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Model of excellence

Examples of excellence in entrepreneurship dot the Nebraska landscape. Such economic vision is critical to maintaining and growing businesses and communities in rural and urban areas.

Outsiders are paying attention. Recently, a group of 30 entrepreneurship coaches from south-central Kentucky visited the Cornhusker State and came away impressed by what they observed.

As a part of a multistate tour, the Kentuckians made several stops across Nebraska. These included the Heartland Center for Leadership Development in Lincoln, Aquinas Middle and High Schools in David City, Elyria Gardens in Elyria, the Valentine Chamber of Commerce and High Plains Homestead in Crawford.

What are the ingredients for growing entrepreneurship in rural communities? That was one of the central questions studied by the Kentucky group.

Another question they addressed: How are rural communities promoting entrepreneurship among rural youths through discussions with students, teachers, organizations and agencies?

And a third: What successful techniques are coaches using as they work with aspiring young professionals?

On all three, Nebraska provided encouraging answers.

Katie Ellis, program coordinator for the Kentucky Entrepreneurial Coaches Institute, told The World-Herald that the group was impressed by entrepreneurial initiatives throughout the state. One notable example: The energy and dedication that four Ord High School students demonstrated in de-

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veloping their own businesses early in their academic careers.

"We were very energized by the creativity the students had and the support the community gave them," Ellis said. "We were very encouraged to see those connections in Nebraska."

The group also visited the State Capitol and met with state legislators who own businesses, learning about how the state is supporting entrepreneurship.

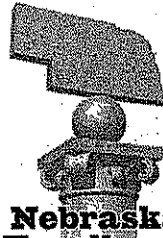
During their trip to Burwell, the visitors absorbed some of the local culture and saw how ranchers have evolved businesses. That portion of the tour was particularly useful, Ellis said, given that many Kentucky farmers are transitioning from tobacco to new crops.

The Kentucky visitors learned more about two successful Nebraska approaches to building rural communities: HomeTown Competitiveness and EntrepreneurShip Investigation.

HTC incorporates four strategies: Mobilizing local leaders. Energizing entrepreneurs. Engaging young people. Cultivating charitable assets. ESI focuses on entrepreneurship education and helps youths develop relationships with local business owners and professionals.

After observing Nebraska's success stories and noting the challenges, representatives of the Kentucky Entrepreneurial Coaches Institute say they are better positioned to improve their state's entrepreneurial policies. The Nebraska initiatives are strengthening the state's rural areas and serving as a model that other states can emulate.

It's no wonder outsiders are paying attention and recognizing this commendable Nebraska vision.



**Nebraska
 Excellence**