North Platte to host entrepreneur-focused “walking conference”

by Russell Shaffer

edited by Geitner Simmons and Sean Hagewood

Community development professionals, entrepreneurs and rural community members will gather April 23-24 in North Platte for the seventh annual Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities Conference.

Registration is open through 4 p.m. April 24, with early bird rates available through April 11. To learn more or register, visit <https://go.unl.edu/ip57>.

Hosted by the University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s Rural Prosperity Nebraska initiative, the 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 conference is Nebraska’s only “walking conference,” where the nearly 30 interactive sessions take place inside locally owned businesses, allowing attendees to experience how entrepreneurship fuels community development and gain valuable insights into workforce development and small business support. 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, a Rural Prosperity Nebraska Extension educator in North Platte. “With its vibrant small business community and recently renovated downtown business district, it showcases what the conference is all about — helping communities create opportunities for growth through entrepreneurship.”

Conference sessions will feature experts from across the country, as well as 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 conference provides opportunities for networking and collaboration.

“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,” said Alexander Coon, who attended the 2024 conference in Sidney.

The conference is open to economic developers, chamber of commerce members, elected officials, nonprofit leaders, business owners, educators and anyone else committed to strengthening their local community.

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