**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**TITLE:** Entrepreneur-focused “walking conference” to be held in North Platte

**AUTHOR:** Russell Shaffer

**ATTACHED:** 838A8035 E.jpg, “Odee Ingersoll, director of the Nebraska Business Development Center at Kearney, presents on effective business transition processes at the locally-owned Elston House maker space during the 2024 CEC Conference in Sidney, Neb.” Photo by Russell Shaffer

**WEBSITE:** <https://ruralprosperityne.unl.edu/connecting-entrepreneurial-communities-conference/>

**CONTACT:** Ben Dutton , Extension educator

Rural Prosperity Nebraska

ben.dutton@unl.edu

308-532-2683

Community development professionals, entrepreneurs and rural community members will gather in North Platte on April 23-24, 2025, for the 7th annual Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities (CEC) Conference. Hosted by the University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s Rural Prosperity Nebraska initiative, this conference offers hands-on learning experiences designed to strengthen local economies and inspire rural innovation. This year’s theme, “Moving Forward, Working Together,” highlights the power of collaboration in building resilient and thriving communities.

The CEC Conference is Nebraska’s only “walking conference,” where the nearly 30 interactive sessions take place inside locally owned businesses, allowing attendees to experience firsthand how entrepreneurship fuels community development and gain valuable insights into workforce development, small business support and more. By immersing participants in the city’s business ecosystem, the conference fosters meaningful connections between those invested in community development.

“North Platte is the perfect backdrop for this year’s conference,” said Ben Dutton, the Rural Prosperity Nebraska Extension educator in North Platte. “With its vibrant small business community and recently renovated downtown business district, it showcases what CEC is all about — helping communities create opportunities for growth through entrepreneurship.”

Conference sessions will feature expert speakers from across the country, and Nebraska entrepreneurs and community leaders, sharing innovative strategies and real-world solutions for fostering economic vitality. Topics will include business retention and expansion, funding opportunities for rural entrepreneurs, leveraging tourism for economic growth, and strengthening rural ecosystems through public-private partnerships.

Beyond the sessions, workshops and roundtable discussions, the CEC Conference provides opportunities for networking and collaboration so attendees can connect with peers who are equally passionate about advancing rural prosperity.

Alexander Coon, who attended the 2024 conference in Sidney, said, “I’ve known there’s been a strong sense of community between businesses, but this conference has really shown just how everybody communicates and works together in the community.”

The CEC Conference welcomes economic developers, chamber of commerce members, elected officials, nonprofit leaders, business owners, educators and anyone committed to strengthening their local community. Whether you are looking to launch new initiatives, support entrepreneurs or drive economic change, this event will provide the knowledge and connections to help you succeed.

Registration is now open, with early bird rates available through April 11. To learn more and secure your spot, visit [the CEC Conference website](https://ruralprosperityne.unl.edu/connecting-entrepreneurial-communities-conference/).

###