



\*\* This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/huck-boyd-leaders-of-the-year-2024>

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## **Kansas innovators, entrepreneurs to be honored by Huck Boyd Institute**

Annual award winners named from across the state

*K-State Research and Extension news service*

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Seven entrepreneurial organizations will be recognized by K-State's [Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development](#) as the 2024 Huck Boyd Leaders of the Year.

This year's award winners are:

- **Community Service:** Duane Toews, KSDS Assistance Dogs, Washington.
- **Tourism:** Joe Minnick, Debbie and Terry Thompson, Hoffman Grist Mill/Ross Boelling, Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad, Abilene/Enterprise.
- **Entrepreneurship:** Isaac and Karina Shue, Gallery Mostaza, Harper.
- **Business Development:** Carolyn Dunn, Stafford County.
- **Technology:** Jason Smith, Rainbow Communications/Smart Rural Communities, Everest.
- **Agribusiness:** Alex Parker, Circle P Processing, Waterville.
- **Ag Innovation:** Ray Flickner, Flickner Innovation Farm, Moundridge.

"These represent some of our state's best examples of innovation, service and business development," said Julie Hower, president and CEO of Farmers & Drovers Bank in Council Grove, and chair of the Huck Boyd Institute Board of Directors.

The winners will be recognized at an awards luncheon on Tuesday, Nov. 5 at the Kansas Department of Agriculture offices at 1320 Research Park Drive in Manhattan.

### **Community Service: KSDS Assistance Dogs**

KSDS Assistance Dogs, Inc. had its beginnings when Cloud, Riley and Washington County 4-H dog project participants began serving as puppy raisers for assistance dog training organizations in other states.

Wanting to bring that service closer to home, Kansas Specialty Dog Service (now KSDS Assistance Dogs, Inc.) opened its doors as a non-profit organization in 1990. It began in a converted steakhouse and now includes a ten building campus with canine housing and training facilities.

Duane Toews is the current CEO. Thanks to generosity of donors and sponsors, guide, service, and facility dogs are made available by KSDS to clients free of charge across the nation.

### **Tourism: Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad**

In 1993, railroad fans in Dickinson County formed the Abilene & Smoky Valley Railroad to preserve and honor railroad history in central Kansas. They now operate an excursion train that runs from Abilene to the historic Hoffman Grist Mill in nearby Enterprise.

Joe Minnick was one of the founders of these initiatives. Debbie and Terry Thompson operate the grist mill and Ross Boelling is general manager of the A&SV Railroad, which now offers dinner trains and much more.

### **Entrepreneurship: Gallery Mostaza**

Isaac Shue always enjoyed art and found he really enjoyed making pottery. After a church mission project overseas where he met his wife, Karina, they moved to his hometown of Harper and ultimately built a studio and gift shop for their handmade ceramics.

Gallery Mostaza takes its name from the Spanish word for mustard, referring to the Biblical parable of great things that are accomplished by faith as small as a mustard seed. Taza is also the word for mug, one of their most popular ceramic products that are sold across the nation and beyond.

### **Business Development: Stafford County**

Carolyn Dunn took on the role of Stafford County Economic Development director in 2011. When the only grocery store in the county seat closed, local citizens mobilized to find an alternative. Dunn led the \$3.8 million project to construct a new building for the grocery store, which operates today.

She also pursued alternatives for housing, which led to the construction of 10 new affordable, energy-efficient homes. Dunn now serves as president of the Stafford County Port Authority, which is building an \$11 million rail transloading facility that is projected to have a \$40 million benefit for the county.

### **Technology: Rainbow Communications/Smart Rural Communities**

Jason Smith is CEO and general manager of Rainbow Communications, the telecommunications company headquartered in his hometown of Everest. During his time with the company, it has grown from serving 1,500 customers to nearly 10,000 locations.

Rainbow Communications is so active in providing broadband in its service area that it was one of 10 companies in the nation to earn the Smart Rural Community Showcase Award.

### **Agribusiness: Circle P Processing**

Alex Parker was working as a farrier in 2020 when it seemed many of his clients were asking where they could get their beef processed. That led him to purchase a former locker plant in Waterville and rebuild it to become Circle P Processing.

His family-owned business has taken the extra step of providing key data points back to clients to help improve beef production. Circle P Processing handles various species and has sent product beyond the borders of Kansas.

### **Ag Innovation: Flickner Innovation Farm**

Ray Flickner is the fifth generation of his family to farm his family's land near Moundridge. Soil and water conservation has always been a priority for his family as the farming operation expanded.

In 2019, he launched Flickner Innovation Farm to explore and showcase innovative conservation techniques. Now, various water conservation initiatives, soil health practices and weed management tools are being tested on this award-winning, production-scale farming operation, which has even been visited by NASA to study water resource issues.

The 2024 Huck Boyd Leaders of the Year winners were selected by entrepreneurship students in K-State's College of Business and by agricultural communications students in K-State's College of Agriculture.

Each year the Huck Boyd Institute selects its leaders of the year from among those featured previously on its weekly Kansas Profile radio program and column. Kansas Profile is distributed by the K-State Radio Network and K-State Research and Extension news media services to radio stations and newspapers statewide.

The Huck Boyd Institute is a public/private partnership between K-State Research and Extension and the Huck Boyd Foundation. The Foundation office is at the Huck Boyd Community Center in Phillipsburg. The Institute office is at Kansas State University in Manhattan.

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### **FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS:** Links used in this article

Huck Boyd Institute for Rural Development, <https://www.huckboydinstitute.org>

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