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Liberal Named as a NetWork Kansas 2012 Entrepreneurship (E-) Community

NetWork Kansas announced today that Liberal was selected as a 2012 Entrepreneurship (E-) Community and has been awarded $166,667 in tax credits, enabling the Liberal E-Community to raise $125,000 to be loaned to local businesses. Liberal joins a group of thirty-seven other E-Communities.

"I am very excited about the opportunities that will be afforded Liberal's entrepreneurs through the E-Community program. Funding is always a problem for new or expanding businesses and through E-Community, there will be another avenue for entrepreneurs to secure some much-need capital. I'm confident that over the years E-Community will become very important to Liberal's entrepreneurs!" said Ronda Maxwell, member of the Liberal E-Community leadership team.

The E-Community partnership, now in its sixth year, has grown from six communities in 2007 to thirty-eight in 2012. The NetWork Kansas E-Community partnership allows a town, a cluster of towns, or an entire county to raise seed money for local entrepreneurs through donations from individuals or businesses within the community. During the first five years of the E-Community partnership, more than $6 million have been raised. These funds are estimated to generate more than $34.1 million of investment in rural businesses across Kansas.

"I am excited about Liberal being chosen as an E-Community. It will afford opportunities for our community to leverage funds and invest in entrepreneurship and assist small businesses to expand, as we all know and realize the growth of any economy is in small business and for our community the small manufacturing companies, we can encourage entrepreneurs and create jobs. It is very exciting to become a part of NetWork Kansas and gain great insight from other communities. I look forward to a long and prosperous relationship that will benefit our community," stated Don Witzke, member of the Liberal E-Community leadership team.

Liberal assembled a local leadership team of representatives from across the county to apply for consideration during the 2012 E-Community Competitive Round. The E-Community leadership team includes: Jeff Parsons, Don Witzke, Robert Burkey, Roger Crossman, Ronda Maxwell, Ernie Schaffer, Tom St. Aubyn, and Jack Taylor. The leadership team will determine the strategy and vision for the E-Community. A separate financial review board will evaluate prospective loan applications from local businesses.

The leadership team submitted a detailed written application to NetWork Kansas in August before being chosen as a finalist. An in-person interview was held between NetWork Kansas and the leadership team this fall that led Director of E-Communities, Erik Pedersen, and Product Manager, Anne Dewvall, to recommend to the NetWork Kansas Board of Directors that Liberal be approved as a 2012 E-Community

"Many of our partner communities are doing innovative things to help foster a flourishing entrepreneurial ecosystem," said NetWork Kansas Director of E-Communities Erik Pedersen, "They have worked to define a process for connecting startup businesses with resources, and to provide specialty assistance that can facilitate business expansions as well as creating this important gap financing component."

Liberal has until mid-December to raise donations in exchange for the tax credits it has been awarded. Interested donors should contact Jeff Parsons about tax credit availability. The tax credits are valued at 75% of donations and offset state income tax liabilities for individuals or businesses.

These funds will then be available beginning in January 2013 to be awarded to local businesses as matching loans. The establishment of the E-Community loan fund represents a significant accomplishment for Liberal and is the result of ongoing

collaboration between area banks and entrepreneurs. In addition to the establishment of the E-Community loan fund, Liberal will also complete a series of strategic activities during 2013 designed to enhance the effectiveness of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in order to drive long-term economic growth.

Seven other communities were also named as 2012 E-Communities in addition to Liberal. The following communities were granted a collective total of $675,000 in tax credits, enabling them to raise $900,000 to be loaned to local businesses in their community. The 2012 E-Communities are: Ellis County, Humboldt, Liberal, Montgomery County, Reno County, Sherman County, Wabaunsee County, and Wichita County.

Since 2007, NetWork Kansas E-Communities have loaned or granted $2.1 million to businesses in their communities through this funding source and leveraged an additional $11.9 million dollars, for a total investment of $14 million dollars into businesses in E-Communities. This funding has spurred the creation or retention of nearly 551 jobs in these same communities and has immeasurable positive effects on the entrepreneurial ecosystems of these participating areas.

To learn more about the Liberal E-Community, Contact:

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