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United Way of Central Kansas Honors Pacesetter Businesses for Extraordinary Support

United Way of Central Kansas proudly announces and celebrates its 2025 Campaign Pacesetters—15 outstanding businesses whose generosity and commitment to community helped raise a remarkable \$102,000, representing 45% of the total campaign.

“These businesses are not only leaders in their industries—they are champions for their communities,” said Charell Owings, Executive Director of UWCK. “Their generosity sets a powerful example of corporate philanthropy in action and allows us to continue addressing the most critical needs in Barton and Pawnee Counties.”

The 2025 Top Donor and Gold Overall Award recipient is First Kansas Bank, earning the top honor for the first time.

Dillons earned the Silver Overall Award, and the University of Kansas Health System–Great Bend Campus received the Bronze Overall Award.

The remaining Pacesetter Companies, recognized for their outstanding workplace giving campaigns, are:

- AdamsBrown, LLC
- Farmers Bank & Trust
- Marmie Auto Group
- Midwest Energy
- Kansas Gas Service, a division of One Gas
- Pawnee Valley Community Hospital
- Spectrum Partners LLC
- Sunflower Bank
- Sunflower Electric Power Corp
- Superior Essex
- USD 428 Great Bend
- Venture Corporation

“These fifteen companies lead the way, not just in dollars raised, but in the example they set for others,” said Owings. “We are deeply



thankful for the dedication of their employees, the leadership of their corporate teams, and their continued support year after year.”

In addition to overall campaign contributions, UWCK also recognized companies with the highest per capita giving:

- Gold Per Capita Award – Spectrum Partners LLC (for the 8th consecutive year)
- Silver Per Capita Award – First Kansas Bank
- Bronze Per Capita Award – AdamsBrown, LLC

A special distinction for Highest Percentage Increase Over the Prior Year was awarded to Venture Corporation, whose employee giving rose by an unprecedented 165%—one of the largest single-year increases in campaign history.

The Business Leadership Award was presented to Freestyle Marketing, led by Haley Ruble.

UWCK also extended heartfelt thanks and recognition with the Leadership Award to longtime Treasurer John Cross.

“To each of our award recipients—thank you for showing what it means to invest in your community,” said Owings. “Because of you, more families, children, and individuals across Central Kansas have the support they need to thrive.”

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Small Business Update: One Big Beautiful Bill, Taxes, and Tariffs



On July 4, 2025, President Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBB) was signed into law. This sweeping legislation includes major tax reform provisions that will have far-reaching implications for small businesses in the years to come.

In this Small Business Update, Neil Bradley, EVP, Chief Policy Officer, and Head of Strategic Advocacy at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, joined CO— Editor in Chief Jeanette Mulvey to unpack the OBBB and what it means for small business owners. Bradley also provided updates on tariffs, immigration, and policy priorities that could impact entrepreneurs across the country.

Here are the biggest takeaways from the conversation.

Business-friendly tax provisions from the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act are now permanent

One of the biggest impacts of the OBBB is that it will make several key provisions from the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) permanent. These policies, which offered extensive relief for many small businesses, were set to expire at the end of 2025, which means the "tax cliff" many had feared will be avoided.

Now-permanent tax provisions under the OBBB include:

- 20% qualified business income (QBI) deduction for pass-through businesses (LLCs and S Corps).
- 100% bonus depreciation for new capital investments.
- Increased interest deductibility limits.
- Immediate R&D expensing, retroactive to January 2022 for businesses with less than \$31 million in gross receipts.

Bradley also highlighted the increased SALT (state and local tax) deduction on federal tax returns, from \$10,000 to \$40,000 per year.

"For those with income of less than half a million dollars a year, ... you'll have

an expanded ability for the next several years to claim a bigger deduction for the taxes that you pay [to] state and local [entities]," said Bradley. "That's good news in terms of your ability to deduct taxes associated with your business."

New and expanded tax credits help businesses support employees

The enhanced employer benefits and incentives introduced with the OBBB make it easier and more advantageous to provide paid leave and other benefits to employees.

Bradley highlighted the following new and expanded tax credits from the Act:

- Paid leave tax credit. The paid leave tax credit is now permanent and available even in states with mandatory paid leave. It can also be applied to employer-paid insurance premiums.
- Childcare expense credit. Small businesses can now claim up to 50% (previously 40%) of the cost of offering on-site or off-site childcare for employees. Now, they can also pool together with other local businesses to access tax credits for shared childcare services.
- Student loan repayment benefit. Under this now-permanent benefit, employers can contribute up to \$5,250 toward employees' student loans tax-free.

Taking advantage of these tax credits can help you expand your benefits offerings, which can ultimately help you attract and retain employees in an already-tight labor market.

Rising tariffs will hit small businesses hard

While the OBBB will have an overall positive impact on small businesses, tariffs will continue to put a strain on their finances. The previously established 90-day "pause" on President Trump's reciprocal tariffs ended on July 8, and a wave of new tariffs is set to take effect on August 1. This includes country-specific tariffs (e.g. 50% for countries like Brazil and Mexico on non-USMCA goods) and product-specific tariffs of up to 50% on goods like EVs, semiconductors, steel, aluminum, and pharmaceuticals.

About 242,000 small businesses import

OBBS (cont'd)

goods each year, said Bradley, and many are already struggling with rising costs and uncertainty.

"Over the next six months, tariffs are likely to go up, not down," he added.

Immigration changes could make labor shortages worse

While millions of workers currently have valid U.S. work authorizations, the Trump administration is beginning to rescind some of these, including parole-based work authorizations and temporary protected status for certain countries, including Venezuela. This could affect millions of legally working individuals across industries like hospitality, agriculture, and construction—and employers may not even

know if their employees' work authorization has been rescinded early.

"The conundrum ... for employers is that you currently have no way of knowing that other than your employee telling you," said Bradley. "And if they don't inform you, then you might not know what the consequences are for continuing to employ that person."

The full length video of the interview can be found at: uschamber.com/co/events/small-business-update/small-business-update-one-big-beautiful-bill-taxes-and-tariffs

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Kansas Department of Commerce Launches New Kansas Small Business Office

Lieutenant Governor and Secretary of Commerce David Toland today announced the official launch of the Kansas Small Business Office. The division is dedicated to empowering small businesses across the state with the resources, connections and support they need to prosper, serving as a vital link between entrepreneurs and state government.

"While large corporations relocating or expanding in Kansas tend to grab the headlines, we fully acknowledge small businesses are key drivers of our state's robust economy," Lieutenant Governor and Secretary of Commerce David Toland said. "With the creation of this new division, we are committing resources to double down on that growth."

The focus is warranted, as more than 99% of all businesses in Kansas are small businesses.

The Kansas Small Business Office consolidates key Commerce resources and creates a centralized point of contact in state government for entrepreneurs navigating business development, certifications, permitting, capital access,

mentorship and more. One of the office's unique offerings will be ConnectKS, a new online platform that will simplify access to business resources statewide. Powered by EcoMap, ConnectKS is designed to help entrepreneurs, small business owners and ecosystem builders connect with programs, funding opportunities, support organizations and events.

The platform provides a real-time, searchable database of resources available across the Kansas entrepreneurial

ecosystem. The digital hub is tailored to meet the needs of users at every stage of business development.

"The Kansas Small Business Office is making it easier than ever for

Kansans to find the resources they need to start and grow a business," Kansas Small Business Office Director Taylor Overton said. "Whether launching a first venture or scaling a successful company, our office provides clarity, connectivity and confidence to our Kansas businesses."

For more information about the Kansas Small Business Office visit: kansascommerce.gov/small-business-and-entrepreneurship/.



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Dads in Action

When Kane Clawson, Great Bend, first heard about a class called “Dads in Action,” he was struck by its goal – helping bad dads become good dads and good dads become better dads.

“I thought I was a good dad but wanted to become a better dad,” said Clawson whose children are ages 16, 11 and 8. “In the past, I maybe wasn’t acknowledging when my kids had a problem. I wanted to learn how to manage these situations instead of avoiding them.”

Because of what he learned in the class, Clawson is now “doing my best to really listen to my children’s needs. I am trying to help them work through problems. I certainly am not perfect but I have improved.

“Overall, I try to be less angry in response to these situations.”

Clawson, 36, shared the circumstances of a somewhat minor incident that he knew would have escalated if he hadn’t recalled some lessons from the class.

One of his kids dropped a couple of plates in the kitchen, which led to a quarrel among siblings. “I was able to step in and calm the situation instead of ignoring it and letting things get out of hand. These are the kinds of situations that can escalate into something more serious.”

During the recent class sessions, Clawson said he found food for thought in a couple of sayings. The first one he mentioned is: The time spent in a child’s life will only return if you spend it first.

The second is: A lot of men say they are willing to die for their kids. But are you willing to live for your kids?

When asked what his wife thought of him attending these classes, Clawson smiled and said “it was her idea.”

Paul Rios, Dads in Action facilitator, noted that Clawson attended each class and participated in one-on-one sessions with him.

“Kane is striving to be better and shows initiative,” Rios commented. “He asks questions and thinks before he speaks. I am really proud of him.”

Upcoming class

The next eight-session class is scheduled for 6 to 8 p.m. on consecutive Mondays, beginning July 28, at the Juvenile Services offices, 1800 12th, Great Bend.



A light meal is provided; the classes are free.

The curriculum is called “Quenching the Father Thirst,” and is designed for dads at any stage – those who are parenting full-time, co-parenting or working to rebuild relationships with kids.

Topics include: it takes a man to be a dad; my challenges as a father; my relationship with women; and father and mother dynamics.

“This is an opportunity to reconnect with your children and reclaim your role as a father,” Rios said. “Any dad who is struggling can find new ways to communicate and be there for their children physically, emotionally and spiritually.”

Rios became involved and took the facilitator training because “I was a broken man from a broken home. I am no longer that man. I am learning to be a positive force instead of a negative force.”

The upcoming class is the third one offered locally; seven men have graduated.

Dads in Action is a program sponsored by Rise Up, a task force under the Central Kansas Partnership umbrella. The local program was made possible by a \$50,000 grant from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment.

For more information and/or to sign up for the upcoming class, contact Paul Rios by calling 620-899-8622 or emailing him at paulrios8317@gmail.com.

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Rising Storm - Central Kansas Special Olympics Team Grows During 2024-25 Athletics Campaign

Storm Special Olympics Team marked a busy 2024-25 athletics campaign, consisting of bowling in early fall, basketball and cheerleading last winter, then finishing with track and field in the spring. The athletics season began with bowling balls rumbling down hardwood lanes last September, gained momentum with strong showings by Storm Team members at State basketball and cheerleading last winter, then surged across the finish line in early June with the anchor of the 4x100 meter relay team at the state track and field championships.

All total, Storm Special Olympics was represented by 57 athletes competing in at least one sport; exceeding last year's total participation number by 13 athletes. And the team's geographic reach expanded beyond Barton County this year, bringing in athletes from Pawnee and Stafford counties. Participation numbers have progressively increased over the last several years, since the program took two years off from 2020-21 because of the COVID Pandemic.

"To watch participation climb is motivation for us coaches and volunteers," said Storm Local Program Coordinator Amanda Hammond. "It lets us know we are doing things right. More than medals, we strive to create a fun and inclusive program where our athletes take pride in participation. I feel like we are moving in the right direction, especially with our numbers increasing so much over the past few years."

During its most recent season last spring, 35 athletes competed in track and field. Thirty-three Storm Athletes competed in the Summer Games June 6-8 at Maize High School in activities ranging from field events like long jump, softball throw and turbo javelin, to walking and running events. Storm Athletes competing in state track

were: Kaleb Beckham, James Boehnke, Tammy Boele, Darren Brown, Michael Burrress, Sarah Burrill, Chris Devine, David Edwardson, Auggie Estrella, Logan Gregg, Roger Guthals, DJ Johnson, Audrey Koester, Austin Levingston, Donnie Lewis, Rian Lewis, Ronnie Lewis, Michael Manka, Beth Mattocks, Rita Mestas, Cole Morin, Kaleb Nixon, Trace Ritterhouse, Cierra Roberts, Tori Rose, Curtis Schneweis, Elisa Shores, Steve Smolik, Abbey Stanley, Josh Trimmer, Debbie Wasinger, Wain Waymaster, and Jim Wonsetler.

The spring season started just mere days after Storm's participation in the state basketball tournament and cheerleading championships in Hays. The spring season wasn't without challenges. Inclement weather and a scheduling conflict for the practice facility meant that Storm Team missed two weeks of practices. Then, inclement weather in late April caused cancelation of the regional meet. Rainy weather leading up to the state meet meant that some events were delayed or moved, and shot put at the state meet was cancelled because of soggy field conditions. However, none of that deterred Storm Athletes from giving their best efforts and recording stellar performances at the state championships.

"Certainly, we had to overcome adversity this year," explained Hammond. "Going out there with the chaos of the season, with the chaos of weather, with the chaos of competing among 1,000 other athletes, Storm Athletes did exceptionally well and they took everything in stride."

They were proud of themselves for how they did and achieving their own personal bests, in many cases. They put in the work needed to improve during the season, and by the end of the season, they could see the

outcome. It may not be that they always got first place, but most of them improved from where they were at the start of the year."

During the meet, Hammond said anxiety set in for some of the athletes because of schedule changes, but she credited the coaching staff of Bri Saunders, Emily Komarek, Andrew Rush,



and Denise Whetham for helping to bring order and calm to the evolving situations. She also credited volunteers Jim Boehnke, Carole Edwardson, and Boe Levingston, along with attending family members and staffing of Storm Athletes for providing invaluable help during the three-day event.

"The athletes really trusted our coaches and our coaches did such a tremendous job with the time-and-location changes to get our athletes where they needed to be," said Hammond.

Beyond coaches' efforts, we benefited with help from athletes' family members, along with staff during the three-day event. It really does take a village to have so many athletes participating in a meet that lasts several days. We are so fortunate to have their support."

A Storm Team highlight of the Summer Games happened during the opening ceremony on June 6 when Hammond read the "Coaches Oath" to attendees. She earned the honor by being recognized as "Coach of the Year" by Special Olympics Kansas last winter. Additionally, James Boehnke represented Storm Athletes during the "Walk of Champions" to open the Summer Games.

Following the hustle and bustle of the successful track meet, it was a quiet ride back to Great Bend for the team. For many, the end of track season marked nine months of practice and competition.

"At the end of track, I think they were ready for a summer break," said Hammond, who has coached Storm Team for 15 years. "But, then, they'll be eager to get back into it, starting with bowling in September. The start of a new season always brings excitement."

For more information, contact Amanda Hammond, Storm Team Local Program Coordinator, AmandaH@rosewoodservices.com, 620-793-5888.



RIBBON CUTTINGS

On June 27th, 2025, the Great Bend Chamber of Commerce joined **T & L Fireworks** for a heartfelt celebration marking an extraordinary milestone: 55 years of lighting up the skies and enriching holiday memories throughout Central Kansas. A festive ribbon cutting was held at noon on the opening day of the selling season at their Superstore location in Great Bend, welcoming friends, family, longtime supporters, and new faces to honor a legacy deeply rooted in community spirit and summertime tradition.

It all began in 1970 when Tom and Linda Barnes, also celebrating 60 years of marriage in 2025, turned their passion for fireworks into a small stand. With determination, hard work, and a love for bringing joy to others, they grew their humble beginnings into the thriving business it is today. From a single stand to a regional staple, T & L Fireworks has become synonymous with celebration and community.

The Barnes family, now spanning three generations, stood proudly alongside their dedicated staff to reflect on over five decades of growth, service, and unforgettable fireworks. Co-Managers Christy Kuhn and Kathy Kaiser shared their gratitude, saying, "This business has always been about family, our own, and the families that come back year after year to celebrate with us. Reaching 55 years is a true testament to the generations of loyal customers and community members who have stood by our side. We wouldn't be here without them, and we carry that sense of gratitude into every season."



T & L Fireworks swings open its doors each season from June 27th through July 4th, with three air-conditioned locations in Great Bend and Larned. Their expansive Superstore, just north of 24th & Main at 159 North US-281, offers a welcoming, spacious environment filled with a wide selection of fireworks for every style of celebration. Their second Great Bend outlet on West 10th Street, along with the Larned branch operated in partnership with First Christian Church—extend the same festive spirit to surrounding communities.

Known for their unbeatable blend of quality, fair pricing, and friendly service, T & L Fireworks has remained a seasonal favorite for generations of Kansas families. Their continued dedication to safe and spirited celebrations keeps the Fourth of July bursting with joy year after year.

To learn more about their story, locations, and offerings, visit www.tandlfireworks.com and follow them on Facebook

Catholic Charities Golden Harvest Thrift Store Announces Grand Opening Celebration in Great Bend

July 9, 2025 – Catholic Charities of Southwest Kansas is thrilled to announce the grand opening of the Catholic Charities Golden Harvest Thrift Store, located at 2410 Main Street, Great Bend, Kansas. The celebration will take place on Saturday, August 2nd, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The community is invited to join in a day of fun, savings, and giving back. The grand opening festivities will feature:

- Door Prizes: Exciting giveaways throughout the day.
- Treasure Hunt: A family-friendly activity with special surprises.
- Free Lunch: Enjoy complimentary hot dogs, chips, and water (while supplies last).
- Grand Opening Sale: Incredible deals storewide.

The Golden Harvest Thrift Store supports the mission of Catholic Charities by providing affordable goods, fostering community engagement, and promoting sustainability. All proceeds help those in need right here in our local communities.

Volunteers Needed – Join Our Mission!

Catholic Charities is seeking dedicated volunteers to help make the Golden Harvest Thrift Store a welcoming and successful resource for the community. Volunteers assist with processing donations, customer service, merchandising, cashiering, and more. Sign up for a volunteer orientation at <https://vist.ly/3n7qaiy>.

Whether you're looking to give back, gain experience, or meet new friends, your time and talents are needed!

For more information about the grand opening, volunteer opportunities, or the mission of Catholic Charities Golden Harvest Thrift Store, please contact:

Rebecca Ford, Director of Communication and Development
620-792-1393, rford@CatholicCharitiesSWKS.org

Join us on August 2nd and be part of something special—where every purchase and every hour volunteered helps change lives in our community!

After nearly 24 years of service, Jyl Nokes will retire at the end of July from her role as Chief Operations Officer at **Heart of Kansas Family Health Care**, where she has played a key role in the organization's exponential growth. Starting in 2001 as a part-time office assistant when the clinic was still called "We Care," Nokes eventually served in nearly every major administrative role, including interim CEO and CFO. She helped guide the organization's transition to a Federally Qualified Health Center, expanded its services to include behavioral health and general dentistry, and supported its growth from a seven-person staff to a team of approximately 90. Her wide-ranging responsibilities included everything from payroll and IT to departmental coordination and resource management. Nokes takes pride in the clinic's mission to serve both insured and uninsured patients, stating that the most rewarding part of her work has been making healthcare accessible to those who need it most. A retirement celebration will be held from 4 to 6 p.m. on Thursday, July 31, at Dry Lake Brewing. CEO Brett Middleton praised her contributions, saying she will be greatly missed by both patients and staff. In retirement, Nokes looks forward to traveling with her husband and enjoying life one day at a time.



Ellinwood Hospital and Clinic welcomes Brooke Churchill, PTA, to its Physical Therapy team. She brings a passion for rehabilitation and community care home to Ellinwood.

Churchill began her education at Barton Community College before earning a bachelor's degree in kinesiology from Kansas State University. She completed her Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) certification from Hutchinson Community College in 2019.

Prior to joining Ellinwood Hospital & Clinic, Churchill worked in both nursing home and outpatient therapy settings, gaining hands-on experience with a wide range of patients and treatment needs. Her clinical focus includes strengthening and balance—a specialty area she's especially passionate about.

"I grew up around sports—cross country, basketball and track—and I know how much it means to help someone get back to their daily life, or even back on the field," Churchill said. "It's rewarding to now serve the people I grew up with. It's nice seeing familiar faces again and being able to support my local community."

Churchill's addition strengthens Ellinwood Hospital and Clinic's commitment to providing high-quality, personalized care close to home.

Ellinwood Hospital and Clinic is a 25-bed Critical Access Hospital and Rural Health Clinic. With an Emergency Room open 24/7, the hospital provides inpatient acute care, skilled swing bed, and intermediate swing bed care and many outpatient services: Endoscopy & outpatient Surgical Services, Physical, Occupational, and Speech Therapy, Respiratory Therapy, a full-service medical Laboratory, and a full range of Imaging services – X-Ray, CT, Mobile: 3D Mammography, Dexa, Sonography, & MRI. There is also an Outreach Clinic that provides access to a wide range of specialists including Cardiology.

The Ellinwood Clinic offers full family care, from newborn to geriatric, provided by practitioners that truly care about you and your health.

For more information about Physical Therapy services at Ellinwood Hospital and Clinic, call (620) 564-2548 or visit EllinwoodDistrictHospital.org

Pawnee Valley Community Hospital (PVCH) has named longtime nurse Melissa Hagerman as the new Family Medicine nurse lead, recognizing her nearly decade-long dedication to patient care within the organization. In this vital leadership role, Hagerman will oversee clinical nursing processes, support patients directly, promote teamwork, and drive a culture of safety and continuous learning. Her promotion reflects her clinical excellence, compassionate care, and strong ties to the community. Previously serving as a clinic nurse and health coach, Hagerman brings both experience and empathy to her new position.

PVCH leadership praised her professionalism, attentiveness, and deep commitment to patient well-being, noting that her leadership will enhance both team performance and patient outcomes.

Originally from Colby, Hagerman holds nursing degrees from North Central Kansas Technical College and Fort Hays State University. Pawnee Valley Community Hospital, 923 Carroll in Larned. Services include 24/7 emergency care; acute, skilled and specialized nursing; surgery; high-tech imaging and laboratory tests; wound care; rehabilitation; and sleep and diagnostic center. PVCH Family Medicine provides the full range of family-medicine services; physician-assisted weight loss; and women's health services.

The hospital's number is 620-285-3161; the clinic's number is 620-804-6007.



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Why Kansas is No Longer Last for Mental Health

After being labeled worst in the nation for mental health care and access to services in 2023, Kansas moved up the ranks to a modest 22nd for 2024. Officials point to changes made prior to the pandemic as reasons for improvement. Researchers and therapists say it's because of enhanced public perception and normalization of mental health concerns.

Doris Arwine has witnessed some improvements in mental health care and awareness in southwest Kansas over the past two decades.

Her dog, Otis, is one example.

Life has been "kind of rugged" for Arwine in recent years, with the death of her husband and illness afflicting her family. She leans on her Christian faith for guidance now more than ever. Arwine is a licensed clinical social worker in Garden City who operates In His Image Christian Counseling, a faith-based therapy service with a downtown office. She maintains a full schedule of clients, ranging from first responders and immigrants to farmers and educators. Most are seeking help with anxiety and depression – two things she's well-acquainted with.

She used to leave Otis at home when she went to the office. After her husband died, she noticed changes in Otis' attitude and appetite. She realized her dog was depressed from being alone, so she decided to take him to work. Now Otis is the "perfect metaphor" for illustrating the effectiveness of mental health counseling.

"He reaches out to other people, and as he reaches out, he becomes more healed, and he doesn't have the depression," she says. "He connects well with everybody."

Although Otis is not a certified therapy dog, Arwine says his presence helps people feel calmer, even among clients who are averse to dogs, allowing them to express themselves more freely. A testament to his work ethic, Otis laid his head in this reporter's lap during an interview with Arwine.

As a therapist, Arwine weaves stories from lived experiences with cognitive behavioral techniques to help clients take control of their mental health. Add a dash of faith, and she says it often leads to success for her counselees.

"I think if you can meet them where they're at, and you can normalize their situation, it helps them to do a lot better," she says.

In Arwine's eyes, awareness of mental health issues has increased during her career, but stigmas still linger about receiving help. New data suggests mental and behavioral health services have improved since that lowest-in-the-nation ranking.

What Kansas has done

But what has gotten better?

In 2023, the national nonprofit Mental Health America ranked Kansas 51st – last in the country – for both mental health care and access to services. For 2024, Kansas jumped to 22nd.

Per the study, about 24% of roughly 2.9 million Kansas adults reported having a mental illness last year. Around 116,000 people indicated having serious suicidal thoughts. Among people 18 and younger, about 50,000 of them said they had had a major depressive episode, while about 22,000 reported having a substance use disorder. About 32,000 young people reported having serious suicidal thoughts, which has climbed from an estimated 30,000 kids the year prior. The report states nearly 3 million children did not receive treatment for their mental health needs in 2024 nationally.

Kyle Kessler is the executive director of the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas. He and his staff were concerned about the 2023 report because he did not think at the time that Kansas was the worst in the country after the Legislature made investments into modernizing mental health care and substance abuse treatment programs.

The state mental health task force recommended in 2018 and 2019 that behavioral health services be expanded and enhanced, with an emphasis on easing access and providing more options for services, particularly in rural and frontier areas. In response, lawmakers committed funding to incorporate mental health resources in public schools and set a schedule for restoring grant funding for community mental health centers.

In 2018, the Mental Health Intervention Team was established to place mental health resources in schools. Under the program, school districts receive funding to employ liaisons to assist students with behavioral and mental health needs and connect them with local care providers. Of the 287 public school districts in Kansas, 87 are



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Kansas Mental Health (cont'd)



participating in the program.

According to a 2024 intervention team report, the program received a \$4.5 million expansion of funding. More than \$13 million in state grants were awarded to districts for fiscal year 2025. School districts keep 65% of the money received and pass on 35% to their local mental health providers. In addition, the 23 private schools that are part of the program received \$1.27 million for mental health support.

In 2021, Gov. Laura Kelly signed a bill establishing a new outpatient clinic model for localized behavioral health services. The certified community behavioral health clinic provides more access and support services via telehealth and in-home visits for those with mental health or substance use disorders. There are 26 such facilities located throughout the state, the majority of them grouped in eastern Kansas.

Kessler says he feels the passage of the health clinic bill was “transformational” for mental health care access.

“We’re treating more people than ever across the system, and now we have a good problem of needing more (mental health care) professionals,” he says.

Persistent gaps

Kessler says another substantial accomplishment for mental health care was the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline becoming available 24/7 in 2022. People can call or text the lifeline to get help with suicidal or harmful thoughts and substance abuse crises, or to share concerns about a loved one who may need crisis support. In Kansas, 988 contact centers are independently operated and receive funding through the Department of Aging and Disability Services.

According to the 988 Coordinating Council report to lawmakers in January 2024, Kansas call centers received 20,084 calls from August

2022 to July 2023. Per month, it works out to an average of 1,674 calls. For that same period, an average of 762 text messages were received each month.

Part of the 988 program’s success comes from its widespread promotion among local partners. Kessler says law enforcement agencies, schools, churches, health care facilities and state organizations, including the Kansas chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, are working to fill holes in mental health care coverage.

According to researchers with the Kansas affiliate of the alliance, gaps in mental health care persist across all 105 counties but are felt more sharply in rural and frontier regions. Residents of less-populated counties can drive for hours to receive care from a provider in an urban area. Traveling for one appointment can become a daylong trek, which is not possible for families with full-time work schedules and young children. Nor is it convenient for seniors or disabled people who rely upon friends and loved ones for transportation.

In some cases, lengthy travel times are viewed as a deterrent from seeking vital care for mental health needs. Isaac Johnson, operations manager and researcher for the alliance’s state affiliate, says the fix for that is more care providers and crisis centers.

“In Kansas in general we have a provider shortage – even in some urban areas – but it’s significantly exacerbated in western counties,” he says.

Johnson says one way to curb that trend is by spreading accurate mental health information through more rural communities and civic groups to dispel stigmas and promote seeking help. To spur on that initiative, Kansas administrators with the alliance created the Standing in the Gap series of information sessions in 2023, with the goal of learning more about rural

and frontier mental health needs through personal stories.

During the sessions, researchers learned that clergy members and church officials are often the first people to respond to an individual’s mental health concerns in rural areas. This is because of established relationships within the community, but it also stems from sparse coverage of care providers. For example, Kansas has an average of one mental health care provider for every 450 residents, according to data collected by the alliance. In areas such as Plainville in Rooks County, the figure stretches to one provider for about 4,000 people. Smaller towns often have multiple churches, all of which can have mental health pamphlets and support information available, sometimes in the narthex.

Other state agencies are attempting to close the rural mental health care gap. The Kansas Department of Agriculture is partnering with Kansas Corn to offer the Kansas Ag Stress program. Its website features a list of mental health providers who offer telehealth services or who specialize in the ag industry. Kansas Farm Bureau also has its Rural Minds Matter program that provides training materials and links to mental health support guides.

Awareness and acceptance of mental health conditions have improved throughout Arwine’s career. As a woman of faith, she says she doesn’t try to have all of the answers, but relies on her Christian beliefs for emotional comfort. She says others can do the same, regardless of their beliefs.

“I need to come across with a spirit of humility so my clients are comfortable and they feel accepted,” she says. “We try to meet everybody where they’re at, and realize every person is valuable, and that every person can learn to change, given the right resources. We focus on their strengths, because that’s where you can help people step up.”

This story was originally published July 7, 2025, by The Journal, a civic issues magazine from the Kansas Leadership Center. Written by AJ Dome. Read the rest of this article at: klcjjournal.com/no-longer-last-mental-health.

CarePortal Growing in Great Bend

A homeless woman and her child were finally able to find a home. The problem was they had virtually nothing to put in it.

This information was shared with local and area churches through CarePortal, a technology platform that connects communities to families in need.

"The request for this family included all types of furnishings, kitchen utensils and more," said Karma Byers, CarePortal point person at St. Mark Lutheran Church, 2101 Jackson, Great Bend. "St. Mark was able to provide a queen-sized bed that was donated and delivered as a result of CarePortal."

This is just one example of the 58 requests at St. Mark, which joined the CarePortal network just over a year ago. So far, 15 of these requests have been honored and 50 children have benefited.

Two other examples of local requests indicate the variety of issues facing families. The requests came from a mom with several children, who were deserted by the husband/father, and a woman who has been through rehab and stayed sober for about a year.

"It is important to know that those who make requests remain anonymous," Byers said. "I don't even know their names."

She also emphasized that in many cases St. Mark collaborates with other churches and approaches local businesses for help.

"St. Mark doesn't do this alone," she commented. "Our congregation and others are sometimes overwhelmed by the number of needs; we encourage other churches and groups to become involved."

The next training session is set for noon Thursday, May 22 at Immaculate Conception Church in Claflin. Churches, child-welfare agencies and community members are welcome. The session takes about an hour.

Agencies that join CarePortal are called "Posting Partners," which can post needs by email.

These local partners are: St. Francis Ministries; Healthy Families/Kansas Children's Service League; Department of Children and Families; USD 428 Great Bend; Juvenile Services; Kansas Kids Belong; The Center for Counseling & Consultation; Family Crisis Center; USD 431 Hoisington; Barton Core Communities; The Family Initiative; USD 355 Ellinwood; and USD 112 Central Plains.

"Those who make requests are thoroughly vetted by professionals from these entities,"

Byers emphasized. "The agency gets to know them and their circumstances. When they learn the request is legitimate, they pass it along."

"The priority is to keep families together in a safe place to live," she continued. "We want to lift people up."

More information

If an individual, business or civic group wants to make a financial donation, they may contact Hallie Cable, CarePortal regional manager, by calling 620-200-1659 or emailing hallie.cable@careportal.org.

"Financial donations would be a huge blessing," Cable said. "Anyone can go through me if they want to ensure their contribution goes toward meeting local needs. I will make the connections for you."

Cable supplied a brochure that outlines more CarePortal information.

"When local churches step up to meet tangible needs of local children and families in crisis, the story is just beginning," the brochure states. "... Church members using the CarePortal platform found it increases awareness of the needs of hurting children and families in their community, increases action by making it easier to assist families and creates meaningful connections with those they help."

Cable noted that Barton County has been involved in CarePortal for nine years, serving 2,433 children and families, and honoring 458 requests with an economic impact of \$445,799.

"I am so grateful to all the Barton County churches and child-welfare agencies that have partnered with us to make a real difference in the lives of their neighbors in their community," Cable commented. "We would love for others to join us."



CarePortal

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SCHEDULE

Every Thursday

Doors Open at 9am

Program at 9:30am

August 7th **HAMMEKE ELECTRIC** 167 N Hwy 281

Hammeke Electric is proudly celebrating 25 years of serving Great Bend and beyond, marking the milestone with Chamber-sponsored events including Coffee and After-Hours gatherings this summer. Over the past quarter-century, they've built a reputation for reliable electrical services and strong community ties.

August 14th **WYRICA ADVENTURES LLC** 1125 Williams, Chamber Board Room

WyRica Adventures offers an elevated Costa Rican getaway centered around Casa WyRica, a luxurious 4-bed, 4-bath villa perched atop the vibrant hills of Manuel Antonio with sweeping ocean and jungle views—including spectacular sunsets and tropical birdsong. Guests can pair their stay with premium angler experiences aboard the charter boat "Amy's Dream," featuring inshore and offshore fishing, sunset cruises, private chefs, and concierge services.

August 21st **RUHE RITUALS** 1519 Main Street

Ruhe Rituals is a boutique wellness studio offering luxurious self-care experiences—from detoxifying wraps and revitalizing facials to IV therapy drips—all designed to help you glow inside and out.

August 28th **SUNFLOWER DIVERSIFIED SERVICES-WESTSIDE MARKET** Westside Market - 5523 10th Street

Westside Market, run by Sunflower Diversified Services showcases unique items—like handcrafted soaps, kitchen goods, furniture and 3D-printed art—created and sold by individuals with developmental disabilities, offering community-minded shopping and vocational opportunities.

September 4th **CENTRAL KANSAS PARTNERSHIP** 3301 Lakin Ave

Central Baptist Church Cyclist Camp Ground

Central Kansas Partnership is a grassroots 501(c)(3) coalition—bringing together parents, professionals, and community members across Central Kansas to promote health, prevent youth substance abuse, support breastfeeding, suicide prevention, and more through targeted task forces and public initiatives.



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OUTLOOK

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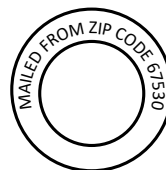
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2021

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YOUR CHAMBER CALENDAR PREVIEW

The countdown to a busy fall begins!

- 9.26 CHAMBER GOLF TOURNAMENT
- 10.2 ELLINWOOD HOSPITAL & CLINIC CHAMBER AFTER HOURS
- 10.5 FALL FEST BY FUEL BARTON COUNTY
- 10.19 CANDIDATE FORUM BY LEAGUE OF WOMEN'S VOTERS
- 10.21 BARTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE CHAMBER AFTER HOURS



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31ST
ANNUAL

Sept 3
2025



KIDS AG DAY!

Join the Mission

**Fuel Ag Education by
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The Great Bend Chamber of Commerce, through its Ag-Business Committee, is proud to present the 31st Annual Kid's Ag Day, Wednesday, September 3, 2025, at Diamond K Farm.

Providing over 400 Barton County fourth-grade students with a deeper understanding of agriculture and its crucial role in our economy.

Developing the Workforce of Tomorrow: Introducing students to agriculture careers and the innovation driving modern farming.

Investing in Youth & Families: Sparking curiosity and pride in our community's agricultural heritage.

Strengthening Business & Community Connections: Showcasing local producers, agribusinesses & volunteers who make this event possible.

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19TH ANNUAL

GREAT BEND CHAMBER OF COMMERCE GOLF TOURNAMENT

Tee off with us for a day of fun, networking, and purpose as we drive our Elevate GBK Beyond Today campaign forward. Each hole and contest highlights one of our 5 focus areas critical to building a thriving Great Bend:

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- Business & People Retention
- Membership Development & Support
- Business & Community Marketing
- Business Advocacy

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anniversary and
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powering progress
in our region!**