

Sidney, Nebraska

Becoming an Entrepreneurial Community

Introduction – Why this Story is Important. Most rural communities in the United States are distressed today. Their core industries are in decline or have left. Demographically there is a hollowing out of the population. Across America there are counter stories of communities pursuing renewed vitality and prosperity. At e2 we have spend decades discovering, learning about, and when possible, capturing these stories. Sidney, Nebraska is one of these stories. Despite a massive economic crash, Sidney is becoming an entrepreneurial community regenerating its prospects for brighter futures. Sidney’s story is important to other communities and policymakers with powerful lessons on how rural community revitalization occurs.

About Sidney and its Rural Region. Sidney is a community of just over 6,000 residents serving a region of about 10,000. Located in the Central High Plains within North America’s Great Plains Region, Sidney is semi-arid and the drive time to the Denver Metroplex is just two hours. Sidney was founded during the building of the Transcontinental Railroad in the 1860s, making it about 160 years old. Sidney has a history socio-economic boom-and-busts associated with single industries and employers. In the early 2000s Sidney was booming and home to Cabela’s national corporate headquarters. By 2018 Cabela’s, now owned by Bass Pro Shops, lost up to 2,000 workers and entered deep recession.

Timeline and Key Events. To appreciate the power of Sidney’s resurgence story, a quick timeline overview with key events is helpful:

Cabela’s Founded	1961	Sidney’s 1960 population = 8,004
The Region’s Oil Boom is Contracting	1970	Sidney’s Population = 6,984
Cabela’s is Beginning to Grow	1990	Sidney’s Population is 6,049
Cabela’s is Booming	2000	Sidney’s Population is 6,371
Cabela’s Employs 2,000 Workers in the Region		Workers Commute from a Multi-County Area
U.S. Great Recession – Cabela’s Struggles	2007-2009	Dropping Discretionary Consumer Spending
Cabela’s Becomes a Public Company	2004	Cabela’s Becomes a Candidate for Acquisition
Sidney’s Peaks in Population = 6,990	2016	Outmigration Begins and Peaks Up
Bass Pro Shops Announces it is Buying Cabela’s	2017	Corporate Headwaters Growth Stops
Bass Pro Shops Acquires Cabela’s	2018	Corporate Headwaters Eliminate Jobs
Sidney’s Population Bottoms = 6,180	2019	Available Housing Drives In-migration
Sidney Joins E3	2021	Exploring Entrepreneurship
Population Loss Stabilizes		eChampions Emerge
Sidney Commits to E2	2022	Funds & Hires a eNavigator
Sidney E3 Commits to Youth Entrepreneurship	2023	Launches...Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge
Hires a Second Navigator	2024	Generates 114 Entrepreneurial Deals

Sidney E3 and its entrepreneurial ecosystem initiative is less than three-years old, and yet it is generating major community economic development wins empowering transformation.



Emerging Transformative Change. In less than a decade, Sidney has activated a major development pivot and transformed from a huge corporate loss and recession to renewal and a more diversified economy. There are new and visionary leaders in Sidney. They are younger and focusing on entrepreneurship. Discernible culture change

and evidence of socio-economic renewal is abundant. Nothing demonstrates this transformation more than the illustration above highlighting the addition of 112 new companies realized in the community over the past few years.

How Sidney's is Renewing. Many factors are contributing to Sidney's renewal. e2's case study documents the following five key drivers¹:

1. Empowering New Leadership and Activated Community Builders – Rising Resident Agency
2. Real Commitment to Entrepreneurial Talent Development and Support
3. A Strong Entrepreneurial Ground Game with Professional Entrepreneur Navigators
4. Robust Investment into Entrepreneurship and Community Building
5. Entrepreneurial Driven Community Building and Quality of Life Enhancements

Conclusion – From Corporate to an Entrepreneurial Community. For over 50 years, two generations of time, Sidney prospered on the back of Cabela's. Like other rural communities dependent upon a single industry or major employer Sidney was at risk should Cabela's falter. When Sidney lost Cabela's it crashed, like a phoenix it is rising again on the back of hundreds of rooted entrepreneurs growing a more diverse, resilient, and once again prosperous community. This is a story in the making and worth continuing monitoring.

Resources. A complete listing of all the *Sidney Case Study* and stories can be found at e2's website at www.energizingentrepreneurs.org and the Sidney Story landing page at...

Questions and Additional Information

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¹ e2's *Sidney Case Study* dives deep into how Sidney's transformation is occurring.

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