

Energizing Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Building in Keene, New Hampshire

By Don Macke with Mary Ann Kristiansen

My first rural community development work was in high school while living in Ogallala (2019 population of 4,536) in western Nebraska. I was part of the high school newspaper and student council. We were engaged in organizing schools in this part of Nebraska to advocate for student interests. In the intervening 47 years since I graduated from Ogallala High, I have traveled throughout North America working in the field of rural community economic development. One of the joys of this work is discovering passionate people and innovative development organizations like Mary Ann Kristiansen and the Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship, in Keene, New Hampshire.

We continue to discover and learn from previously unknown and often newer Entrepreneurial Development Organizations (EDOs), like the [Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship](#) and [Hannah Grimes Marketplace](#). We have organized this story into the follow sections:

- The Hanna Grimes Naming
- Keene, New Hampshire, and this corner of New England
- Remarkable Entrepreneurial Development Organizations
- The Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship
- Hannah Grimes Marketplace
- Radically Rural
- Mary Ann Kristiansen – Founder of the Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship Rural
- Journey Chronology
- Conclusion – Empowering Dreams, Better Lives and Vibrant Communities

Hannah Grimes

“Hannah Grimes” is used in this paper as shorthand for the **Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship** and its affiliated retail incubator, **the Hannah Grimes Marketplace**.

Before we launch into this delightful story of hope and progress rooted in entrepreneurship, we explore a bit about the name of the Center.

The Hanna Grimes Naming

The following is from the Hanna Grimes website:

“The Hannah Grimes philosophy comes directly from its namesake. Born in Keene in 1776, she married William Stoddard Buckminster in 1806 and raised a family on their farm in Roxbury, New Hampshire. Hannah Grimes created and surrounded herself with simple, well-made, and functional everyday items. What she and her family could not make or grow themselves, they bought from or bartered with friends and neighbors. They were part of a local, bustling marketplace.

At that time, a strong, local marketplace defined an area or region and provided a place for people to come together. It helped small producers, farmers and craftspeople succeed economically and preserved an important way of life that provided the needs of the local community while contributing vitality and vibrancy.



Keene, New Hampshire is a community rich in New England history and culture.

In 1997, local products were not in favor, as they are today, and the infrastructure to buy and sell local products was disappearing. Yet local artisans and farmers continued to create and grow unique products that brought the history, culture, and resources of this beautiful corner of the world to life. With business and market support, these makers have built strong, local businesses which have become the seeds for the next generation of local entrepreneurs, for larger businesses and the continued economic success of the region.

In her time, Hannah Grimes was a true example of a traditional New Hampshire producer who participated in a thriving local economy. In that spirit, Hannah Grimes Marketplace today supports over 250 members with a market and business resources to start and grow their business.

Founder of the Hannah Grimes Marketplace, Center for Entrepreneurship and Radically Rural -- Mary Ann Kristiansen selected the name Hannah Grimes in large part because Buckminster Farm has been her home, inspiration and her love of connecting history and place with present community building efforts.”

Our next step in the Hannah Grimes story is a quick review of its home in extreme southwestern New Hampshire – the community of Keene, Cheshire County, and the Monadnock Region.

Keene's European-American settlement history dates back to the 1730s -- prior to the formation of the United States of America. By comparison, my current hometown of Lincoln, Nebraska's first Census population was in the 1870s, or nearly 150 years younger. New England, and communities like Keene, have long and rich histories shaping who these communities are and what they want to be. For Keene, Hannah Grimes is ensuring that entrepreneurial energy will be part of its future.

Keene, New Hampshire, and this Corner of New England

Keene (2019 population of 22,953) is a micropolitan community and hub city in extreme southwestern New Hampshire. It is rural in character and part of the Monadnock Region. It is on the outer fringes of the Manchester Metropolitan Area. From Keene to the Manchester airport is about 72 miles, with a driving time of just one hour and 15 minutes. Manchester and this part of southeastern New Hampshire is increasingly part of the Greater Boston Metroplex with over 4.6 million residents. In turn, Boston is now part of the eastern seaboard metro corridor running from Portland, Maine all the way to Richmond, Virginia.



Keene, New Hampshire Central Square

We share this geography to emphasize an important development perspective.

While Keene is a classic rural New England community, it is nested in a vast, diverse, and growing collection of regional economies and communities. With good transportation and now, more remote workers, someone can call Keene their hometown and be part of this regional economy and society. Keene has faced its share of challenges, but it has a promising future.

To learn more about Keene, see e2's [Development Opportunity Profile for Cheshire County](#), where Keene is located.

Before we spend some time with the Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship, we explore some background on the role of entrepreneurial ecosystem building organizations and models.

For decades our work has been informed by remarkable people, organizations, and communities. Before the term **entrepreneurial ecosystem builders** was in wide use, we employed the term **entrepreneurial development organizations** (EDOs). Our first research activity in the entrepreneurship space was to find and study these ecosystem building organizations across America.

Remarkable Entrepreneurial Development Organizations

EDOs focus on entrepreneur-led development. Some provide direct services to targeted entrepreneurs, like technical assistance and business capital. Others are more directly engaged in community-centered entrepreneurial ecosystem building. Not all EDOs are actively engaged in community and regional entrepreneurial ecosystem building and support. But most high-impact EDOs do create micro-entrepreneurial ecosystems valuable to their client entrepreneurs.

Over the years we have learned so much from community, regional, state and even multi-state EDOs. Our earliest learning about entrepreneurship as a rural development strategy came from legendary initiatives like:

- Maine's' Coastal Enterprises – www.ceimaine.org
- Kentucky Highlands Investment Corporation – www.khic.org
- Michigan's Northern Initiatives – www.northerninitiatives.org
- Littleton, Colorado's Economic Gardening Initiative - <https://www.littletongov.org/city-services/city-departments/economic-development>
- Kansas City SourceLink – www.kcsourcelink.com
- Communities Unlimited – Mid-South – www.communitiesu.org
- North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center – www.ncruralcenter.org
- GROW Nebraska – www.grownebraska.org

When we first dipped our toes into the field of entrepreneurship, the term **entrepreneurial ecosystem building** was not in use. Decades ago, the term being used was **entrepreneurial development systems** (EDSs). The concepts were the same despite different language. Both imply we need complex and comprehensive systems of entrepreneurial support with corresponding cultures growing entrepreneurial talent and communities.

There is a material distinction between **entrepreneurial development organizations** and **entrepreneurial ecosystem building**. EDOs can create micro-entrepreneurial ecosystems as can occur with incubators, accelerators, centers, and co-working spaces. A local coffee shop can become a micro-entrepreneurial ecosystem where entrepreneurs, resource providers and others gather to share, learn, and collaborate. But not all EDOs are community-centered, let alone regional entrepreneurial ecosystem builders. But they can be.

As with the entrepreneurs we serve, we are often consumed running our venture and spending too little time developing it. Most EDOs are on a funding treadmill and nearly all their time and energy is focused on delivering, with little capacity and energy to focus on growing the larger ecosystem. This

distinction is important today, where more and more EDOs are claiming to be entrepreneurial ecosystem builders. Clearly, they are contributors, but not necessarily intentional and high-capacity ecosystem builders.

As we move forward with entrepreneur-led development, we need to find ways to provide both robust and long-term funding to EDOs like the Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship so that they can engage in broader ecosystem development and evolution. In most cases, centers like Hannah Grimes are best positioned to host entrepreneurial ecosystem building roles in our communities and regions.

Importance of Story Capture

The Hannah Grimes Center is curating a case study that will become available later in 2021. Stories like the one curated about the Hannah Grimes Center and its founder are critically important. Fueling America's economic innovation and growth are our extensive network of business colleges and their collection of business case studies. These studies are used to teach MBA students key lessons about growing more competitive corporations. We need more objective and rich case studies of rural Entrepreneurial Development Organizations and community-centered Entrepreneurial Ecosystems. Such case studies and stories could radically advance entrepreneur-led development in rural communities. When this case study becomes available, we will share it with our via our website and newsletter.

Case Method for Story Capture. In our work with the Hannah Grimes Center, we introduced a framework for story capture rooted in the case method for story capture (sometimes referred to "narrative methods") advanced by my colleague and friend Deborah Markley. Check out our paper, [Case Method of Story Capture](#), on this topic.

Our next stop focuses on the Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship, located in Keene, New Hampshire.

The Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship is a new story to e2. While we have worked extensively in New England, it has been some time since we have been actively engaged in and on the ground in this region. We are excited about our new collaboration with the Hannah Grimes Center, its story capture and 2021's Radically Rural gathering, a two-day conference for rural residents from across the country to share success stories in the areas of main street, arts and culture, community journalism, land and community, and rural entrepreneurship.



About the Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship

The following is from the Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship [website](#):

“The Hannah Grimes Center provides the space, tools and connections that innovative entrepreneurs need to build strong businesses, thriving local economies, and vibrant communities in the Monadnock Region. The success of entrepreneurs in the Monadnock region fulfills the Hannah Grimes Center’s broader vision of a sustainable, thriving local economy and vibrant community, built upon the region’s heritage, culture, natural resources, and the civic-minded entrepreneurial spirit of its people.

The Center for Entrepreneurship educates, supports, and assists in the successful development of entrepreneurs who are committed to building a vibrant community. Through the incubator, workshops, annual CONNECT event, and many other programs, the Center helps entrepreneurs overcome obstacles to start and grow their business. In 2019, our programs served 1,670 individuals from the Monadnock region.

An important part of the organization’s effectiveness in serving the nonprofit and the for-profit sectors is that Hannah Grimes has started and grown, and continues to operate, both a nonprofit organization and a for-profit business. Their programs are not academic, but a result of the real needs that Hannah Grimes, their businesses, and local nonprofits experience. Staff at Hannah Grimes can attend their own workshops to learn and can create

workshops they need. They lived through the recession and the agonizing recovery. They've made cuts and changes, suffered setbacks and celebrated victories, and have worked to stay ahead of trends, just like the businesses and nonprofits that they serve.

Hannah Grimes has a stellar reputation in the region and the state for being innovative and offering relevant, high-quality programs. This includes:

Hannah Grimes Marketplace offers 250 producers and growers an opportunity to learn business skills that help them enter and succeed in the marketplace. It also offers a year-round, Main Street location to sell their product, network, and gain market exposure. This for-profit social enterprise has served over 1,200 makers since 1997.

The **business incubator** is an intensive business development program with 21 offices intended to propel businesses to a new level of success within three years. The building also has kitchen facilities, high-speed internet, networked copiers and four conference rooms. Hannah Grimes has had 108 businesses in our incubator since 2006 and 90% of them are still in business today.

Workshops range from 1 ½ hours to multi-day sessions that teach participants the skills they need to grow their business, overcome obstacles, and innovate. Workshops are free or low-cost, and scholarships are readily available. In 2019, we offered 58 workshops with 677 attending.

Coaches, working professionals and experts in their respective fields, offer free monthly consultations on a multitude of topics including branding and packaging, HR, fundraising, business law, financing, and productivity. In 2019, they offered 189 free sessions, courtesy of 28 volunteer coaches.

Business Lab is a course consisting of seven weekly sessions, which builds to a completed business plan and a public pitch of their business idea. It is a hands-on, interactive class covering marketing, idea viability, values, financial management, leadership, and startup. 174 businesses have completed the program since 2004 and 82% of them remain in business today. Thirteen businesses graduated from two cohorts in 2019.

PitchFork addresses the need for capital, one of the top causes for the steep decline in startup rates in rural America. PitchFork offers a uniquely local solution to this challenge by providing a fun, low-key networking, and business pitch event for local investors to learn about promising local business ventures. The goal is to improve pitch skills and strengthen the connections that will encourage greater investment – large and small – into local economic growth. Hannah Grimes has coached over 50 businesses to pitch at PitchFork since 2016.

The Hive: coworking space that offers shared resources including a kitchen, copier, fast broadband, “telephone booths”, and a conference room. A large open space and many

quiet nooks allow for both concentration on focused tasks as well quiet conversations and collaboration. This gives individuals the ability to focus, network, problem solve, and advance their business ideas. In 2019, 109 unique visitors utilized coworking in the Hive, up from 91 in 2018.

Radically Rural Summit is an annual summit, launched in 2018, to help shape and share ideas to help rural communities thrive, that has grown to nearly 600 attendees from 25 states in partnership with our local newspaper, The Keene Sentinel. The two-day gathering has six tracks focused on Entrepreneurship, Community Journalism, Arts & Culture, Main Street, Clean Energy and Land & Community. The summit utilizes eight unique venues throughout downtown Keene; a walkable, historic small city center in the heart of New England. Combined with great local food, networking, regional art, and music, the venue presents a creative framework for substantive, high-energy learning, discussing, and sharing.”

The next stop is to explore the Hannah Grimes Marketplace in more detail.

Before there was Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship or Radically Rural gathering, there was the Hannah Grimes Marketplace. Mary Ann is an artisan and values the creative work of area artisans. The Hannah Grimes Marketplace was created to provide a commercial outlet for passionate artisans, often less interested in growing a business, then producing their art and networking with other artisans.

Hannah Grimes Marketplace

It was the marketplace where Mary Ann and her collaborators cut their teeth in supporting artisan entrepreneurs and now other kinds of entrepreneurial talent. The following is from the website. To learn more about the artisans and their creative wares, visit www.hannahgrimesmarketplace.com.



HANNAH
GRIMES
MARKETPLACE

Hanna Grimes Marketplace Mission

“The mission of Hannah Grimes Marketplace is to create a thriving market for local products and to help build the businesses of the people who make them. These makers are a group of businesses that is overlooked when considering economic development, but taken together, the members of Hannah Grimes Marketplace contribute at least \$5.4 million each year to the local economy.

The Marketplace works to educate consumers about the buy-local movement and fosters an environment that helps small-business people thrive while preserving a unique rural culture. Note that within this vision and values, is a deep commitment to community-centered development.”

The Hannah Grimes **movement** has been instrumental in creating and hosting the Keene-based **Radically Rural** gatherings.

Our next topic is focused on this premiere rural development gathering.

The first **Radically Rural** summit was held in 2018. Both the 2018 and 2019 events were in-person events staged in downtown Keene. The 2020 Summit was held remotely due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the need to avoid large in-person gatherings. The 2021 Radically Rural Summit will be held in-person September 22-23, 2021.

Radically Rural

The following is from the Radically Rural website (www.radicallyrural.org):



“Radically Rural builds sustainability and success for rural life and places by building a network that connects people to each other and to new ideas.

The Radically Rural Summit was an expansion of a regional annual “CONNECT” event hosted by the Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship and the Keene Sentinel, which was wildly popular in its essence and its impact. It is grounded in its cherishing of rural communities and the belief that when we get people together, great things happen. To this day, the CONNECT event still takes place on the evening of the first day of the summit.

During the global pandemic, the 2020 conference was held 100% virtually. Over 500 attendees from 43 states were able to choose from 22 sessions in six tracks. Tracks include Arts & Culture, Community Journalism, Land & Community, Entrepreneurship, Clean Energy and Main Street. In 2021 a Healthcare track will be added. Further, a full-time director was hired, and a three-year plan created which added two components in addition to the annual summit for growing the Radically Rural movement.

The first component is the **expansion into year-round programming**. This provides regular connection opportunities throughout the year through virtual Roundtables centered on Radically Rural track content.

The second component is a **Local Economy Indicators project**, the purpose of which is to enable greater understanding of entrepreneurial conditions in our community and to see trends early. Working together with the NH Community Development Finance Authority (CDFA), the NH Fiscal Policy Institute (NHFPI) and UNH Cooperative Extension, the group has developed a set of key entrepreneurship-related economic indicators, by county, for the state of NH and visualized the data to make it user friendly and accessible to stakeholders. Hannah Grimes will work with the NH community to encourage the use and deepen understanding of the data across the state to allow for more data-driven decision-making to entrepreneur support organizations. The plan is to refine the data set and present this as a national model for rural communities with a session in the 2022 Radically Rural Summit.

While our concern for rural communities lies in negative data trends, our hope for rural communities lies in the creativity and determination we see in the people who live there. Radically Rural values **positivity**. Its programs are friendly and welcoming. Attendees are serious about the ideas and take serious enjoyment in sharing them. The Summit celebrates and elevates what is working in rural areas across the country and holds it up as a model for others. We know that rural communities are the best ones to help each other learn and grow.

Hanna Grimes, through Radically Rural, is working to create greater impact in the arena of rural community economic development. This is an indicator of a mature organization seeking to move a field as well as benefit a hometown and home region.”

To learn more about Radically Rural and sign up for their newsletter, check out www.radicallyrural.org. The Radically Rural Newsletter provides additional content and a way to stay current not only with this gathering but the movement it is advancing.

e2 and Radically Rural

In 2021 e2 Entrepreneurial Ecosystems and NetWork Kansas are honored to be organizing the entrepreneurship track providing two powerful sessions focusing on **rural community transformation** and **mobilizing and deploying capital into rural communities**.

Mary Ann Kristiansen, Founder and Social Entrepreneur

The following is borrowed from soon-to-be released story of Mary Ann and the Hannah Grimes Center story. It is the origin story for the Hannah Grimes movement, with Mary Ann front and center as a founder and champion.



“The Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship stands as a guidepost in the rural Monadnock Region of New Hampshire. It provides sustained support, office space and authentic networking opportunities to entrepreneurs from a large variety of backgrounds. The Center itself is a story of entrepreneurship, resilience, and at times, a persistent drive mixed with a belief that we, as individuals, can do anything when our community scaffolds us. Mary Ann Kristiansen, the Center’s

executive director, didn’t always walk into an architecturally beautiful space filled with light, nor did she always have staff working with her to actualize her vision.”

Champions

In our work with community builders like Mary Ann, we employ the concept of **champions**. Champions are a type of community builder that is passionate and becomes vocational in their commitment to their hometowns and their development. They are the kind of people legendary

anthropologist references in her famous statement, *“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”* Mary Ann is a community building champion, and she has energized others around a vision of value-based community economic development.

“It all started in Keene, but truly before that in Mary Ann’s formative years soaking in her parent’s self-reliant spirit, her father commonly hunted before breakfast, and her mom made her clothes. First generation American, she lived her parent’s adjustment to their new home while she grew up in the rural Midwest. She felt the tug many first-generation Americans feel and spent time overseas traveling and, in Oslo, for school. This experience enabled her to leave her rural roots and pursue her ambitions in New York, seeking the challenges of city life while changing careers starting in advertising, transitioning to publishing, and finally ending up administrating seven clinics for Merrill Lynch employees. In between, she pursued an advanced degree in public administration. But her New York days came to a halt as downsizing ended her administrative career and set her on a path to her destiny, well-equipped with a cadre of talents honed through these years of business exposure.

Her husband’s work brought them to Keene in 1991. Mary Ann found and purchased Hannah Grimes’ home in Roxbury, a town of 238 inhabitants that abuts Keene. There was an instant connection to this land, and she naturally fell into the rhythm of New England life, reconnecting with her rural roots. She researched the history of her home and came across Hannah’s story and imagined this wife, cook, mother, and farmer who traded, bought, and bartered for everything she couldn’t make or grow - like many in her day. This idea of local economy resonated with Mary Ann; she had been raised in large part to live off the land. She understood Hannah and began walking her path.

She joined a spinning group and made soap. But, as her craftsmanship evolved, to Mary Ann’s surprise there were no local markets for these products in the early 1990s. Her spinning companions, although true artisans, were struggling to sell their wares at local craft events for reasonable prices. They also lacked the business know-how to grow their business. She saw a niche in her community, but much of the infrastructure to buy and sell and trade with neighbors was gone. Mary Ann wanted to provide a physical marketplace and business skills for sellers and to educate local consumers and give them a convenient, single downtown location to buy locally made products.

In the late 1990s, the Buy Local movement didn't exist, and many didn't realize the interdependence our rural communities rely upon to succeed, especially in areas where many manufacturing industries have disappeared. She wanted to reconnect the purchasing public and the skilled artisans around the uniqueness of place - her place - the Monadnock Region, NH.



To promote the artisan community, she held a local Festival, The Traditional Craft & Industry Fair, at her home, taking in no profit for herself. She was energized to attract local purchasers and provide an opportunity for them to reimagine “locally made” through real connections with the community of local producers. She wanted to create a community that would be proud of what is local, purchase local, and tell their friends that purchasing locally had value.

About this time her spinning friend Deb Dugan's husband, Jack Dugan, a local economic developer, purchased a strip of buildings on the eastern side of Keene's Main Street. Mary Ann was invited to fill a property with a nonprofit venture, the Hannah Grimes Marketplace, to create a thriving market for locally made and grown products and to help build the businesses of the people who make and grow those products. Unable to move in before Christmas due to construction delays, she first opened Hannah Grimes Marketplace in November 1997 in a temporary space, much larger than today's space, with only months to collect the necessary wares to sell. Her naivety and tenacity helped Mary Ann fill the space and create even more local connections. Craftsmen contacted her, the news was spreading, there would be a place for local artisans to sell their goods. They were no longer alone - there was a place that would promote their products and build their business skills.

For Mary Ann, moving to Main Street didn't change the personal atmosphere she created at her home, but what did change was the day-to-day organizing of a retail shop. She held the fair, taking no profit. Now, she needed to run a retail store, with daily tallies, the need for upfront capital and sales goals, answering to a board of directors, all while convincing locals the value of its wares. Her persistence and belief in the value of a strong local economy enabled her to convince her community that she had brought something of essential value into the store - their neighbors' wares. Locals were learning that purchasing from local artisans had value to the broader local community, that knowing who made an item of clothing or cheese had a coolness factor that can't easily be measured, and all while she was learning how to run the retail shop in a way that was equitable to the artisan members and the marketplace while being sustainable.

Ultimately, the IRS rejected the nonprofit filing and Hannah Grimes established its current structure, a 501(c)3 wherein the Hannah Grimes Center owns the for-profit Hannah Grimes Marketplace. Each organization has its own board of directors and completely separate governance and financials. As the Marketplace developed, so did its offerings. Business workshops were offered from the beginning for things like tax filings, e-commerce, and pricing, but by 2004 Mary Ann saw an interest among some members for programming that supported more ambitious growth. After successful USDA rural business grant applications in 2004-05, the Marketplace hired a business coach and offered a facilitated peer group to support more growth-oriented craftsmen and artisans. The program offered members a path to strong revenue and employee growth."

The Hannah Grimes Center Story. This story of Hannah Grimes and Mary Ann and her collaborators continues. Mary Ewell is curating this story to be released later in 2021. For those looking for more granular detail about program impact, check out the [Hannah Grimes Center Program Analysis](#) (September 2020) by BCE Consulting.

While we had heard of Hannah Grimes and particularly the Radically Rural gathering, it was not until Mary Ann reached out to see if we could advise her on a new project to capture this remarkable collection of stories. The Marketplace opened in 1997 or 24 years ago. Mary Ann and her collaborators were thinking about the future of this work and the day that Mary Ann, as the founder, would back away from active engagement. Capturing this story was important to lay a foundation for those who are taking up the charge of ensuring the Hannah Grimes movement is alive and well for another quarter of a century.

Journey Chronology

1730s	The origins of what becomes Keene, New Hampshire, where the Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship, Marketplace and Radically Rural gathering are located, take root in extreme southwestern New Hampshire. This community is deep in New England history and culture, reflected today in the values of the Hannah Grimes movement.
1994	The Traditional Craft & Industry Fair - At the home of Mary Ann - this fair was the impetus for the Hannah Grimes Marketplace.
March 1997	Jack Dugan from Monadnock Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) approaches Mary Ann about opening a retail store to serve local producers in the former Woolworth building that MEDC was retrofitting to retail and office space after Woolworth closed. Mary Ann began contacting producers, building a board, and applying for 501(c)3 status.
1997	Received a loan from NH Community Development Finance Authority (CDFA).
November 1997	Renovations are not complete on the former Woolworth's building, so the Hannah Grimes Marketplace opens in a temporary location near its permanent home on Main Street in Keene for holiday shopping in November.
June 1998	Hannah Grimes Marketplace moves into its permanent location at 42 Main Street in Keene.
March 2001	After four years of back and forth with the IRS, Hannah Grimes created two separate legal entities - a 501(c)3 nonprofit the Hannah Grimes Center and a for-profit business, Hannah Grimes Marketplace. The Hannah Grimes Center is the owner of the Marketplace.
2004	Hannah Grimes Marketplace received an USDA grant to run a one-year program, The Entrepreneur Project, consisting of monthly meetings facilitated by a business coach to offer a next level of business support to some of the more ambitious Marketplace members. At its conclusion, the five businesses in the program had 30% year-over-year growth and added, on average, one new employee per business. At the successful conclusion of this program in October 2005 is when MEDC invited HGC to take over operations of their business incubator. The programming established over the past year with this USDA grant was deemed a good start toward incubator programming.
May 2005	Mary Ann takes a small office in the same building as HGM and has "wall space".

January 2006	Mary Ann accepts the invitation of Monadnock Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) from its president Jack Dugan to take over the operations of a business incubator initiative they had started but which had failed to attract tenants. HG now has office space and a conference room. Hannah Grimes took over the incubator space, just one block off of Main Street, and instituted an incubator program based on the successful conclusion of The Entrepreneur Project. This broadened the scope of sectors of entrepreneurs that HG worked with beyond the makers and growers that constituted the community of entrepreneurs at HGM. The Marketplace continued to operate separately on Main Street. With a small amount of funds remaining from the previous incubator, HGC hired a second employee, an administrative assistant.
October 2007	HGC has been in the building 1 ½ years and raises \$300k to purchase the building.
September 2008	Hannah Grimes Center for Entrepreneurship launches its fall CONNECT event to connect alumni from multiple Entrepreneur Project cohorts. In just a couple of years, this event is opened to all the HG community and eventually becomes the impetus for the Radically Rural Summit.
2010	In the wake of the recession, HG hires its first program director – bringing the total number of employees to three.
2010-2011	The Center has its first makeover after securing capital funds of \$900k from local, state, and federal sources. This developed previously unused space in the lower level of the building, adding a new conference room, 15 incubating offices and 3 staff offices.
2014-2015	The Center had its second makeover after capital funds of \$1 million were secured from local and state sources. This allowed for the main level to be restructured and created two additional conference rooms that could be combined to hold up to 75 and seven new offices. It also provided some upgrades to a space in the building occupied by a separate nonprofit whose lease pre-dated HG's purchase of the building.
2016	<p>The Keene Sentinel partnered with HG on the fall CONNECT event, a powerful partnership that grew the event from a steady 150 attendees each fall to a high-energy, themed event that attracted 420 attendees. This ultimately led to the creation of Radically Rural.</p> <p>The nonprofit renting part of the building closed, and the space was leased to a private business for one year then had a redesign to become a co-working space – the HIVE – with a capacity of 138 which opened up the possibility for larger in-house events on limited evenings and weekends. The HIVE also offered new incubating opportunities for non-office related activities, for example, a live music venue launched from there and grew into a restaurant and art bar and a church launched from there as well.</p>
2018	Together with the Keene Sentinel, HG launched Radically Rural, a two-day conference for rural residents from across the country to share success stories in the areas of Main Street, Arts & Culture, Community Journalism, Land & Community, & Rural Entrepreneurship. The CONNECT event became the main networking event in the evening between the first and second days.
2019	Center's employee positions expanded to a much needed fourth with the addition of an Operations Coordinator to support the Operation Director building, finance, and marketing responsibilities.

2019	Radically Rural expands - introducing the Clean Energy track to its lineup
2020	Receives grant to support a FT, 3-year position to enhance the Radically Rural Conference
Pandemic World Health Crisis and Economic Recession	
<p>The COVID-19 Pandemic and associated economic recession has challenged businesses, governments, and nonprofits. The Hannah Grimes Center, Marketplace and Radically Rural has been challenged as well. The Radically Rural gathering went virtual in 2020. Though challenging, Hannah Grimes has emerged in a strong position. Too many entrepreneurial development organizations and initiatives will not. It is important to remember that there are many failures during the worst of a major crisis, like the Great Recession or now the Pandemic Recession. But many are also weakened, and failure later comes.</p>	
2021	2021 continues with the Pandemic health crisis and recession. But signs of recovery are increasing. Current U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) projections call for herd immunity by mid-summer based on vaccination rates. Economic recovery signs are growing stronger. Radically Rural is projected to be both held in-person and virtually.
Future	The Hannah Grimes story is 24 years and continuing. No one knows what the future holds for these remarkable entrepreneurship initiatives. We are betting that in another generation this story will be richer, creating impact and lessons to be learned.

Community Economic Development Never Ends

Community economic development is a local responsibility in America, unlike most of the rest of the mature economies in the world. Community economic development is a 24-7-365 forever job. Entrepreneur-led development requires both a forever and robust commitment if it is to ensure community vitality over time. We believe a key to ensuring the ongoing work of initiatives like Hannah Grimes is growing permanent charitable endowments to provide core operational funding, opportunity funds to meet new opportunities and a safety net during tough times. Check out our paper, [Entrepreneurship and Community Philanthropy](#), for more information.

At times, we feel powerless in our rural communities. We perceive that the global forces are working against us, and our sense of hopelessness deepens. At e2, we believe that community-centered entrepreneur-led development is foundational to rural vitality. A vitality that does not displace us (e.g., external development and/or gentrification) but empowers our existing and new residents to grow brighter futures for their families and in turn evolve more vibrant and livable communities. The Hannah Grimes stories is one of empowering dreams, growing better lives, and evolving more vibrant rural communities.

Empowering Dreams, Better Lives and Vibrant Communities

We hope this paper and accompanying **Pathways to Rural Prosperity Podcast** [episode](#) serves the following purposes:

Inform and inspire. This evolving story is powerful and can inform and inspire our field of entrepreneur-led development. We thank Hannah Grimes for your innovation and impact. We have much to learn from your experience.

Drive engagement. We encourage our e2 readers to use this story and others to drive community engagement to explore how you can grow a more prosperous community through entrepreneur-led development and ecosystem building. Avoid using the Hannah Grimes model as the solution for your community but focus on the underlying lessons and how they can help your community find your right and smart entrepreneurship game plan.

Empower you and your rural community. We believe stories like this one are powerful and can inspire us in rural America that we can vision and grow more vibrant rural communities and regions. The burden of this hard, but rewarding work falls on you and your community. But we hope you are inspired to take that next step and grow a more entrepreneurial community in your corner of rural America.

Let us know what you think. Join our e2 National Practitioners Network, subscribe to our e2 Newsletter and our Pathways to Rural Prosperity Podcasts. More important, let us know what you are doing or the challenges you are facing by contacting Don Macke at don@e2mail.org.

Questions and Additional Information

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