



Ord, Nebraska

An Entrepreneurial Community

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*In the 1980s Ord and its region were in crisis facing serious challenges and the potential it could go the way of so many other rural communities into continued decline losing vitality along the way. By the 1990s Ord was facing these challenges including confronting anti-change forces and the real risk of losing its hospital. During this decade Ord sought out help and began the all-important process of visioning a new future. The year 2000, in so many ways, is the pivot year from crisis and decline to a new road to development and prosperity. During the 2000s Ord began to make critically important commitments followed by investments laying the foundation for transformative change and impact. By the 2010 to 2020 period these commitments and investments moved Ord from decline to success. Our story, **Ord, Nebraska An Entrepreneurial Community** captures this transformation through the entrepreneurship lens.*

Guide to this Story

We have worked with Ord and Valley County, Nebraska off and on for the past 25 years. Over the last three years, we have revisited Ord to capture its development journey. This story, **Ord, Nebraska An Entrepreneurial Community**, provides our story capture work to date as it relates to entrepreneurial ecosystem building in Ord and this region of Nebraska. Our story is organized into seven chapters:

Chapter 1 – Introduction - Why is this Story Important? – Page 2

Chapter 2 – Why Entrepreneurship is Foundational – Page 5

Chapter 3 – About the Ord Regional Community and Economy – Page 11

Chapter 4 – Ord’s Entrepreneurial Ecosystem – Page 11

Chapter 5 – Entrepreneurial Impact and Community Transformation – Page 23

Chapter 6 – Lessons and Insights for Other Rural Communities – Page 43

Chapter 7 – A Community’s Work is Never Done Page 48

We begin our exploration of this entrepreneurial community story with Chapter 1 or **Why** the Ord story is so important to rural communities across North America.

Chapter 1 - Why is this Story Important?

Tupelo, Mississippi to Ord, Nebraska

In 1999 when author Vaughn L. Grisham, Jr. and the Kettering Foundation published *Tupelo, The Evolution of a Community*, an entire generation of community economic developers, leaders and policymakers were inspired that even the most distressed communities can realize transformative change. As some leaders in Tupelo, Mississippi embraced the idea that African American residents were a development asset and not a threat, Tupelo moved from one of the poorest and most distressed communities in America to one of the best performing.

The transformative change in Ord, Nebraska is comparable to the Tupelo story. The more we capture and document the Ord and Valley County Region story we are convinced that transformative change is happening. We are learning the formula and the ingredients essential for rural community transformation through entrepreneurship.

Over 20 years ago Vaughn L. Grisham, Jr. released his book *Tupelo, The Evolution of the Community*. A companion piece by the Rural Economic Policy Program at the Aspen Institute titled *Hand in Hand, Community and Economic Development in Tupelo* put Tupelo, Mississippi on the community economic development map. Tupelo, best known for being the birthplace of Elvis Presley, was historically also known as one of the poorest communities in the United States with a legacy of racial divide and conflict between white and black communities. Janet Topolsky with The Aspen Institute and Vaughn Grisham travelled widely sharing this story of hope rooted in the Tupelo story. Of those laboring in rural community economic development, the Tupelo story made the case that transformative change was possible.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead
American Cultural Anthropologist

At e2, we believe the Ord and Valley County, Nebraska story has comparable power to the Tupelo story. Ironically, the Tupelo story was released in 1999, and it was in 1999 that the turning point in Ord’s contemporary future was launched. That year a small group of committed and passionate leaders gathered in Ord to envision and act on development that could enable community vitality and prosperity.

Over the past two decades Ord has intentionally committed to and built a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem that is generating transformative impacts. This small and rural community is demonstrating that entrepreneur-led development can empower a thriving, diverse and resilient economy, and society. We have come to believe that lessons learned in Ord, like Tupelo, can inspire and guide other rural communities seeking a better tomorrow.

At the forefront of these lessons are identity, intentionality, and investment. Knowing who you are as a community by investing in building who you are with intention. This is not simply self-promotion, but a willingness to build the necessary bridges and a process of self-discovery, determining your highest intentions, recruiting whole people and families and not simply workers and capital, finding the right

economic levers to create flexibility, investing in passion and working towards an asset- and opportunity-based attitude in the entire community. It requires strong agency and committed advocates able to see their self-interest embedded within the community interests. And mostly it requires recognizing that while success is in the community's own hands, they must accept responsibility for searching out support and remaining open to accepting such support by following through on what is offered.

In the case of Ord there were a confluence of initial conditions and further actions that produced these results. They will be different in different places, but some mixture is always within the grasp of a community willing to do the work to harness them. For Ord these included:

- Establishing a community foundation based on the bequeathal by a community member;
- Passing a local state-approved sales tax levy, thus creating a vigorous lending capacity, and enabling gap financing and flexibility for small entrepreneurs;
- Hiring an economic development director focused on empowerment rather than simply resource acquisition;
- Development of progressively more positive public-private trust and partnerships;
- Implementation of a tailored leadership training initiative that was community-based, expansive and long-term;
- Commitment to mentoring among the entrepreneurial community to shepherd passion by backstopping business skills and strategic thinking;
- Acceptance and implementation of guidance, resources, and open exchange with outside resource agencies both public and private.

Chapter 2 – Why Entrepreneurship is Foundational

Ord's Historic Two-Dimensional Economy

For most of its history Ord and its regional economy has been two dimensional with production agriculture (e.g., farming, ranching, and allied activities) as the foundational economic activity and Ord's role as an area hub for retail trade and services. Production agriculture like most natural resource-based economies undergo periods of **economic booms** when weather is good, demand is high, commodity prices are strong and net farm income elevated. But agriculture and other natural resource industries also undergo periods of **economic bust** with economic contraction adversely impacting the area economy and society. Given the underlying trends of agricultural automation, industrialization, and contraction (e.g., fewer, and larger farm and ranch units and outsourcing of purchasing) rural communities like Ord rarely return to pre-bust economic and social vitality.

Across rural North America communities are experiencing change and for many, this change is traumatic as traditional industries and economies are transforming, undermining the very rationale and vitality of rural communities. For Ord and its region, its economic rationale for existence was rooted in agriculture and Ord's role as an area trade center community. This **two-dimensional economy** was constantly at risk to the boom and bust cycles in production agriculture. Lacking diversity, Ord's main street economy suffered with downturns in agriculture never fully recovering after each bust cycle.

Economic Crashes and Rural Community Distress

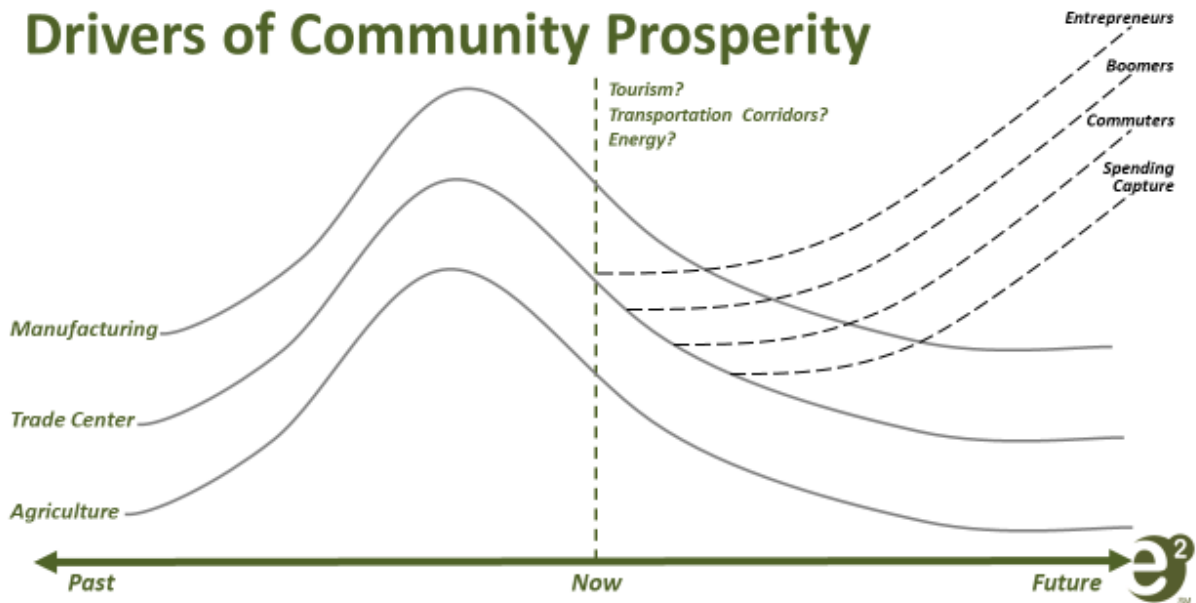
Typically, rural economies and societies are less diverse when compared to urban and particularly metropolitan areas. Every economy and society experiences crashes, but more diverse communities and regions are inherently more resilient and able to weather these crashes when compared to less diverse communities. Crashes range from the loss of a dominate industry, major employer or disruptions caused by natural disasters (e.g., hurricanes, wildfire, flooding, etc.). Because socio-economic crashes typically stress less diverse rural regions more, we have developed a special paper, [Economic Crashes, Mini-Case Studies](#), providing additional background on economic crashes.

Figure 1 provides a visualization of the drivers of rural community prosperity. In North America's Great Plains Region, the foundational rationale for rural communities were production agriculture. In the 1880s production agriculture was labor-intensive with large farm and ranch families dotting the rural countryside. The consumer needs and wants of farmers, their families and hired help created a need for rural villages, towns and cities spread across America's agricultural regions. Ord existed because of the underlying agricultural economy. But as production agriculture has changed it has undermined its need for Ord and other like rural communities. A primary reason for chronic and severe depopulation in the Great Plains has been the failure to diversify rural community economies both beyond and within production agriculture.

Automation of Production Agriculture

Beginning in the 1880s and accelerating in the 1900s the automation of production agriculture (e.g., substitution of technology for human labor) increasingly changing and reducing the need for all of these rural communities like Ord. While agriculture automated, a second U.S. trend rooted with declining family size further undermining rural population. Combined, these two persistent trends reduced rural populations and drove rural to urban migration hollowing out the Ord region.

Figure 1 – Drivers of Rural Community Prosperity



With a relatively large rural population the need for area and regional trade centers grew offering basic and amenity goods and services. This was the time of Norman Rockwell main streets full of people on Saturday nights. As rural populations thinned out over the decades the trade center role of communities like Ord eroded as market demand shrunk due to fewer consumers and increasing external competition first from mail order companies like Sears and Roebuck, then from franchise and box stores in larger communities and now electronic commerce from across the globe.

Beginning with World War II and continuing into the 1970s American industry (e.g., particularly manufacturing, and associated activities) was relocating from the coasts and larger cities to more rural areas. Initially the relocation of industry was driven by war defense concerns and a national policy of industrial dispersion. But this trend of relocation continued and grew in the decades following the war as corporations discovered lower cost labor, land and often less regulation (plus state and local relocation incentives – tax abatements, free land, etc.). Nearly every community of any size in the rural Great Plains had one or more relocated or new manufacturing or other industrial plants or facilities. Ord with a population consistently hanging around 2,000 residents never really benefited from the industrial manufacturing trend. But larger communities in its region did like Grand Island, Kearney, Columbus, and Norfolk. These communities became magnets for rural young adults seeking job and career opportunities further shifting population from smaller rural communities to larger rural communities.

For the rural Great Plains and communities like Ord production agriculture, manufacturing and trade center activities continue, but they no longer can provide sufficient economic activity to support the large number of remaining rural villages, towns, and cities. The need for economic diversification both within and beyond production agriculture is foundational if rural communities in this Region are to survive and thrive.

Figure 2 – Community Prosperity Model

Community Prosperity Model



Figure 2 provides e2’s basic community change model. Based on our 40+ years of work throughout North America we have evolved this change model theory beginning with the belief that **increasing entrepreneurial behavior** (i.e., within business, nonprofits, and government) generates a set of desirable outcomes beginning with increased competitiveness and broadening economic and social diversification. As entrepreneurial ventures find market niches and thrive, they inherently become more competitive. Additionally, central to the strategy of becoming more competitive these ventures develop new products and services and reach new markets inherently increasing the diversity of a community’s and region’s economy. Often through economic diversification, there is associated social diversification as innovative and competitive ventures attract new human talent. Emerging entrepreneurial communities with expanding numbers of more competitive and diverse ventures typically create higher value economies. By higher value economies we are speaking of ventures that typically are more profitable, stable and create better jobs and careers generating more income and wealth throughout the community.

In turn communities with more competitive, diverse, and high value ventures, along with rooting household and community wealth become more resilient with greater capacity to weather shocks (e.g., whether from natural disasters to loss of major economic activities) and recover more completely once a shock has passed. Increasing resiliency fuels wealth formation in households and community assets like building stocks, amenities, and civic and social capital. Continued investments into growing entrepreneurial behavior and talent creates a progressive cycle furthering community vitality.



Figure 3 – Brian Dabson’s Theory of Tiered Development

Development



Brian Dabson, one of America’s leading entrepreneurship thought leaders, first articulated his theory of people and entrepreneurship as foundational to all development years ago. Brian, and we agree, theorized that investing in a community’s residents was foundational to all development thereby enabling smarter and more robust investments into the community ranging from schools, health care and infrastructure to main streets, ventures, parks, and ventures. Communities that is investing in people and community is in turn better positioned for more effective and impactful economic development

Figure 4 provides a simplified image of Brian Dabson’s theory of tiered economic development. Early on entrepreneurship was discussed as just one more strategy in a collection of economic development options including business attraction, retention, tourism development, entrepreneurship, and the like. Brian challenged this view arguing that entrepreneurship was foundational to all development in a community-centered context.

Smart development has always been important but is increasingly important given resource constraints. Following World War II America’s economy was globally dominate and booming. This is no longer the case and in today’s highly competitive global economy and society every community and region in America must focus on genuine development opportunities and assets pursuing optimal development and use of available development resources. We agree with Brian Dabson that entrepreneurship is the foundation of all development.

Figure 4 – Brian Dabson’s Theory of Tiered Development

Economic Development



We fundamentally agree with Brian’s theory that investing first in entrepreneur-led development and ecosystem building is foundational to all economic development. By growing a stronger climate for venture development and growth rooted in entrepreneurial behavior, each community positions itself for more effective business retention and expansion and even business attraction. In today’s environment, particularly for rural communities, business attraction is more about attracting entrepreneurs and their ventures versus securing relocation of a Fortune 1,000 branch plant or back office operation.

Why Economic Development? – Why Entrepreneurship?

At e2 we have curated two papers that supplement our section on why entrepreneurship is so important to Ord’s development and success. The first paper Community-Centered Economic Development LINK addresses the case that each and every community in America must assume responsibility for its own development. Our second paper, Why Entrepreneurship? Making the Case for Entrepreneurship! LINK builds on the first paper and explores why entrepreneurship-led development and ecosystem building is foundational to all economic development as advanced by Brian Dabson decades ago.

We continue to find that entrepreneurship-led economic development is not mainstream. Communities looking at entrepreneurship as a development strategy face serious challenges from the status quo where business attraction and retention of large employers reign king. Our answer to why entrepreneurship continues to be paramount for most communities. This reality is in part why the Ord Story is so important as 20 years ago this community committed to a more balanced development approach including both entrepreneurship as well as larger scale project development.

Figure 5 – The Economic Development Landscape

<p style="text-align: center;">Not in Game</p> <p>Too many rural communities and urban neighborhoods do not really have an economic development game plan. They are not in the game and they need to be leading.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Traditional Development Focus</p> <p>Most communities in the economic development game are still largely investing most of their efforts with traditional development such as attraction and retention of large employers.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Considering Entrepreneurship</p> <p>A growing number of communities are now actively exploring, considering, and testing entrepreneurship as an economic development strategy. Some have maturing strategies with impact.</p>
<p>Economic Development Challenges Today</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">Under Capitalized</p> <p>Given the size of our economies and the need for aggressive economic development, most economic development strategies are grossly under-capitalized. Lack of resources and consistent funding undermines the effectiveness of all economic development. See our paper Funding Economic Development.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Wrong Focus</p> <p>Economic development should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity-Focused • Asset-Based • Community-Centered <p>Too often communities are rooted in what worked in the past but does not work well today. Also, rural communities tend to mirror urban strategies that are mismatched with rural capacity.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Token Support</p> <p>With a traditional development focus on attraction and retention of larger employers there is often a strategy focused on small business. In some cases, these strategies are real and even robust. But too often this is a token commitment to local small businesses and nowhere close to an entrepreneurship game plan. Intentional entrepreneurial ecosystem building is still relatively rare.</p>

In summary, we found two keys to Ord’s transformative success: it’s 20 -year commitment to entrepreneur-led development and associated ecosystem building and second, its willingness to invest sufficient funds to stand up a smart and robust game plan. Both of these keys point toward the importance of entrepreneurship

Chapter 3 – Ord the Community

In order for us to understand and appreciate the power of the Ord story we must understand Ord the Community. For other communities to relate to Ord, regardless of their size and situation understanding the basic background on Ord the community is foundational. In our use of this story in the field, ranging from smaller rural communities to metropolitan areas rooted in rural regions, we find strong connection. If a community with a few thousand residents can create this transformative change from crisis and decline to success and prosperity, chances are good that any community can learn lessons from the Ord journey.

In this paper, ***Ord, Nebraska – An Entrepreneurial Community***, we highlight Ord’s communities by exploring its multiple layers. Figure 6 provides a quick profile of these communities based on population and population change.

Figure 6 – Selected Population Statistics for Ord’s Various Communities

Geography	Most Current Population	1970 to Present Change	2000 to 2010 Change	2010 to Present Change
City of Ord	2,076 (2019)	-14.9%	-6.9%	-1.7%
Ord’s Zip Code	2,893 (2020)	NA	NA	-2.82%
Valley County	4,199 (2020)	-27.4%	-9.6%	-1.4%
Ord’s Region	9,784 (2020)	NA	-7.2%	-1.0%

Sources: 1970, 2000, 2010 and 2019 data from the U.S. Census Bureau and 2020 data from Esri.

By all national and international standards Ord is rural and small nested in a lower density rural region. The nearest larger city is Grand Island (now a small metro with just over 50,000 residents) to the south roughly 60 to 90 minutes by highway and motor vehicle. There are two critical considerations central to the Ord story with respect to Ord the Community: First, the community of Ord is actually much larger than its population of 2,076 estimated by the Census Bureau in 2019. Ord is the hub within a much larger socio-economic region based on consumer, workforce, and other indicators of close economic and social interaction. Second, there is growing evidence that Ord’s success has both expanded its regional footprint and contributed to growing a stronger region. The ethanol complex, health care system and the decision to make gap financing available county-wide are examples of this regional commitment to development. In turn the stronger regional economy is contributing to Ord’s success in terms of overall economic activity, labor force and consumer base.

We have curated a separate paper – ***Defining Ord the Community*** – that provides a much deeper explanation into Ord and its regional community (*Due out in the fall of 2020.*)



Chapter 4 – Ord’s Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

In this chapter we focus on Ord’s commitment to entrepreneur-led development as a foundational economic development game plan and the remarkably impactful entrepreneurial ecosystem it has evolved beginning in 2000 continuing to the present day. Here we address the following topics:

- Ord’s Development Journey
- Ord’s Increasingly Diverse Economy
- Growing an Impactful Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Then in Chapter 5 we share both impact metrics and a carefully curated set of entrepreneurial stories.

Ord’s Development Journey

Figure 7 summarizes Ord’s development journey beginning with the 1980s agricultural crisis that challenged this community with its very survival. Ord had a choice let decline continue or search for a development game plan that could enable a brighter future and greater community prosperity. For many communities following this most difficult crisis simply drifted into deeper decline losing vitality and the opportunity for building a better future. A small group of leaders in Ord made the personal and collective decision to fight back.

My First Visit to Ord

I still remember my first visit to Ord in the late 1990s when its leaders were searching for a way forward and a formula for development success. This was the time when Ord was considering becoming our first HomeTown Competitiveness community. We had a meeting over lunch at a local café. I was struck by the meal complete with a full offering including chicken fried steak, potatoes, vegetables, drink, salad bar and choice of desserts for about \$5.00 and change. Granted while this was 30 years ago, I was dumb struck by the price. I remember asking the question how a café can offer such a meal for such a lower price. Our host Robert Stowell responded that in our community that what people can afford. Today, while value can be found in Ord there is significantly higher disposable incomes and wealth empowered by its development.

Figure 7 – Ord’s Progression from Crisis to Transformative Change

1980s	1990s	2000	2000-2010	2010-2020
Agricultural Crisis	Search for Solutions	Pivot Year Aiming for Success	Investment & Progress	Transformative Change

Source: e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems. August 2020.

Other Challenges Overcome

Before the turning point from decline to progress, Ord experienced a number of other challenges that it overcame demonstrating that progress was possible.

Breaking the Control of Anti-Tax and Change Groups. The first of these challenges was the increasingly active anti-change and tax movements embodied by the John Birch Society and the Posse Comitatus. The distress of decline and the agricultural crisis fueled these movements across the Great Plains, but they were particularly strong in Ord and Valley County. They were taking control of local government,

education, and other parts of the community. They used peer pressure, bullying and other tactics to hold the community hostage from making critically needed investments. During their reign passing bond issues and tax increases were blocked. Leaders rose up, at great personal cost, and challenged these groups best illustrated by anti-government school board members proposing to band books in the schools. A recall initiative was launched and succeeded creating an important win and space for progressive action. Check out our paper, [Looking Back at America's Farm Crisis](#), for additional background.

Saving the Hospital. The second challenge came in the early 1990s when the Ord Hospital was on the verge of insolvency and faced being closed. This crisis, coupled with allied controversies with local doctors, divided the community between pro- and anti- groups. Again, a group of progressive leaders and community builders rallied to find a solution resolving the doctor controversy and saving the hospital. This represents a second tough test of community leadership and action laying the foundation for what has now become a remarkable health care system and the largest wage and salary employer in the region.

As the agricultural crisis abated Ord, like so many other farm dependent communities discovered the severe damage done and that the community was not recovering to pre-crisis vitality. The 1990s can best be characterized by Ord's search for solutions back to prosperity. That small group of leaders expanded. The community reached to outside resources like the Nebraska Public Power District, Nebraska Extension, HomeTown Competitiveness and other communities like Central City, Nebraska that were finding solutions. Seeking outside help is part of Ord's success formula bringing not only expertise and perspective, but moderators helping the community find its vision for its futures.

In so many ways 2000 was the turning point from crisis, disinvestment and decline to now 20 years of progress, investment and positive impact making Ord and its region a powerful turnaround story. So many things happened during and near 2000 that put Ord on a more permanent road to greater success including the formation of the inter-local agreement creating the Valley County Economic Development Board, hiring of Ord's first economic developer, passage of LB840 providing local option sales tax funding for economic development and creation of the Valley County Community Foundation fund within the Nebraska Community Foundation. What is remarkable and comes next is this community's ability to sustain growing level of development activities and impacts enabling transformative change.

During the 2000 through 2010 period we cannot demonstrate through secondary data indicators that Ord was achieving differential success. But we can document a decade of commitments, expanding leadership, expanding public and private investment and a decision to pursue entrepreneur-led economic development. Our associated paper – ***Ord's Entrepreneurial Development Chronology*** (due out Fall 2020) – provides a very detailed overview of the key commitments, investments and initiatives that cumulatively positioned this community and its region for amazing development success in the 2010 to 2020 period.

The most recent decade of time (2010-2020) has been transformative for Ord and its Region. During this period the collective impact of searching for the right game plan, growing leaders, engaging more of the community in development and standing up a high level of annual private and public development projects makes Ord a transformative community. Later in this story we summarize key lessons learned that can be considered by other rural communities as you seek your formula for development success.

Our paper, ***Ord's Entrepreneurial Development Chronology***, is a must read providing the quantitative and qualitative evidence of Ord's journey from severe crisis to being one of rural America's most successful rural communities. This chronology demonstrates it takes time, but with a smart game plan and deep commitment any community can become a more prosperous community. This paper will be released in the fall of 2020.

Ord's Increasingly Diverse Economy

Central to the socio-economic success of any community in the 21st Century is the two-fold focus areas of economic diversification and resident diversity and inclusion. With Ord's development journey in mind, let's explore its increasingly diverse economy before we profile its entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Ord's Regional Economy

Development opportunities are rooted in the larger regional economy. In an asset-based development environment, development opportunities must be rooted in the underlying economic opportunities afforded to the regional economy. The exception is where there is massive external investment to create or generate new opportunities. For example, massive generational investments by the Appalachian Regional Commission into roads, communications and other critical infrastructure has enabled a growing recreational and experiential tourism industry tapping into millions of potential visitors from the East Coast.

Transformation from a Two Dimensional to a Multi-Dimensional Economy

Over the past two decades (i.e., 2000 to 2020) Ord and its region has transformed from a two-dimensional economy rooted in production agriculture and Ord's role as an area trade center community to a multi-dimensional economy. We believe that this transformation has been empowered by Ord's commitment to entrepreneur-focused development. In Chapter 2 we share e2's community change model addressing economic diversification as key to sustained socio-economic vitality.

Today there are four anchor economic drivers shaping Ord's development opportunities:

- Anchor 1 – Agriculture including Value-Adding Activities
- Anchor 2 – Area Trade, Service and Cultural Center
- Anchor 3 – Valley County Health System
- Anchor 4 – Tourism

Figure 8 provides a visualization of Ord's Regional Economy in 2020. It reflects the progression from a two-dimensional economy to a multi-dimensional economy. Diversification has occurred within production agriculture with the development of the ethanol value chain and cluster, as well as development of a robust and dynamic regional rural health care system.

Figure 8 - Visual Overview of Ord's Regional Economy

<p>Anchor 1</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Agriculture</p> <p>Production Agriculture – Farmers & Ranchers Allied Agricultural Services Green Plains Renewable Energy (ethanol plant) Ethanol Plan Value Chain Cluster (distillers’ grains, trucking, cubing, etc.) Cargill Trotter Fertilizer and Allied Ventures Popcorn Country USA</p>		<p>Anchor 2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Area Trade, Service & Cultural Center</p> <p>Retail Businesses Service Businesses Amenity Businesses Central Community College Learning Center The Golden Husk K-12 Schools</p>	
<p>Anchor 3</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Health Care System*</p> <p>Hospital Hospice and Home Health (serves 17 counties) Clinics Care Home Independent Living Home <i>*Valley County Health Care System is the largest employer in the region.</i></p>		<p>Anchor 4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Tourism</p> <p>Calamus Lake & River Calamus Resort & Outfitters Events (Husk, Windmill Festival, etc.) Attractions (Ft. Hartsuff, Chalk Mine, Local Museums, etc.) Amenities (Scratch Town Brewery, cafes, etc.)</p>	
<p>Other Economic Activities Contributing to the Area Economy</p>			
<p style="text-align: center;">Retirees</p> <p>Retirees are the single largest consumer group in the area and are key to the health care system, care home, independent living center, senior housing, and related activities (pharmacies).</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Growth Entrepreneurs</p> <p>There is a small group of growth-oriented entrepreneurs diversifying the area economy including Subcon, Trotter businesses, Misko Sports, Popcorn Country USA, etc.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Commuters</p> <p>Outbound commuters (living in but working outside Valley County) accounted for 7.3% of household earning in 2017. Inbound commuters are an important segment of the County workforce.</p>	

Ord and Valley County are like hundreds of rural communities in America’s Great Plains Region that are agriculture dependent, experiencing chronic and severe outmigration and depopulation and struggling to find the formula for socio-economic success in the 21st Century knowledge economy.

Anchor 1 – Agriculture. Agriculture has been and continues to be the foundation of the Valley County regional economy. Production agriculture is commodity based and vulnerable to commodity markets. However, Ord has been able to diversify its agriculture and increase value-added activity that has enhanced economic resiliency and prosperity. The ethanol cluster is particularly important in strengthen in Ord’s underlying agricultural economy.

Anchor 2 – Area Trade, Service and Cultural Center. While other rural area trade center communities in the Great Plains have declined, Ord has managed to grow in this role adding diversity and vitality to the community. Ord supports a strong collection of retail and service businesses including a remarkably strong business services cluster (e.g., attorneys, CPAs, commercial lenders, etc.). Over the past decade Ord has also become a **cultural center** with investments in The Golden Husk theater and its associated



arts and humanities events, allied amenity businesses (e.g., food, drink, catering, spa, etc. businesses) and amenities like the new water park.

Anchor 3 – Valley County Health System. Across America hundreds of rural hospitals have closed. In the 1990s Ord’s hospital was near closure. The community rallied and today the Valley County Health System is profitable and thriving. It has become a regional health care system with diverse services. It is the largest employer in the area and provides career opportunities that have been instrumental in the attraction and retention of new resident and human talent.

Anchor 4 – Tourism. Diversifying the economy is a moderately sized tourism cluster. The primary assets are connected to the Calamus Lake and River. The lake and river are a destination for visitors. There is a growing seasonal and permanent resident population associated with the lake increasing the area’s market size. Other assets such as the historic fort, The Golden Husk cultural and event center and amenities ranging from Scratch Town Brewery and Utopia Spa enhance the attractiveness of this community as a visitor destination.

Resident Attraction, Development and Retention Connection

Our field experience and research support the view that the ability of communities to attract, develop and retain new residents and human talent (essential for 21st Century economies and societies) is tied to quality of place (both amenities and culture) and economic opportunities. There is a strong connection between people, place, and entrepreneurial economy.

There are three emerging economic drivers diversifying and now strengthening this regional economy. We explore each of these emerging economic drivers to paint a broader picture of how these drivers are strengthening and diversifying this area's economy and society.

Retirees. Retirees have long been an economic driver in this rural area economy. With the rising tide of retiring Boomers, this development opportunity will increase dramatically. Every day in America 10,000 Boomers are retiring and demographically this trend will continue for three decades. It is huge. A significant number of Boomers are relocating from the cities where they made their wealth back to more rural communities. There are a wide range of factors driving this trend including escaping high costs, congestion, perceptions about safety or for those who grew up rural coming home. Retirees are the largest holder of American household wealth and one of the biggest consumer groups. Because of Ord’s vibrant economy and quality of life amenities, it is well positioned to capture a share of both the retiring Boomer market and the Boomer entrepreneurship capacity.

Boomers have spending power related to markets that can provide the right housing, goods, services, recreation and entertainment (e.g., audiences for arts and humanities programming in rural communities), health care and amenities (e.g., wine bars, craft brewers, cafes, coffee shops, bakeries, etc.). With growing numbers of active and relatively healthy Retiring Boomers, there are major entrepreneurial opportunities in locally meeting their wants, desires, and needs.

Younger Retiring Boomers are also engaging in second and third careers. They have energy and passion, resources, networks and are a source of entrepreneurial talent. These Boomers are often investors, mentors, buyers of businesses and start businesses. By retaining and attracting Retiring Boomers there are important entrepreneurial development opportunities for communities.

Growth Entrepreneurs. There is an emerging class of growth-oriented entrepreneurs in this regional economy. Growth entrepreneurs (e.g., Subconn, Inc., Popcorn Country USA, ethanol complex, Trotter industries, etc.) created a large community economic development impact with respect to jobs/careers, economic activity, and local tax base support. By increasing overall entrepreneurial activity, Ord is creating a pipeline for more growth entrepreneurs.

Commuters. Ord and Valley County are part of a regional economy and society with significant inbound (live outside of Valley County but work in Valley County) and some outbound (live in Valley County but work outside of the county). Over the past 20 years Ord has become a regional employment hub attracting more inbound compared to outbound commuters. With growing numbers of inbound commuters, Ord has the potential to provide hometowns for these workers fueling further development.

One of our key story findings is that Ord and its region have been able to diversify both within and external to agriculture. As noted earlier a diversified economy is foundational to competitiveness, a higher value economy and increased resiliency enhancing the probability of higher rates of sustained progress and prosperity. Our point is that for most rural Great Plains communities like Ord, they have one, two (i.e., agriculture and area trade center activities) or three (i.e., agriculture, area trade center activities and/or manufacturing, tourism, or transportation corridor service activities) underlying economic sectors. These economies by any measure are narrow and at threat from boom and bust cycles detrimental to community vitality. Figure 9 on the next page provides a snapshot of Ord's (based on Valley County data) economic diversification in 2018 or pre-Pandemic.

Figure 9 – Valley County Economic Concentration/Diversification – Earnings Based

Sector	2018	Concentration	\$1,000s
Dividends, Interest and Rent	\$91,734	31.05%	Top Sector
Age-Related Transfer Payments	\$48,540		
Government	\$34,229	59.06%	Top 3 Sectors
Hardship-Related Transfer Payments	\$29,164		
Outbound Commuting	\$11,751	72.90%	Top 5 Sectors
Retail Trade	\$10,645		
Other Transfer Payments	\$9,100		
Health Care and Social Services	\$7,836		
Wholesale Trade	\$8,893		
Construction	\$8,523	88.13%	Top 10 Sectors
Manufacturing	\$5,827		
Finance and Insurance	\$6,832		
Farming	\$5,616		
Other Services	\$5,216		
Professional and Technical Services	\$5,166		
Administrative and Waste Services	\$1,839		
Real Estate, Rental & Leasing	\$1,365		
Accommodations and Food Service	\$1,165		
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	\$1,165		
Educational Services	\$754		
Management Companies	\$123	99.96%	Top 15 Sectors
Transportation and Warehousing	NA		
Forestry, Fisheries & Ag Services	NA		
Utilities	NA		
Mining	NA		
Total	\$295,483		

Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. August 2020 and e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems, August 2020.

Employing earnings to gage economic concentration or diversification has the advantage that we can consider non-traditional economic sectors like retirees, commuters, and transfer payments. The downside is this metric tends to under-estimate the full economic impact of sectors like agriculture and to a lesser extent manufacturing.

With that caution about the data, Ord has a very diverse economy rooted in multiple sectors as follows:

Sector #1	Production Agriculture*	\$*
Sector #2	Retirees	\$140 Million
Sector #3	Health Care	\$37.0 Million**
Sector #4	Hub City***	\$31.2 Million
Sector #5	Construction	\$8.5 Million
Sector #6	Manufacturing	\$5.8 Million****
Sector #7	Tourism	\$2.3 Million

*Employing household earning dramatically under-estimates the role of production agriculture in the Ord regional economy. It is clearly the foundation of this economy including farm and ranch activity, agricultural services, wholesale trade, warehousing and transportation and key parts of both construction and manufacturing. For example, much of the ethanol complex is classified as manufacturing but it represents diversification within agriculture.

**The \$37 million probably under-estimates the size of the health care system due to the hospital being a county hospital with its household earnings generated posted in the government sector.

***By hub city Ord is a community where consumers come for retail trade goods, services, business services and entertainment.

****While value-added agricultural manufacturing dominates this sector with the ethanol plant, cubing plant, and other activities. There is some non-agricultural manufacturing like Subconn that manufacturers underwater caballing technology.

Ord's economy has seven major drivers creating amazing diversity for a community of its size. While it continues to be overly dependent upon agriculture and allied agricultural activities like inputs and processing, this diversity is not only creating a wider range of job and career opportunities supporting people attraction and retention but creating a higher-value economy contributing to enhanced household disposable incomes and wealth.

Growing an Impactful Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

“Entrepreneurial talent is universal. Entrepreneurial ecosystems are not.”

Andy Stoll, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation

Next, we explore Ord's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Figure 10 on the next page summarizes the primary component parts of Ord and Valley County's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Host Organization Cultivating the Ecosystem. The Valley County Economic Development Board in partnership with the City of Ord, the Chamber, investment club and others, serves as the host organization coordinating both support for area entrepreneurs and development of the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Based on our national field work we believe having clearly accepted and robust host organization is a critical design element.

Entrepreneurial Leadership. For over 20 years there has been strong and consistent community leadership advocating for and supporting entrepreneurship as a lead development strategy. Stable leadership has contributed to continuity and growth in both capacity and sophistication of Ord's entrepreneur-led development efforts. The importance of intentional leadership development generally, and its embodiment in the SVLA (Synovation Valley Leadership Academy) specifically, is illustrated in the story of Hackel Construction, Inc. in Chapter 4.

Figure 10 - Ord's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Entrepreneurial Leadership Synovation Valley Leadership Academy Corporate Leadership Organizational Leadership Culture of Leadership	Impact Economic Development Business Development Risk Management Business Deal Flow	Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy
Five Commercial Banks Small Business Lending Participate in Deal Packaging	Area Entrepreneurial Talent	Valley County Lodging Tax – Tourism Promotion County Farm – Mortensen Business Park
Business Services Attorneys, Accountants, etc. Business Mentors	Deal Packaging A key strength in this ecosystem is regular and active deal development and packaging. Exercising this key activity has contributed to increased competencies and diversified capacity contributing to high performance.	Tax Increment Financing or TIF LB 840 Business Fund
Loup Valley Investment Club Building & Property Acquisition Specific Deal LLC Formation Equity – Loans	The Valley County Economic Developer is a matchmaker finding deals and working with both Investment Club members and the City to recommend business development projects. The ED curates the business development deals.	City of Ord Manages TIF Manages LB840 Fund Active Partner
Valley County Economic Development Board	Chamber of Commerce	

Valley County Economic Development Board and Chamber of Commerce. The Valley County Economic Development Board (created by a governmental inter-local agreement in the early 2000s) is co-located and collaborative with the area’s chamber of commerce. While there is need and opportunity for more staffing, this partnership does provide more capable organizations and allows the economic developer to focus on business deal flow. With most small or single person shops the economic developer must also focus on community development issues ranging from community promotions to trail development.

Connected to Outside Resources

Over two decades Ord and Valley County have had just three economic developers with an average run of about seven years. This is more than twice the lifespan of most economic developers in the rural Great Plains. Transitions from one economic developer to the next have been relatively stable with effective community leadership ensuring a continuing commitment to entrepreneurship. Because of this stability Ord is well connected to outside entrepreneurial and other resources. These connections have given Ord greater capacity to support available entrepreneurial deal flow. *Note in 2020 Trevor Lee took another job and Caleb Pollard (the second economic development) took on this job once again.*

City of Ord. The City of Ord is a committed partner in this work. Following creation of the Valley County Economic Development Board (the City was a founding partner in the inter-local creation agreement), a Nebraska policy tool referred to as Legislative Bill 840 was used. LB 840 allows political jurisdictions in



Nebraska through a vote of their residents to institute additional 1% sales taxes that can be used for economic development and/or property tax relief. Ord's LB 840 program dedicates all funding to economic development, and this has created the gap financing program for businesses. Additionally, Ord has been progressive in the use of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) in support of development projects.

Valley County Board of Supervisors

The Valley County Board of Supervisors are also a co-founding partner of the Valley County Economic Development Board and have been constructive contributors to community economic development. The Supervisors granted the county farm that provides highway accessible land for what became the Mortensen Industrial and Business Park. This asset has provided development space for entrepreneurial ventures.

Loup Valley Investment Club. The Loup Valley Investment Club (LVIC) has become both a leader of and contributor to entrepreneurial deal flow. The role of LVIC is illustrated in Chapter 5 (Misko Story) and in our entrepreneur mini stories. LVIC provides a vehicle for the increasingly important LLC equity investment resource within the ecosystem.

LB 840 –Powerful Gap Financing Tool

Legislative Bill 840 enacted (1991) by the Nebraska Unicameral and Governor has proven to be a powerful economic development tool for communities throughout Nebraska. Provisions within LB 840 require a community to create an “economic development program” and then seek approval of a majority of the community's voters to enact additional sales taxes that can be used for economic development and/or property tax relief. Ord passed LB 840 by a super majority in the early 2000s. It has since been renewed by a vote of the people with strong support. In Ord 100% of these tax funds are used for economic development and to capitalize the community's gap financing fund.

Responsive and Proactive Deal Packaging. Over the past 20 years Ord has supported dozens and dozens of large and small entrepreneurial deals through both technical assistance and gap financing. At the start of Chapter 5 we summarize the gap financing deal flow and provide selected mini stories to illustrate the importance of both responsive and proactive deal packaging. The community's economic developer serves at the center of deal packaging working with entrepreneurs, technical resources, the City and its LB 840 gap financing fund and LVIC.

A Main Street Conversation

In 2019 when conducting a community site visit, I witnessed a telling main street conversation. Our host, Robert Stowell, was hosting a dinner conversation with entrepreneurs and ecosystem players. During the reception Bob began a conversation with Ord's Mayor and some others talking about how a deal could be put together to acquire a vacant downtown square building next to The Golden Husk cultural center and the potential to seed an entrepreneurial venture there. This is an illustration of entrepreneurial culture where every asset (a vacant building and an entrepreneur needing space) can be enabled to create a new deal. It also illustrates the organic nature of the entrepreneurial process when embedded in an entrepreneurial ecosystem animated by a growth mindset: every conversation is itself an entrepreneurial opportunity.

Business Services Sector. We believe because of the high level of business activity in the Ord and Valley County area, Ord has been able to sustain and actually grow its business support services. For a community of just over 2,000 residents, there are five commercial banks doing small business lending. There is a strong cluster of legal, financial, and other business services concentrated in this community contributing to an enhanced entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Business Mentors. While still pretty organic, there is an emerging network of business mentors. We see considerable business-to-business networking. The strong business services in the community enhance access to entrepreneurial mentoring. The Misko story in Chapter 5 illustrates how mentoring was linked with equity capital investments to providing a successful risk management strategy for the investors.

Youth Entrepreneurship. Finally, there is an “on and off again” youth entrepreneurship strategy. This topic will be addressed further in the Youth Story capture work.

The Valley County area entrepreneurial ecosystem is opportunity focused reaching out to area entrepreneurs and bringing meaningful and sophisticated business development assistance that enables more and better deal flow. Combinations of technical assistance and financing resources pragmatically identify, support, and sustain a wide range of deals from a multi-million-dollar ethanol value chain to local main street businesses.

Chapter 5– Entrepreneurial Impact and Community Transformation

In Chapter 5 we capture the entrepreneurial impacts that have in large part enabled Ord and its region to transform from a community in crisis to a thriving community. In this part of our Ord story we address five key impact topics:

- A Transformational Community
- Development Investment
- Entrepreneurial Deal Flow
- Ord’s Comparative Performance
- Entrepreneurial Stories

We begin our journey with respect to how this increasingly entrepreneurial economy and community has generated remarkable impacts beginning with our main thesis that Ord and its region is a transformational community

Transformational Community

Community Transformation

Within the Hierarchy of Community Impacts LINK there are five levels of community economic development impacts ranging from early process impacts associated with evolving and committing to smart development strategies to early outcomes like how many entrepreneurs a community is working with at given time. Level 5 impacts reflect systemic or transformative change that can be measured in recognized secondary data indicators. Based on our story capture work we believe that Ord and its region is undergoing transformative change based on its sophisticated commitments and investments into leadership development, placemaking, people attracting and growing a more diverse and robust economy through entrepreneurship.

Back on page 11 we shared this Figure providing a quick overview of Ord’s transformational journey from a community in crisis and decline to a community of progress and prosperity.

Figure 11 – Ord’s Progression from Crisis to Transformative Change

1980s Agricultural Crisis	1990s Search for Solutions	2000 Pivot Year Aiming for Success	2000-2010 Investment & Progress	2010-2020 Transformative Change
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Source: e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems. August 2020.

We repeat it intentionally because this transformation is so important and why the Ord story is so powerful worthy of other community’s deep attention. We believe, when compared to most other rural communities Ord and its region is transformational and the following analysis illustrates our case that this is true.

Development Investment

\$250 Million Invested and Counting. Conservatively since 2000 the community of Ord and its region has invested over \$250 million in private and public projects fueling its development. On average this level of investment represents \$12.5 million per year over this 20-year period (i.e., 2000 to 2020). Smart and robust investment is foundational to growing vibrant and successful communities.

Level 3 impacts within the Hierarchy of Community Impacts framework focuses on commitments made and fulfilled. A tangible and measurable form of commitments made and fulfilled is public and private investment. We conservatively estimate public and private investment made between 2000 and 2020 to be \$250 million.

Figure 11 visualizes the areas of public and private investment made over this 20-year period. Our estimates of public and private investment include multiple projects associated with the ethanol plant including value added development, input, and support activities. The public investments in the Valley County Health Care System and private associated investments with pharmacies and other for-profit businesses. As of mid-December 2019, there are 63 LB840 gap financing deals generating an estimated \$20 million in deal flow. These hard numbers do not include other business development not supported by the LB840 program.

Figure 12 – Visualization of Ord’s Regional Investment – 2000 to 2020

Ethanol Complex		Health Care System	
<p>Placemaking Downtown Revitalization Parks & Trails New Water Park Husk Cultural Center</p>	<p>Smaller Business Development 63 LB840 supported projects generating an estimated \$20 million in total deal flow.</p>	<p>Housing Development New Subdivision Senior Housing Infill Housing</p>	<p>Other Public Investments School Improvements New City Building New Fire Hall</p>
<p>Virginia Smith Dam and Calamus Reservoir Our \$250 million in public and private investment estimate does not include the 1970s Calamus Project largely funded by the Federal Government including the Virginia Smith Dam, Calamus Reservoir, and associated irrigation system developments. This project created a mini-economic boom during its development legacy benefits associated with enhanced agricultural productivity related to irrigation, recreational assets and now second home development anchoring this region’s tourism cluster.</p>			

Substantial public investment in schools and the city. There are significant investments into parks, trails, and other cultural amenities like the Husk Center. Finally, our estimates capture public and private investment into new and rehabilitated housing. This also includes an aggressive program to remove bad housing and support infill addressing the community’s need for more housing.

Entrepreneurial Deal Flow

Remember Three Kinds of Deal Flow – Business, Civic and Social

Over the past generation there is a strong pattern of investment and deal flow in not only businesses, but civic (e.g., new city hall, fire station, water park, improved schools, park enhancements, etc.) and social (e.g., The Golden Husk cultural center, cultural and art events, community events, etc.) projects.

Combined tens of millions of dollars of new investment into business, civic and social deals and projects have been realized strengthening the community's economy as a competitive place to live, work, do business and play.

A key element in Ord's entrepreneurial ecosystem is its LB840 gap financing loan program. LB840 is a tool enabled by Nebraska law that allows cities to enact by a vote of the residents a local option sales tax funding economic development. One of Ord's initial commitments was the development of a proposed LB840 economic development plan and passage of the local options sales tax. 100% of this local option sales tax is used to support economic development and particularly capitalized the LB840 gap financing loan program run by the City in collaboration with the Valley County Economic Development Board.

The December 2019 report from the LB 840 sales tax supported gap financing loans completed in the Ord area. This report spans the period of 2003 (beginning of this gap financing program to December 2019.) During this period the LB840 loan program provided nearly \$6 million in gap financing leveraging nearly \$14 million in private business investment generating an estimated \$20 million in business deal flow. For a community of this size, this represents significant deal flow. Unfortunately, we do not have comparison data for other communities at this time employing an LB840 loan program. However, we are considering surveying other LB 840 communities to secure similar data for comparative purposes. As noted earlier this does not include larger business developments like the ethanol plant and other business investment not supported by the LB840 fund.

Ord Comparative Performance Analysis

There are thousands of communities in rural America. Across this vast and diverse landscape are remarkable communities like Ord bucking the trends and demonstrating that rural communities can thrive. Central to our focus on the Ord Story is that it has sustained a smart game plan long enough to realize desired transformative change. Central to making the case that the Ord Story is worthy of our study is whether, when compared to other similar communities, Ord has demonstrated materially greater success. We have completed complex analyses testing the question:

Is Ord doing better compared to other communities?

Our complimentary paper, ***Ord Comparative Performance Analysis***, (due out Fall 2020) provides detailed analysis answering this question and demonstrating that Ord is remarkably unique in its transformative change. We are drawing key "take aways" from this analysis to make the case that Ord and its story is worth our attention.

Transformative Change is Demonstrated

Based on our performance analysis we believe there is strong evidence that Ord and its region have moved from a community in serious crisis and decline to a community that is now progressing and becoming more entrepreneurial and prosperous. This journey has been long for those of us seeking quick solutions. But given the long arch of community change, the rate of turnaround is remarkably short. For those communities willing to learn from Ord we believe this transition can be accelerated.

Figure 13 – Ord’s Progression from Crisis to Transformative Change

1980s Agricultural Crisis	1990s Search for Solutions	2000 Pivot Year Aiming for Success	2000-2010 Investment & Progress	2010-2020 Transformative Change
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Source: e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems. August 2020.

Three Sets of Performance Analysis

In seeking an answer to the question--*Is Ord doing significantly better?* -- we have completed three sets of performance analysis:

Ord and Valley County Analysis -- Peer County Analysis -- Peer Community and County Analysis

By employing these three lenses of performance analysis we can create a richer perspective on Ord’s progress in answering why other community leaders should spend time learning from Ord’s story. We begin our performance analysis by focusing on Ord and Valley County without comparison to other peer communities and counties.

Ord and Valley County Analysis Take Aways

For rural communities in the Great Plains the bottom-line metric for community decline or success is population. Unlike many other rural regions across America, communities in the Great Plains manifest its distress through chronic and severe depopulation. For most of these Great Plains communities, counties and regions populations peaked at the county level in the 1920s and 1930s with lead communities peaking between the 1950s to 1980s. Focusing on population as that bottom-line performance metric Ord, Valley County and its region have made remarkable progress.

While there is still some population loss, overall, the Ord community has dramatically slowed its loss and with improvement in cohort growth in key groups like 30-year-olds there is demographic healing. There is now emerging evidence that Ord is now growing again. Time will tell if this trend is sustained with tough times created by agricultural and Pandemic Recessions. Corresponding evidence supports the dual strategies of creating a more diverse and attractive economy has supported people attraction and retention enabling demographic stabilization and quality of life placemaking making Ord and its region a magnetic community.

Understanding that this story of transformation covers 50 years running from 1970 to 2020, there are leading and lagging indicators of socioeconomic performance as illustrated as follows:

More Jobs → Improving Income → Stabilizing Population → Rising Wealth

This area of analysis now documents the Ord community’s economy is creating more jobs generating improvement in disposable income that is in turn enabling increasing demographic health and now rooting household and community wealth.

Peer County Analysis Take Aways

Comparative analysis is a powerful way to demonstrate if a community is doing materially better when compared to other similarly situated communities. As part of this analysis we compare Valley County to peer communities from the Central Great Plains from Nebraska, South Dakota, and Kansas. Between

1970 and 2000 there was no material performance difference between Valley County when compared to peer counties employing three macro performance indicators of population, employment, and personal income. But when we consider the last 20 years (2000-2018) Valley County demonstrates significantly better job creation.

Performance of Proprietorships in Rural America

For most rural communities, proprietorships are foundational to these economies. These are often locally owned and rooted businesses ranging from main street mainstays like grocery stores to locally grown manufacturing ventures. Changes in proprietorship employment is the leading indicator of change in our progression to improved wage and salary employment, personal income, population and ultimately wealth formation.

The primary finding employed in this peer analysis is Valley County's net job creating in the all-important proprietorship (both farm and nonfarm proprietorships) category. Between 2000 and 2018 we find the following net change in proprietorship related jobs:

Valley County	+0.67% Annualized Rate of Change
Nebraska Peer Counties	-0.19% Annualized Rate of Change
Kansas Peer Counties	-0.19% Annualized Rate of Change
South Dakota Peer Counties	+0.13% Annualized Rate of Change

While these differences may seem small. Small annual changes cumulatively generate major changes. For example, Valley County with a 0.67% annualized rate of job change translates to 12% net gain in jobs over the period compared to say Nebraska or Kansas peer communities with a -0.19% annualized rate of job change, resulting in a -3.42% cumulative change. The spread is over 15% which is transformative. It is critically important to understand that small change sustained over time enables and drives cumulative and transformative change. Just as rural communities have lost vitality in small increments over time, the same is true with turnarounds.

Peer Community and County Analysis Take Aways

Our third set of comparative performance analysis employed how Ord and Valley County has done relative to a peer community and county. This focused analysis allowed us to go deeper in answering the question – ***Is the Ord community doing materially better and what is driving this change?*** The findings based on this analysis is a clear yes.

- Ord and Valley County compared to its peer community and county has stabilized population compared to continued severe population losses for its peer.
- The Ord community has also moved from economic decline to expansion demonstrating material improvement (2000-2018 total job change = +12%) when compared to its peer community which is experiencing decline (2000-2018 total job change = - 21%).
- Returning to our leading indicator of proprietorship employment Valley County has experienced between 2000-2018 a net gain of 8.8% job growth versus a staggering -35.6% loss for its peer county.

- Central to Ord’s success has been its ability to both expand its region and increase spending capture. Based on 2020 retail trade spending capture Valley County posts a net retail trade surplus of +\$15.3 million compared to its peer community with a -\$12.2 million leakage generating a differential of an amazing nearly \$28 million.
- Finally, employing our final lagging performance indicator of household wealth in 2020 Valley County posted nearly \$901 million in net household current net worth compared to its peer county’s household wealth of \$603 million or \$300 million difference. Even adjusting for the small household differences this spread is still powerful.

The Progression from the 2000-2010 to 2010-2020 Periods

It is important to note that during this 20-year period of 2000 to 2020 there are two distinct periods based on the first decade of 2000 to 2010 and the later decade of 2010 to 2020. During the first decade there was limited evidence of differential progress (based on reliable secondary data) when compared to other communities and counties. During this decade Ord was making commitments and investments laying the foundation for material outcomes and impacts manifested in the later decade as documented in the secondary data. This makes sense given that it takes time before a community can bend its trend lines. Smart strategy, commitments and investments must be made and sustained that in turn leads to materially important outcomes and impacts as confirmed in secondary data indicators.

Again, returning to our bottom-line performance indicator or population change over the past eight years or 2010 to 2018 rural Nebraska, including much larger communities, rural Nebraska lost 11.9% (over 1% annualized loss) population for this period. Compared to the Ord Region with less than a 1% loss for the entire period representing a 16.3 times differential. While the Ord story is one still in the making this statistic alone should get our attention and drive our attention to learn more about what Ord is doing to realize such stronger performance.

Entrepreneurial Stories

The performance statistics we have shared are part of the story. The other part of the story relates to the entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial ventures that are driving Ord and its region’s success and transformation. In this section of **Ord and Entrepreneurial Community** we share some remarkable stories from this community of a sampling of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial ventures.

Our story capture team has curated the following entrepreneurial mini stories:

Essential and Amenity Businesses Jubilee Catering Scratchtown Brewing Company Misko’s Sports	Emergent Growth Ventures Subconn, Inc. Utopia Spa Hackel Construction Ord Locker
Larger Projects Ethanol Value-Chain Cluster Valley County Health Care System	

Before we share these mini stories, it might be helpful to provide a little framing around what we mean by **Essential and Amenity Businesses, Emergent Growth Ventures, and Larger Projects**.



Selecting Entrepreneur Stories

It is important to note that there are hundreds of ventures in the Ord Region. There are numerous worthy stories we could capture. We employed an organic process to select the stories we have captured beginning with recommendations from local leaders. They based on preliminary interactions and focus groups we narrowed the list based on our time budget capacity. In time we hope to capture more entrepreneurial stories from Ord and particularly its larger region.

<p style="text-align: center;">Essential and Amenity Businesses</p> <p>In our <i>e2 Entrepreneurial Venture Typology</i> we identify ventures by their unique role within the community. Essential and amenity businesses provide important goods, services, and experiences essential for a vibrant community including great cafes, a full-service grocery store and a local health clinic. Amenity businesses move beyond the essentials to those ventures that provide life enhancing amenities. The Golden Husk cultural center and a top-tier coffee house are examples.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Emergent Growth Ventures</p> <p>In general, essential and amenity businesses primarily serve local consumers. Emergent growth ventures are those that might also serve local markets but are reaching external consumers, broadening, and diversifying the diversity of the economic base of the community.</p>
<p>Larger Projects</p> <p>Larger projects, often more tied to traditional economic development (e.g., business attraction, retention, and expansion), generally create major impacts associated with jobs, tax base and economic activity. However, these larger projects, if they contract or fail, can create disproportionate adverse community impacts unless there is a diversified economy.</p>	

Increased and Better Deal Flow – Practice Makes Perfect

Our preliminary analysis has surfaced an interesting theory. We believe one reason Ord is doing so much better than other communities is practice. This idea surfaced in both the data (number and frequency of projects) and interviews/focus groups. We know that execution is as important as a great plan. As City Attorney Heather Sikyta, shared in a dinner conversation, *“We get lots of practice and that helps us do this work well.”* A key attribute of a high performing system is lots of execution experience where the system learns and fine tunes, thus increasing efficiency, effectiveness, and impact.

We dive first into our stories about Essential and Amenity Businesses in the next section of this paper, followed by Emergent Growth and Large ventures. Each section is composed of thumbnail descriptions that include links to more complete narratives (much in first voice) about each enterprise and individual.

Essential and Amenity Entrepreneurs

Essential and Amenity Businesses

What makes a vital and livable community? At root it is access to the basics of life, the essentials. But it is more than that. It is also access to amenities such as culture, recreation and services that facilitate building community and signal opportunity to others. Here we highlight three such successful businesses that demonstrate the expanding amenity profile of this small community, hence it’s livability. There are others which we could highlight as well.

Jubilee Catering



The pathway to entrepreneurship for Melanie Boden has not been linear: interviewer, mother, nurse, caterer. This unorthodox path now provides Ord with high-quality food, attentive service and an accommodating venue for meetings, celebrations, and meaningful life events.

By profession Melanie Boden is a nurse. By choice Melanie has become an entrepreneur creating and running Jubilee Catering. During our two site visits to Ord, Melanie (Jubilee Catering) provided great food, drink, and service. While Jubilee is primarily a catering business, Melanie has an attractive, commodious, and functional main street storefront space for events. Jubilee provides off-site higher end catering service contributing to the

community. Jubilee Catering regularly provides food service for Ord cultural events at The Golden Husk (the historic theater located in downtown Ord named after the beautiful acoustical walls constructed with corn husks) and for community celebrations, contributing to the quality of these events along with other service providers in the community. In addition, much of her business services events such as wedding rehearsal dinners, funeral luncheons, and specialty luncheons for organizations hosting meetings or training in the area. She is primarily a one-person operation but makes use of her two children and at-will community friends for additional help as needed.

Melanie's story is both a story about why talented people who have left Ord decide to return and a story of discovery and perseverance cultured in a supportive environment that produce entrepreneurship. Agency and motivation do not spring whole from the earth by magic. They are more akin to a mushroom that springs from an ever-growing network of underground fibers deriving their vitality from a medium of the old and new. A positive early life in Ord and the promise of a good life for her children and family served as the magnet to return. A path of self-discovery in a community ecosystem of support allowed her passion to bloom into a successful community amenity and business.

Importance of Legacy Businesses

Every community faces change. Businesses, organizations, and residents come and go with time. But sustaining legacy businesses are important to a community's identity and culture. The ability of legacy businesses to change with the times remaining competitive and relevant are demonstrations of what is possible in community economic development. The same is true with main street districts in rural communities. Main street areas are rural community's living rooms where historically residents gathered to shop, socialize, and have some fun. While the Normal Rockwell image of America's downtowns has fundamentally changed these districts continue to be important as they are repurposed over time contributing to community vitality. The two 1880s Misko buildings on the town square are important reminders of not only a rich past but a promising future given the evolution of Misko Sports.

Scratchtown Brewing Company



Caleb Pollard came to Ord to become Valley County's second economic developer. Caleb is a forceful personality and left a positive mark on Ord and Valley County during his time as its economic developer. He also developed a state reputation for his active engagement and willingness to voice his development views. Caleb left his job as economic developer but chose to stay and make Ord his home where he and his family remain firmly rooted. In doing so Caleb pursued both a personal and business passion – the brewing of craft beer.

Caleb and his partners created Scratchtown Brewing Company with a retail location in downtown on a prominent corner in Ord's courthouse square. Scratchtown Brewing is a destination for both locals and outsiders. It is part of a growing Nebraska craft beer cluster in the region. As with his work as economic development director, Caleb has created a statewide presence in the craft brewing world, and he continues to be a strong voice for development in Ord and the region. Despite recruitment efforts to get Caleb to run for public office, he has declined given his current priorities around family and the brewing company.

Caleb's story is that of an outsider who goes with intention to a place that fits his lifestyle preferences and where his family life will be enhanced despite having no direct roots in the community. It is also a story of advocacy, perceived opportunity, adversity, and resilience. In both his business model and his engagement with the community he has balanced his individual entrepreneurial pursuit with a collective concern for the larger community. Scratchtown is the fruition of a dream fused to a commitment to lifestyle.

Misko Sports

Misko Sports is an important story and we have spent more time working to capture it as it represents one of Ord's more sophisticated business development plays. There are considerable development lessons that have implications for both Ord and other communities.

Misko Sports is a legacy brand in Ord. Starting as a saddle and tack shop in the 1880s, it occupied a prominent location on the courtyard square in downtown Ord. Its continued operation from saddle shop to sporting goods business illustrates how local ventures can evolve and renew their competitive positions. Figure 13 summarizes the Misko deal.



Figure 14 summarizes the key insights and lessons learned from the Misko deal. We are particularly interested in two aspects of this deal. First, is the role of LLC equity investors and mentors, and second is the hybrid business model. Misko Sports is both a retail venture but also an electronic commerce venture that enables it to thrive due to expanded market access and diversification of profit centers. For rural America, and particularly small-town rural America, this kind of hybrid model is attractive, bolstering the survival of local retail establishments and reducing dependency on exclusively retail foot traffic.

Next, we turn to key insights from the lessons learned in the most recent Misko Deal that illustrated a full deployment of Ord's entrepreneurial ecosystem's resources.

Figure 14- Misko Sports Business Transition Deal Illustrated


Last Misko Owner Encompasses two important buildings in the core of the downtown. Dean Misko sold the business to Clay Ramsey a key employee beginning the transition of Misko Sports.		History Founded 1880s On Court House Square Saddle & Tack Store Evolved into Misko Sports	
Building sold to Loup Valley Investors LVI	Megan’s Family Helped Purchase the Business \$30k of Equity	The \$30K from Megan’s family and 50% equity from LVI provided needed equity investment to make the deal work, but with an expectation of repayment.	
Investors Deal \$105K Initial Equity \$80K to Buy the Building \$25K in Startup Cash		Successful Transition Thomas & Megan Herman (30s) Total Deal = \$267K May 2014	Initial Loan Rejection Bank Participation First National Bank of Ord
Three Mentors +\$20K later for Improvements Rent to Buy Building Agreement – 10-Years with 5-Year Balloon		Deal Packaging Trevor Lee, the VC EDB economic developer serves as a matchmaker and deal packager working with Thomas and Megan, the investors, City, and bank. The LB840 Loan Committee recommended the LB840 Fund gap loan to the LB840 City Committee.	Current Status The business is thriving with growing sales and income. Primary revenue source is team sales.
Misko Investors LLC* Robert Stowell – Attorney Gaylord Boilesen – Serial Entrepreneur Bruce Lammers - CPA *These three investors also contributed time pro-bono to mentoring Thomas and Megan Herman.			Gap Financing LB840 Fund Committee \$112K for Inventory & Fixtures City of Ord
Valley County Investment Club The Investment Club itself did not do this deal, but three members did form an LLC to enable this transition deal.		Valley County Economic Dev. Board	Motivations Desire to help Thomas & Megan Fear of 2 Vacant Buildings Maintenance of vital city center

Figure 15 - Key Insights and Lessons Learned from the Misko Deal

Megan and Thomas. Thomas and Megan Herman were respected despite being young and having little business experience and personal capital. They were motivated, willing to work hard and receptive to help including intense mentoring and guidance. Leaders in the community were motivated to work with them and find a way to make this transition be successful.

- Experienced Entrepreneurial Ecosystem.** Andy Stoll with the Kauffman Foundation is known to say... *“entrepreneurial talent is universal... entrepreneurial ecosystems are not.”* Despite the community’s size and rural nature, it has a sophisticated entrepreneurial ecosystem with powerful support strategies, proven tools, and motivated agency.

- **Feasible Deal.** When Thomas and Megan first tried to buy Misko, their loan application was turned down as too thin and too risky. They simply had too little equity and too little experience; they were asking too much of a bank. The revised deal provided a feasible way forward providing the Herman's an opportunity for success.
- **Patient and Flexible Capital.** The LLC Investors and City's gap financing loan provided more patient and flexible capital. This arrangement provided space for this transition to succeed. A thinner and more aggressive deal would likely have set up the Herman's for intense stress and possibly failure.
- **Hybrid Business Model.** Think about it, a community of several thousand residents in a very low-density rural region with a retail sporting goods store. Most people would agree that there is an insufficient local retail market for such a specialized store since there are box stores about one hour's drive away in Grand Island. Their operational success rests on their diversification of revenue streams and selective targeting of their product lines. Only 20% of Misko's sales are walk-in retail. 80% of their sales are through eCommerce selling to teams and communities throughout the region.
- **Mentoring – Key to Success.** The Investors LLC not only brought important capital to the deal, but they also provided deep mentoring to both Megan and Thomas. On the one hand such mentoring is a risk management strategy for the investors, but more importantly, it serves as a commitment beyond money both to two youthful entrepreneurs and to maintaining the economic base necessary to a vital community. Key mentoring areas are:
 - Introduction of point of sale software to track what is selling and to ensure inventory turnover;
 - Management of dead inventory and inventory optimization;
 - Payment optimization strategy to take advantage of vendor discounts while closely managing cash flow;
 - Accounts receivable management;
 - Pacing management. The mentors worked with Thomas and Megan to make timely and smarter decisions on when to spend and how to deploy their time and talent.
 - The three examples above show that there is no one-size-fits-all strategy or trajectory for cultivating businesses and their success. Each of these enterprises entered the fray with different assets and different needs. It is the capacity of the ecosystem to correctly assess those needs, to meet those needs and to provide acceptable pathways for each enterprise to engage the needed resources. It isn't just the financial arrangements or public relations boosting; it involves a rich inventory of available resources tailored to individual needs operating in a matrix (ecosystem) of linked efforts with community-based goals.

Emergent Growth Ventures

Essential and amenity businesses like Jubilee Catering, Scratchtown and Misko Sports are foundational to rural communities. But emergent growth ventures are particularly important to overall economic vitality. Scratchtown Brewing Company draws customers from outside of the community. Like other craft brewers it has the potential to become an emergent growth venture and in doing so it will create a larger economic footprint in the community expanding its base economy. Misko Sports has crossed this line as a hybrid retail and growth venture (because of its electronic commerce). Next, we explore three emerging growth entrepreneurial businesses.

The Subconn Story



Subconn was started by Burwell entrepreneur and innovator Delbert Wagner about 40 years ago. Located now in both Burwell and Ord, this landlocked location designs and produces under-water cabling technology worldwide with offices in Denmark and San Diego. [Subconn](#) is a classic growth entrepreneurial venture with a unique product and market niches. This company and its markets are external to Ord providing important diversification to the economy.

The Subconn story is one of success due to its ability to continually address the challenges of life in a small rural community. From its origin as a custom fabrication machine shop with an eccentric owner/operator to a business with a European distributor and 92 employees moving into a new facility in Ord, Subconn is a success story. The internationalization of its product line creating market resiliency. Nonetheless, success also carries challenges. For Subconn this involves attracting and keeping the right kind of workforce in an area often perceived from the outside as lacking lifestyle amenities.

The story of Subconn is also strongly tied to another story, the story of Shopko. It is one all too familiar to small towns in America but with a quite different outcome because of involved and intentional leadership. When Shopko closed its doors in Ord, jobs were lost, a large facility went vacant, retail needs went unmet and people sensed a certain doom. The acquisition of the building by Subconn was a win in all directions by a community and the story of Subconn articulates it well.

ShopKo Connection

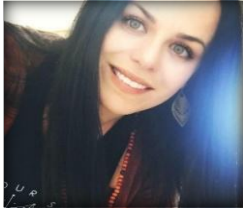
Shopko is just one of many regional and national companies (e.g., Wal-Mart, Dollar General, etc.) that have moved aggressively into rural markets. They have brought desired goods and services but also eroded and destroyed locally owned ventures changing the economic landscape of rural communities. One of the threats with national and regional companies like ShopKo is when they hit hard times or fall victim to ill-conceived management decisions they can contract and even fail quickly, leaving retail and service deserts in their wake. This is exactly what happened to ShopKo, leaving vacant buildings throughout rural America including Ord. Ord worked hard to attract ShopKo and when it failed, it worked hard to ensure that this vacant property was put back into productive use. After quickly exploring various options, a deal was cut with Subconn to provide needed expansion space for growth. This is a classic response by Ord in taking a threat and liability and turning it into an opportunity. Nancy Glaubke, when she was Ord's first business coach, had a similar experience when she learned that a local grocery store was closing. She and the Ord quickly turned from disappointment at this loss to how this location could be repurposed. A hallmark of entrepreneurial communities is their ability to turn challenges into opportunities, just as successful entrepreneurs do every day in America.

Utopia Spa and Health Studio

Rural communities do not need spas to be viable or even thrive. But Utopia Spa in Ord is truly unique in a number of ways. We classify the spa as an emergent growth business. While most of the spa's customers are local, it has a growing clientele coming from a multi-county region, the Tri-Cities Region of Central Nebraska, Lincoln, Omaha and even Denver and areas outside of Nebraska. The



venture model for Utopia Spa is unique and promising for both rural communities and urban neighborhoods.



Sarah Brinkman is from an area ranch family who returned from New York and saw a need for a spa. She purchased and repurposed a downtown building that now hosts over 15 spa businesses and entrepreneurs. This innovative business model provides an “attraction” amenity and workspace for these independent spa service providers. Spa services range from traditional hair, face and nail care to yoga and exercise classes to healthcare related cold and heat therapies.

From the outside, Utopia presents as a nondescript, single-story light industrial building just off the city center. However, immediately on entry it unfolds as a labyrinth of commercial personal services that entices the patron deeper into an embracing feeling of personal care and attention by capable and friendly owner-providers offering a wide range of services.

Utopia is not an employer/employee environment, a cooperative or simply an owner who rents to people. It’s something different, something more. When queried as to how to describe the business model she has inspired and created, Sarah thoughtfully says, “*a tribe.*” And indeed, the experience is tribal in terms of the easy cooperative independence evidenced by both the individual proprietors themselves and the fluidity with which they collectively generate the structural backstopping necessary to any successful single owner/operator enterprise.

“Building sustainable social and economic capital: tribe without tribalism”

Sara elaborates, “*I mean it really kind of is a tribe. We have a couple [of workers] that are actually like W-2 employees, but everybody else is just everyone with a vision that came together and kind of was in a place. And we just shared space basically, but it just works well. It does for us anyway. Right?!*”

The Hackel Construction Story: SLVA and Transformative Leadership in Ord



In operation since 2001, Hackel Construction, Inc. is a Nebraska based, full-service commercial general contracting firm attending both public and private sector customers.

Growing up on feedlot farms both Jeana and Tanner had a strong work ethic and a well-developed habit of perseverance. Yet, while Tanner was by nature gregarious and extroverted, Jeana came by it only with some effort. Returning to

Ord Tanner moved into the construction business learning as he went. It was two years later after their marriage that Jeana became a part of the business.

As a company, Hackel Construction is local and regional in scope, staying largely within a target geography of 120 miles. Nonetheless, they have worked border to border in the state. They do a lot of work for rural airports, building hangers, taxi lanes and fuel stations often funded by federal dollars. But they are always up to the challenge of something new and Tanner says it’s “*fun for us to jump in and learn, and that growth piece is exciting.*” In addition to the couple the company has 8 or 9 full time employees and 4 or 5 part-timers the summer months, largely college kids on internships. Their core

business objectives include meeting deadlines, eliminating surprises, clear communication, delivering quality products and finishing well, all of which advance their core values and business success. Steadfast accountability along with actively listening to the customer, their employees and each other have produced a reputation for quality.

Jeana and Tanner attribute their business success to clearly defined goals, the centrality of customer satisfaction and a deep commitment to a leadership style that is solution directed and distributive in expression. Central to this has been their experience with the Synovation Valley Leadership Academy (SVLA). Tanner says that he was always interested in developing his understanding of leadership. However, by the time SVLA emerged in Ord as an opportunity he was quite skeptical and tentative about its utility to him and his business. As he says, *"I had done all that before"*. On the other hand, Jeana expressed a lack confidence in her own leadership ability, consequently often feeling defensive when in a managerial situation. Importantly however, she was aware of these personal limitations. Thus, she was quick to see the potential of SVLA as a vehicle for self-development and a transformative experience once the need presented itself. Both agree that their focus on effective leadership has advantaged their business, their relationship, their family life and even the family lives of their employees.

Ord Locker – More Value-Added Agriculture

There was a time when every rural community regardless of size had lockers where locals could process animals into food products. My Dad following service in the Military in World War II employing the GI Bill was trained as a meat cutter and operated the Mullen (Nebraska) Locker and Meat Counter in his brother's grocery store. But over time local lockers closed as food safety regulations increased and fewer rural residents produced their own meat products. Ord Locker could have gone this way without new leadership and vision. The current major expansion and new facility positions the Ord Locker to become a go-to resource for an entire region. Its vision to create value-added products will further enhance its competitiveness. The Ord Locker is a great example of a growth-oriented entrepreneurial venture contributing to both the based and secondary economies of this region. It is also another example of value-added agriculture.

The Ord Locker Story, A Doctorate in Living



Ord Locker is a local custom meat processing business located in downtown Ord, Nebraska. The owners are Ace VanDeWalle and his sister, Ida VanDeWalle.

What happens when an accomplished and well-educated young man destined to teach at the university decides the academic life is not his passion? For Ace VanDeWalle the answer was to harness his knowledge and skill set and strike out on his own in a landscape he loves. In the supportive community of Ord, Ace has

found he can both practice his craft and educate people while serving his products. A trip to Ord Locker is more than picking out a cut of meat for dinner. It is an opportunity to learn from someone who knows his product from hoof to table. Whether it be raising, grading, butchering, selecting, cooking, or enjoying a fine cut of meat, you can find it all at Ord Locker, home of a small-town, custom, meat processing business.



Ord Locker is a small enterprise with a big vision and an open field of opportunity. Currently employing about four staff Ace is working with Hackel Construction to design and build a new processing plant which will allow him to process meat in much greater volume. Well trained as a meat inspector, Ace has all the tools to become a major regional player for local ranchers needing access to reliable processing. Beyond this he has increasingly moved into the custom meat processing arena packaging private label cuts for his customers, and he intends to grow this part of his business significantly. It is this growth mindset coupled with established success that puts Ord Locker squarely into the Emergent Growth Venture category.

One Story Becomes Part of the Community Story

At the heart of all the stories in this section is the repeated theme of enlightened leadership which harnesses self-development to community development. We have referred to it as “intentionality” in various places, but it is more than that since it is built on a bedrock of self-understanding and a concern for clear understanding of one’s highest purpose in any interaction. SVLA has been a part of this community wide shared culture but so has individual agency and motivation arising from inner fiber. Bob Stowell describes an example of how this impact was carried intentionally beyond an individual, beyond an employee, beyond a company.

“The principal at the school...said, ‘you know what? While we’re doing this for the adults, we really should do this in the school.’ And so, taking the adult curriculum, we wrote a curriculum for the school at the eighth-grade level, and then ramped it up as an advanced course. [Now] it’s a mandatory semester in the eighth grade, and ... [the principal] ...said, ‘you could tell the difference, shortly: with how the kids treated each other; how they walked through the hallways.”

A new resident describes how the impact at the community level is even apparent to an outsider and provides the impetus to join the community. *“I was able to go to a lot of different rural communities. And I think that’s when it started to set in that the mindset [in Ord] is completely different, or very different, from a lot of communities that I visited. ... Sometimes it’s really hard to find people that are passionate about what they do and are driven to be involved in the community. ... People understand it better here. When you invest in people, in their personal development, it is going to positively impact entrepreneurship and economic development.”*

New Generation of Leaders?

The story of Ord and Valley County is remarkable, demonstrating a long and continuing run of successes. But there are voices from both inside and outside the community that express concern about the future of Ord’s leadership. The concerns reflect an awareness of remarkably empowering and effective community leadership of people like Bob Stowell and Gaylord Boilesen that has nurtured success. What happens when they are not able or willing to provide leadership? This is a reasonable concern. We have witnessed rural communities on a roll, making progress and then crashing when key leaders leave the scene. But we sense in Ord there is a next generation of emerging leaders – individuals like Caleb Pollard, Nancy Glaubke, Tanner Hackel, Heather Sikyta and Thomas Herman. Some, like Nancy who leads the healthcare system, are well established and remarkable leaders in their own right. Others are just beginning to assume leadership roles in the community. Going forward, the emergence of the next generation of leaders, following in the tradition of effective, empowering leadership, will shape Ord’s long-term future.

Ord has embraced a wide range of development opportunities including more traditional business attraction. While the business attraction opportunity has diminished from its World War II to 1970s hay days, there are opportunities and in the following section of our story we address two very important larger development projects with one being an industrial attraction opportunity and the other a home-grown initiative.

For most rural communities like Ord venture development falls in spectrum of small businesses, nonprofits and governmental enterprises that typically employ a few to a few dozen employees. However, contributing to the vitality and diversity of the Ord regional economy are larger ventures and the value-added clusters associated with them including the K-12 School District and the following two stories.

Next, we explore these two larger development projects.

Larger Projects

The first larger development project centers on the development of an ethanol plant and the subsequent value-chain and cluster providing value-added opportunities to the region's foundation economic driver production agriculture. Earlier in our Ord story we addressed the need for economic diversification both within and beyond production agriculture. The ethanol complex development is a prime example of diversification within agriculture. The second larger development project relates to the regional health care system anchored by the Ord Hospital. This is a home-grown success story contributing to not only economic diversification but the creation of a wide spectrum of jobs and careers that has enhanced people attraction, development, and retention.

The Ethanol Value-Chain Cluster



The largest industrial development project taken on by this community is its evolving ethanol value-chain cluster development. Central to this value chain is the Green Plains Renewable Energy plant (ethanol). Establishing this industrial cluster has been quite a journey with multiple owners, threats of shut downs and other challenges.

In our e2 rural community prosperity change model (see Page 6) we emphasize the importance of economic diversification. This diversification strategy includes both within the mainstay economic activity of agriculture and the development of non-agricultural economic activities. The ethanol value-chain cluster is a great example of value-adding economic diversification within agriculture. After production agriculture and the healthcare cluster, the ethanol cluster is probably the next largest employer and economic driver in the community.

Value Chain or Micro-Cluster Development

Value chains or micro-clusters occur result from multifocal, interrelated development, including input suppliers, value-adding activities, and distribution operations. Value chains are particularly important to community prosperity. Micro-clusters like Ord's ethanol value chain create more economic activity, a wider range of businesses and employment, a stronger tax base and most importantly, a higher value-added economy.

The development of this ethanol cluster is a rich story of acting smart, working hard with determination and commitment. Key elements of this cluster include:

- Agricultural Grain Producers – Alternative Markets for Crops
- Green Plains (Ethanol) Renewal Energy Plant
- Distillers Grain for Livestock Feed
- Enhanced Trucking Sector
- Cubing Plant
- Allied Activities such as Trotter Truck Plaza

We have curated a more detailed story of the **Ethanol Value-Chain Cluster** that will be available later this fall.

Commodity Agriculture and Value-Added Activities

It is common knowledge that farmers and ranchers producing commodities like corn are price takers. They are always facing market ups and downs. A prime driver in the development of the ethanol industry was to create a higher-value and more predictable market options for grain producers. The ethanol plant provides an alternative market for area grain producers. Downstream products like distillers-grains and cubes provide alternatives for livestock feed. Increased trucking activity provide complimentary work for farmers and others. While there continues to be international debate around the merits of ethanol as an alternative to petroleum based on the energy required to produce ethanol, it is clear that this complex has increased the value of agriculture in the Ord region.

Central to all community economic development are leaders and community builders who take ownership and empower a community to accomplish development. These leaders and builders perceive the opportunity and work, often at personal cost to themselves, to enable important development to occur contributing to the community's growth and vitality. There have been and are multiple players in Ord's development of its ethanol cluster. One key leader has been Gaylord Boilesen, a home-grown serial entrepreneur, leader, and economic developer. We have curated a story with Gaylord that provides more on his values, approach to development and long history of making a difference in this community. This Gaylord Boilesen story will be available later this fall.

Valley County Health Care System



The Valley County Health Care System story is remarkable. From near collapse and closure in the 1990s to one of rural Nebraska's thriving healthcare systems. Today the health care cluster is the largest employer in the Ord Region. It is critically important in that it provides a wide range of jobs and careers contributing to people attraction, development, and retention. Additionally, this system is important in creating spouse employment and career options where one spouse is employed in the health care system and the other is an entrepreneur or employed in another part of the economy.

Importance of Job and Career Options

Central to impactful people attraction, development and retention is a community's ability to provide a wider range of jobs and career offerings. This is particularly important for couples where both working adults in a household can find meaningful work. Schools, local governments, and health care are important in providing not only a wide range of job and career offerings, they provide jobs with more secure employment with strong benefits like health care and retirement. Having these wage and salary careers enable other household members to pursue entrepreneurship knowing they have good benefits and one predictable income.

Key elements of the Ord regional health care cluster include:

- 10-Year Older Modern Hospital with visiting Emergency and Specialty Services
- Three Rural Health Care Clinics (i.e., Ord, Burwell, and Loup City)
- 17 County Home Health and Hospice Services
- On Site Laboratory and Imaging Services
- Nursing Home, Multiple Pharmacies, Dental and Optical Offices
- Other Private Services ranging from Utopia Spa to chiropractic, dental and counseling services

The hospital provides the anchor in this cluster attracting and retaining customers enhancing market opportunities for other elements within the cluster. Like anchor retail in shopping malls that attract retail traffic, a strong and modern rural hospital plays the same role within health care.

Health Care – An Essential Service Foundational to Rural Community Vitality

Access to local high-quality health ranging from emergency to specialty services is a foundational essential service to rural communities. The ability to obtain basic services to more advanced services locally rooted in modern and attractive facilities is key to a community's ability to attract and retain residents. This is particularly important for younger families and retiring Boomers. Distance matters in health care. Individuals and families face hard choices when local health care erodes and ultimately may choose to move to communities with strong health care services. Ord has positioned itself and its region for growth because of its thriving health care system.

The current success within this community's health care system was not always the case. Like so many health care systems in rural communities across America the story of erosion, closure and loss is more common. When hospitals, clinics, and services like dental and optical cease to exist locally, community vitality is also eroded. Ord and its region have travelled a hard road to success. We have curated a story of Ord's health care cluster providing much greater detail of this story that will be available later this month.

Leaders and Community Builders Defined

We employ these terms – leaders and community builders – intentionally. Leaders are those in the community that provide the kind of empowering leadership that enable community members to engage and create desired change. But desired change cannot occur without meaningful community and resident engagement. Community builders are those that band with leaders to actively engagement is making things happen committing to small and larger undertakings ranging from promoting bond issues to volunteering to be active members of working groups and committees essential for progress.

As is the case with other development efforts in Ord and its region there are leaders and community builders that are central to the transition of Ord's health care system from crisis decades ago to one of rural America's higher performing health care systems. We could profile multiple leaders and community builders central to this story of turnaround and success including the voters who passed the \$21 plus million bond issue enabling the modern hospital. A key leader is Nancy Glaubke who now serves as the President and CEO of the Valley County Health Care System. Nancy is home grown, moved away, pursued a career in health care manage and now is both a next generation health care and community leader in the community. We are curating a story about Nancy's journey and perspectives as an empowering leader that will be available later this fall.

Lessons in Large Enterprise Recruitment

There is an important lesson to be gleaned from the Ord story regarding the role of large economic enterprises and how communities relate to them. Many communities simply see large economic players as opportunities to pursue exclusively through economic posturing such as favorable tax policies, land concessions, limited regulatory environment, workforce opportunities, etc. While these can be valuable tactics in recruitment, they seldom produce a deeper strategic connection and commitment to the community by themselves. The opportunistic motivation that they engender leaves the community open to the downside risk of being similarly outcompeted later by another community offering more lucrative benefits to the economic enterprise they have recruited. For example, consider the experience with Shopko.

At one level Ord has been intentional in focusing its attention on attracting entrepreneurial talent that has given rise to smaller enterprises but ones where both the enterprise and the entrepreneur have deeper attachments to the community than simply as a labor pool or market. On another level, the pursuit of larger economic enterprises in Ord has had an organic quality wherein they have grown naturally out of existing community assets, values, and interests. They embedded at their root. In certain ways this harkens to the way civic and economic leaders in Tupelo built their economic success on the foundation of unique strengths already present in the community. Combined with strategic advocacy in locating the railroad, aggressive public campaigning for infrastructure improvement, and persistent community integration efforts to bridge urban-rural and other divides, Tupelo created an unprecedented reversal of its fortunes in northeast Mississippi. While in a much more modest fashion but with many of the same initial challenges of a fractured population, declining infrastructure and a broadly held sense of hopelessness in the face of destiny, Ord has also bucked the prevailing trends of rural depopulation and economic stagnation. Both the Valley County Health System and the Ethanol Value Chain share this characteristic, albeit in slightly different ways.

As a rural health care delivery enterprise, the Valley County Health System is by its very nature grounded in the community. Yet, these services could have been captured by another community in the regional

service area, leaving Ord and Valley County without its biggest employer. This didn't happen. Instead Ord was intentional about saving its hospital, attracting enlightened management, recruiting an engaged and proactive board, and building collaborative relationships with both management and employees. They did it through aggressive community support both economically and in promotion. And they persisted in their efforts over time despite obstacles, false starts, and setbacks. They were intentional. They were relentless. They stayed true to their community goals.

The ethanol value chain is a rather different matter. It is a story of dogged pursuit built on two kinds of persistence: commitment to the community and a commitment to stay focused on an asset-based approach to existing circumstances. In this way each failure was taken to be an opportunity for revising the strategy by refocusing on what remained as an asset rather than a liability. It enabled local investors and the community at large to grow an ever-expanding set of enterprises from the ashes of bankruptcy primarily due to forces outside of local control. Today this value chain plays a large economic role in the community, but one that is firmly rooted in the community and will, therefore, remain so.

Subconn is also emerging as one of the larger enterprises as it expands production and moves to a larger facility. However, its future is a bit murkier in that it is a subsidiary under foreign ownership. While founded by a local inventor and entrepreneur, its acquisition by a Danish company means that it is somewhat less rooted locally and its future in Ord remains to be seen. The biggest challenge is recruiting the needed workforce, and this introduces certain potential challenges for Ord in the future. The first is competition for workers which is a problem shared by several employers with whom we spoke. The second is the likely ethnic diversification this might mean for the community and how well social relations will be managed. Nonetheless, all things being equal, Subconn is "of" the community and has more reason to stay than a company recruited from elsewhere.

All three of these examples point to the intentional, aggressive, and integrated strategic and tactical approaches undertaken in Ord: economic support, enlightened leadership, community promotion and strong public-private collaboration. These intentional investments go a long way to ensuring long-term viability of the relationship with the community unlike the short-term corporate siting seen in many places used as stepping-stones to other sites offering more lucrative benefits that once exhausted loosen the ties that bind an enterprise to a place and a population. Call it restructuring. Call it the effects of globalization. Call it simply economic exploitation. When the ties binding an enterprise become lessened from place, it is the people, the community and the future that tend to be sacrificed. The community of Ord recognizes this.

Growing the Base Economy

In economic development 101 we divide ventures into "base" and "secondary" activities. Secondary ventures primarily serve area consumers contributing to local spending capture thereby strengthening the economy by reducing spending leakages. Basic economic activity is located in a community but largely sells to consumers outside of the community bringing income and jobs to the community. Traditional economic development has always put great emphasis on growing the base part of the economy with a belief that the secondary part of the economy would be fine. At e² we believe both parts of the economy require development attention. However, growing the base economy is a challenge for smaller rural communities like Ord. The fact that Ord has achieved significant success is expanding its base economy thereby diversifying it is important. The increasing number of hybrid business with both local and external customers is an important venture model for rural communities across America in today's highly competitive market economy.

Chapter 6 – Lessons and Insights for Other Rural Communities

Essential for robust and sustained community vitality are strategic development efforts that interweave to strengthen a community's quality of life placemaking, ability to attract, develop and retain human talent, expand the capacity of the community to undertake more development and an opportunity generating economy. Check out e2's paper, [Community Prosperity Development Framework](#).

Ord was the first community to become engaged with a new development initiative called **HomeTown Competitiveness** (HTC). HTC was created by a collaboration including the [Nebraska Community Foundation](#), the national Center for Rural Entrepreneurship (now [e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems](#)), the [Heartland Center for Leadership Development](#), the [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#)¹, [Nebraska Extension](#) and the [Center for Rural Affairs](#).

HomeTown Competitiveness (HTC)

HTC was widely deployed in rural communities throughout Nebraska. Many of these HTC communities are now among a class of thriving rural communities within the Cornhusker state. HTC has been adapted and employed throughout the United States. Indiana and Purdue University adopted and innovated off of HTC foundational to its rural community development framework. In Kansas, HomeTown Competitiveness was renamed to HomeTown Prosperity and provided foundational to subsequent initiatives like NetWork Kansas.

HTC embraced four foundational pillars central to community development and vitality:

- Leadership
- Youth
- Community Philanthropy
- Entrepreneurship

Ord thrives within the HTC development framework. Over time Ord added a fifth pillar focused on placemaking rooted in the arts and humanities. Other story capture work is underway focusing on all five pillars operating in Ord and Valley County.

Leadership. The Heartland Center Leadership Development is taking the lead in capturing how Ord's early commitment to leadership development has resulted in broader, deeper, and more effective community leadership.

Youth. The Nebraska Community Foundation and the Heartland Center for Leadership Development are collaborating to capture Ord's commitment to youth engagement, attraction, and entrepreneurship and how this commitment has created an attractive community for youth and young adults.

¹HTC was awarded one of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's 75th Anniversary celebration multi-million-dollar grants that materially enabled HTC to sustain, reach scale and demonstrate its value as a development framework for rural communities.

Community Philanthropy. The Nebraska Community Foundation has been collaborating with Ord for years capturing its community philanthropy story. Community philanthropy has played a strategic role in empowering community building.

Entrepreneurship. e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems (formerly the national Center for Rural Entrepreneurship) is taking the lead in capturing Ord’s entrepreneurship story (this content).

Arts and Humanities Rooted Placemaking. The Nebraska Community Foundation is taking the lead in capturing Ord’s innovative work in placemaking rooted in arts and humanities.

Our efforts to capture and summarize overarching lessons learned from our Ord and Valley County story research is a work in progress. Our research and analysis are continuing. The following are our top 10 current insights and lessons learned.

1. Leadership and Community Engagement
2. Overcoming Crisis and Realizing Opportunities
3. Meaningful Commitment, Investment and Sustained Effort
4. Community Capacity Building and at Scale Development on Multiple Fronts
5. Embracing Entrepreneurial Behavior
6. Recognizing Diversity is an Asset
7. Pursuing Regional Development
8. Growing an Abundance Culture
9. Willingness to Reach Out for Help and Learn
10. Realizing Documented Transformative Change

Next, we begin our journey of lessons learned that could be valuable to your community’s development with the importance of leadership and community engagement.

Leadership and Community Engagement. Early on key leaders in Ord recognized the importance of growing empowering leadership and community engagement. The ability of this community to vision and stand up development projects and initiatives is rooted in its ever-expanding empowering leadership and increasingly effective community engagement. The progress of this key development capacity is as follows:

*Small Band of Champions
Ever Expanding Group of Empowering Leaders
Increasing Numbers of Community Builders
Resulting Community Support and Engagement*

Based on this experience and our other work with communities across North America leadership development and meaningful community engagement is the leading edge of all community economic development progress.

Overcoming Crisis and Realizing Opportunities. Throughout our Ord story we have employed this re-occurring illustrating visualizing decades of Ord history transforming itself from crisis to transformative change. Ord’s journey, like every community, is full of major and minor challenges that had to be overcome and opportunities that surfaced to be capitalized. It is clear from our leader interviews that



the major challenges – 1980s agricultural recession, anti-government groups, the hospital crisis, and the ethanol plant – tested Ord and its leaders and community builders. Overcoming these challenges and responding to opportunities out of challenges has built greater community development capacity. It has created the kind of confidence and culture which enables a community to be constructive, pro-active, and successful through the development journey.

Figure 16 – Ord’s Progression from Crisis to Transformative Change

1980s Agricultural Crisis	1990s Search for Solutions	2000 Pivot Year Aiming for Success	2000-2010 Investment & Progress	2010-2020 Transformative Change
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Source: e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems. August 2020.

Meaningful Commitment, Investment and Sustained Effort. Level 3 in the Hierarchy of Community Impacts Framework are commitments made and fulfilled. Ord and its region have demonstrated ever increasing ability to make meaningful commitment to its own development fulfilled with serious public and private investment. We estimate over the 2000 to 2020 period \$250 million in public and private investment has been mobilized. A significant amount of this investment has come from within the community as well as leveraged external investment. Furthermore, there is a pattern of increasing commitments and investment over time. Beyond financial commitments and investments this is also a pattern of increasing human talent commitments and investments. Ever broader community engagement has been foundational to this successful journey. With local time, talent and treasure commitments Ord and its region have also been able to attract ever greater external help and assistance

Openness to External Help and Assistance

In rural culture there is a tendency to hunker down and not seek outside help and assistance. Sometimes we are reluctant to share what we do not know keeping us from searching for solutions that could move our community forward more quickly. At e2 we have always made the point that somewhere in rural America there are communities that have found better solutions that could inform challenges and opportunities we are confronting. A hallmark of Ord in the 1990s during its search for solutions was a willingness to reach out to other communities, external resources, and ideas to craft a formula for development success.

Community Capacity Building and at Scale Development on Multiple Fronts. Last year we had a focus group dinner with a group of community leaders and builders. Our conversation focused on the very successful LB840 gap financing program for businesses. We inquired why was Ord so successful with financing so many ventures with relatively little failure. The answer came from the City Attorney and was validated by others. In so many words, “We get lots of practice.” Not only has this community gotten a lot development practice, building its capacity to take on more development, its commitment to and investment in leadership and community engagement has expanded the level of overall community participation enabling it to take its development to scale on multiple fronts from business development to civic improvements to quality of life placemaking. The level of development undertaken most years is remarkable and has directly contributed to the transformative change we have addressed in this story.

Embracing Entrepreneurial Behavior. From its early 2000s commitment to entrepreneur-led development to the design of its Synovation Valley Leadership Academy, Ord and its region has



embraced ever greater levels of entrepreneurial development. Ord now has a critical mass of leaders and community builders, along with the organizations they are part of, that behave entrepreneurially. They are opportunity focused, believe in collaboration, team building and other core entrepreneurial attributes that are now rooting in the very culture of the community. From how the community responded to the ethanol development opportunity to the loss of ShopKo reflects on this approach to development and life.

Every Asset Counts

Throughout this story we capture evidence of a key entrepreneurial trait or seeing value in every community asset. The evidence is substantial ranging from the early loss of a grocery store and within 24-hours refocusing efforts on how to repurpose the real estate to a deteriorated building and lot near downtown and finding a new use for this asset to the conversion of the old county farm into a vibrant commercial and industrial business park. In our many visits to Ord and tours of the area the conversation was rich with ideas and pending actions to take current assets, often depleted, and how they were to be deployed to grow a better community and economy. Not only is this an entrepreneurial trait it is core to asset-based development.

Recognizing Diversity is an Asset. Central to the amazing Tupelo, Mississippi story was its embrace of diversity as an asset versus a threat. While Ord has not had to overcome the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, and the divide between Black and White residents, it has its own diversity challenges. Like other Great Plains rural communities Ord and its region held conservative and traditional values with respect to gender, age, new residents, religion, and the like. In the not too distant past a woman seeking a bank loan to start a business required a father, brother, uncle, or some other male to co-sign the note. Today women are increasingly key drivers in business, government, and nonprofits. Early in our work with Ord there were a group of young men who wanted to start a business. They lacked family status and wealth, but the community worked with them and today this very venture continues to be part of the business community. Embracing diversity as a development asset comes in many forms including gender, sexual orientation, faith orientation, new residents versus long timers and family reputations. Ord and its region have made significant progress in embracing diversity as an asset enabling greater development to occur as its fuller human potential is brought into play.

Pursing Regional Development. Rural America can be described a low density and high cost markets. Rural communities often lack the necessary scale for success in today's environment. Ord has embraced a wider and more enlightened view with its development. Three examples illustrate our point. When LB840 or the local option sales tax for economic development was passed it enabled gap financing to be deployed throughout the county. The self-interest was clear... County residents pay the tax when they shop in Ord and if the County is doing better Ord is doing better. The inter-local agreement that created the Valley County Economic Development Board has a primary mission of developing Ord and Valley County. But quickly this Board realized that supporting development in its region was an important self-interest creating fertile soil for collaboration across county and community lines. Finally, the vision and mission of the Valley County Health Care System is truly regional by intent and design. In fostering regional development Ord has been able to strengthen its region contributing in turn to its success.

Growing an Abundance Culture. Jeff Yost, CEO and President of the Nebraska Community Foundation speaks often of a culture of abundance. This is a half-glass full attitude on steroids. Ord and its region have embraced and become committed to abundance thinking. This kind of attitude and behavior stretches communities to dream bigger and reach farther. It moves historically conservative community

focused on slowing decline to focusing on the future believing the assets and opportunities are present to grow more vital and prosperous communities. It is hard to measure the abundance culture DNA in a community but this value surfaced time and time again when we conducted interviews with leaders, community builders and residents.

Willingness to Reach Out for Help and Learn. Earlier on we discussed Ord's willingness to reach out for help and assistance. This is such an important take-away from our learning. For many distressed rural communities, they are often focused on "life lines" chasing programs, resources and grants that may or may not fit their genuine development opportunities and preferences. Ord has increasingly moved from this kind of behavior more common in the 1980s and 1990s to a much smarter strategy of engaging outside help relevant to its established priorities. This approach to development is important in an opportunity-focused and asset-based development model which optimizes development impact over time.

Realizing Documented Transformative Change. Chapter 5 in this story and our associated deeper dive into comparative performance documents transformative change. It is for this reason we believe the Ord Story is so powerful as it demonstrates that a relatively small, farming based and rural community in America's Great Plains can move into a cycle of progress and increasing prosperity. For other communities to embrace the hard choices and commitments to undertake the work necessary for transformative change it is so important that we have communities like Ord demonstrating that it is possible, and most communities have the assets and opportunities to make it so.

Chapter 7 - A Community's Work is Never Done

The work of community economic development is never done. We exist in a dynamic world with constant change in economy, governance, society, and environment. The COVID-19 World Health Pandemic is a clear lesson that dramatic change can surface quickly.

For more information on possible rural development opportunities in a post-COVID world check out [*The2020 Pandemic Recession – Future Trends*](#).

In the long term, climate change will drive profound change impacting the way we work, live and play. Ord's development is a work in progress. Over the past 20-years it has realized transformative progress in our opinion rooted in a comprehensive and sophisticated development game plan based in increasing entrepreneurial behavior throughout its region.

The Prosperity Curse

Over the years we have observed individuals, ventures and entire communities that fall prey to what we call the **Prosperity Curse**. When a community, after working so hard to achieve success, often loses its commitment to continued aggressive development. Communities become conservative feeling things are going great and begin to undermine the kinds of actions and investments necessary to ensure their sustained and longer-term prosperity. This cycle is natural given the demands of active community economic development. When times are good it can be harder to mobilize a community to continue investing itself where personal advancement dominates collective action. **Remember community economic development is a 24-7-365-forever commitment.** Time will tell if Ord and its region remains hungry to aggressively pursue its development now that it is achieving success.

We hope this collection of stories and resources inspires and informs you and your rural community. There is so much we can learn from communities like Ord that have found a formula for success. Ord cannot rest on its progress and must continue to vision and invest smartly and robustly in its future. It must avoid the **Prosperity Curse** remaining committed to the hard work of community economic development.

We would love to hear from you and your thoughts as you spend time with the **Ord, Nebraska – An Entrepreneurial Community** story. Reach out to us at e2 by contacting Don Macke at don@e2mail.org.

How e2 Can Help



e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems helps communities increase prosperity through entrepreneur-focused economic development and ecosystem building. Led by [Don Macke](#), e2 has a national team of practitioners who bring research, coaching, incubation, market intelligence and other expertise to this work.

What We Do

- ✓ **Mentoring.** We mentor and coach new practitioners seeking to pursue entrepreneur-led development. We provide advice and support for building eEcosystem strategies that work.
- ✓ **Analytics Support.** e2 helps communities and regions understand their entrepreneurial potential through research and data. Explore some of our research tools and reports [here](#).
- ✓ **e2 University (e2U)** is our platform for sharing guides, papers, stories, tools, and resources with communities wanting a deep dive into eEcosystem building. Don Macke leads the e2U team with analytics support from **Cathy Kottwitz** and report preparation from **Ann Chaffin**. Special recognition for their e2U legacy contributions goes to **Dana Williams** and **Deb Markley**, LOCUS Impacting Investing.
- ✓ **Fostering the eMovement.** We support the national entrepreneurship movement along with our partners including the **Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City**, **SourceLink**, **Edward Lowe Foundation**, **Kauffman Foundation**, and **NetWork Kansas**. We are a founding member of [Start Us Up: America's New Business Plan](#), a coalition dedicated to strengthening entrepreneurship across America. Together, we continue to advance the foundational ideas of building entrepreneurial ecosystems and entrepreneurship-led economic development.

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[NetWork Kansas](#), a 501c3 nonprofit organization dedicated to developing an entrepreneurial ecosystem in Kansas, is the home for e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems. NetWork Kansas connects aspiring entrepreneurs, emerging and established businesses, to a deep network of business building resource organizations across the state.

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