network Kansas assisted about 20 persons who participated in one of three Business Basics in a Day sessions. This course, offered by the Small Business Development Center, provides an overview on starting a business and provides direct access to a banker, accountant, attorney and insurance agent.

Business Coaching

Sometimes there just needs to be another perspective. Representatives from the Small Business Development Center, SCORE and similar organizations offer free, technical expertise to help businesses get started, expand or transition their operation. More than 20 clients received more than 70 hours of free assistance from the SBDC.

More information on the Miami County eCommunity program is available at www.MiamiCountyKS.org/eCommunity.



On the left: Business Expo; Ribbon cutting for Blue Lion Express and Bedrock Concrete in Spring Hill; Taylor Forge hosted the Manufacturing Business Roundtable; and Ribbon cutting for solar array in the City of Osawatomie

Choosing MIAMI COUNTY

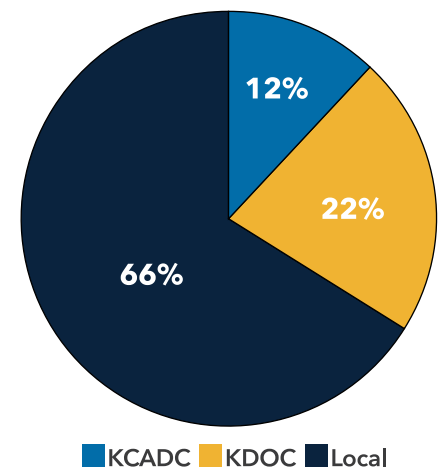
The county's location within the metro region provides a strong business case for many businesses. But a large number of business owners have indicated they selected Miami County as their business base because it was also a good fit for their families.

Community connections are vital to the region's success. More than 65% of 2024 business leads stemmed from local referrals. The department supported nearly 130 projects with almost 20% already resulting in completed expansions or new businesses. More are expected during 2025.



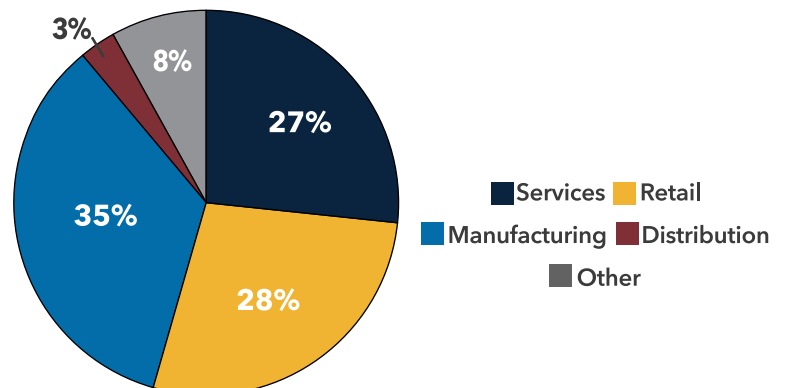
Project Leads

Companies that are looking to relocate or expand in the area largely come directly from local contacts such as real estate agents, city leaders and bankers. The department also leverages the broader reach offered by the Kansas Department of Commerce and the Kansas City Area Development Council. Collaborating with these partners ensures Miami County is not only on the radar of companies and site selectors for its own merit, but also as part of a larger laborshed.



Project Type

Although economic trends shape the types of projects in the market, the Kansas City region typically sees a significant number of service and manufacturing projects. Miami County's projects reflect that pattern.



Celebrating CONNECTIONS

This past year was demanding, but the results have been amazing. Powerful partnerships with local chambers of commerce, KansasWorks, Network Kansas, the Small Business Development Center, and the Marais des Cygnes Extension Office were instrumental in maximizing our reach and effectiveness. Their support was essential.

Whether through training grants, loans, or technical assistance, we've seen firsthand the positive impact on so many businesses. **The outpouring of appreciation - emails, notes, and calls - has been truly inspiring. Thank you.**



About Miami County ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Assists in starting and growing businesses
- Acts as an intermediary to resource providers
- Prepares and distributes reports and research data on demographics, businesses, employment, market profiles, census data, workforce characteristics and available property
- Provides technical assistance in areas such as marketing and business management

The department relies on strong partnerships with the chambers of commerce in Louisburg, Osawatอมie, Paola and Spring Hill to deliver services and programs. Coordination with each of the county's five cities, Fontana, Louisburg, Osawatอมie, Paola and Spring Hill, allow business owners to work with a team. The department is led by Janet McRae, director.

Janet has almost completed her second year as past president of the state association of economic development professionals, Kansas Economic Development Alliance. She also serves on the Federal Home Loan Bank's Affordable Housing Advisory Council and the Kansas Governor's Council on Travel and Tourism.



Janet McRae
Director