

SMALL TOWN REVITALIZATION – COMMUNITY PROFILE

Name of Community: Albion Nebraska

Population: 1699 (*add date*)

Community Type (circle one): Unincorporated – Village – Town – City

Key Contacts:

Name: Amber Wynn

Title & Role: Village Clerk

Organization: City of Albion

Phone: 402-395-2428

Email: utilityclerk@cityofalbion-ne.com

Website: [Albion, Nebraska \(cityofalbion-ne.com\)](http://Albion, Nebraska (cityofalbion-ne.com))

Name (**Champion**): **Jeff Jarecki**

Title & Role: President of AEDC & local attorney

Organization: Albion Economic Dev. Corp. & Partner at Jarecki Sharp & Peterson Law.

Phone:

Email:

Website: [City of Albion, Nebraska \(wpengine.com\)](http://City of Albion, Nebraska (wpengine.com))

Name: Michelle Olson

Title & Role: Director

Organization: Albion Economic Development Corporation

Phone:

Email: michelleolson@boone-county.org

Website:

Active Chamber of Commerce or Business Association: y/n

If yes, name: Albion Chamber of Commerce

Active Economic Development Corporation or Committee: y/n

If yes, Name: Albion Economic Development Corp.

Part of a Regional Economic Development Corporation: y/n

If yes, Name: Boone County Development Agency

Success Stories, Events, Best Practices:

- Façade Program = 400k investments in downtown
- Community Daycare Facility (capacity 80 kids)
- Removed dilapidated building in downtown and now used for social gatherings, arts, music.
- Boone County Trails system
- Dilapidated Building Assistance
- Downtown Revitalization Grant
- New Ag Arena
- Raised 26mm to renovate the hospital
- Big Give – Boone County Community Fund
- Passed Ne Law LB840 providing additional tax revenue to small towns

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- Increased local tax %, per LB840, to invest into economic development.
- Host to the Boone County Fair each July (Regional)
- Host to Holiday Lights Parade each December (local)

Informational Website Links:

Eleanor J Shirley says:

March 18, 2022 at 8:03 pm

As a person from small town rural SW Iowa, now living in Omaha, this story is inspirational! I see efforts in my small, rural hometown led by a “community pride” group but these kind of dollars and community investment aren’t flowing there—yet. Knowing Jay Wolf, I can only imagine the developing leadership, collaboration, and ongoing commitment to and in Albion. The Early Childhood program is awesome, too! Congrats!

- [Albion, investing in itself, shows how small towns can thrive - Flatwater Free Press](#)
- [Albion, Nebraska \(cityofalbion-ne.com\)](#)
- [City of Albion, Nebraska \(albionne.com\)](#)
- [Boone County Development Agency \(boone-county.org\)](#)
- <https://youtu.be/ppzBcQ9aurY> Video of young entrepreneurs in Boone County.
- [Albion Economic Development Corporation \(AEDC\) | Albion NE](#)

The Local Option Municipal Economic Development Act (LB840, 1991) authorized incorporated cities and villages — if approved by local voters — to collect and appropriate local tax dollars, including sales and/or property tax, for economic development purposes. The legislation, passed in 1991, provided Albion with an additional .5% increase in local sales tax receipts. For Albion, this added roughly \$120,000 per/yr in additional funding, earmarked for economic development investments in Albion and Boone County. This money was saved up for many years and eventually was used toward the projects they’ve developed over the past 20 years or so.

To implement an LB840 program, communities formulate a written economic development plan which, if voter-approved, becomes the foundation for the collection and expenditure of local tax revenues for economic development under which the municipality’s LB840 program operates.

[Local Option Municipal Economic Development Act \(LB840\) - Nebraska Department of Economic Development](#)

Introduction:

Albion Nebraska, located about 2hrs west and north of Omaha, is a small town of nearly 1700 residents, and many community Champions. They’ve inspired us with their ongoing commitment to make their community the best place it can be...

“The child care center and arena are two of the nearly dozen major projects undertaken in and around Albion, pop. 1,699, in the past decade. And they represent something else to local leaders and rural

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development experts – proof that small towns can build a better future if residents quite literally invest in making that future possible.” – Flatwater Free Press, Article by Matthew Hansen March 11th, 2022

Story: This story began in the 90's with a spark when the Nebraska State legislature passed LB840 into law. This allowed eligible communities, such as Albion, to increase and collect an additional .5% of the local resale taxes. In 2002 a group of citizens, including teachers and students, renovated the old movie theatre which now runs current releases and is operated by high school students. Since that time Albion has completed many projects, many in the last 10 to 12 years as they've grown their capacity to fund raise and complete these important projects. Something of a turning point for Albion was the creation of the Boone County Big Give event that started in 2013 and includes the Boone County Foundation Fund. The Big Give event accepts local donations and then applies a matching portion to each donation which multiplies that donations they receive. This gave the leaders in Albion one more way to maximize every dollar of donations they receive during the Big Give event. They're a town of many champions, which is a huge reason for their continued success. "With each new project it seems like a new Champion emerges to take the lead, even to the point that when you're the point person on a project, and it gets completed, you're more likely to be left alone for a period of time and others will take on the next project." Said Jeff Jarecki, board member of the Albion Economic Development Corporation. "We all realize what it takes to lead these efforts so it's nice to be able to take a little break once something is completed, it's wonderful that we have so many engaged community leaders and Champions of Albion"

Albion, a small town in Nebraska located approximately 2 hours west and north of Omaha, is home to nearly 1700 residents who have become community champions. Their dedication and ongoing commitment to making their community the best place it can be is inspiring. According to an article by Matthew Hansen in the Flatwater Free Press on March 11th, 2022, the child care center and arena are just two of the almost dozen major projects that have been undertaken in and around Albion in the past decade. For local leaders and rural development experts, these projects represent proof that small towns can build a better future if residents invest in making that future possible.

The story of Albion's success began in the 1990s when the Nebraska State legislature passed LB840 into law, allowing eligible communities such as Albion to increase and collect an additional .5% of local resale taxes. In 2002, a group of citizens including teachers and students renovated the old movie theater, which now shows current releases and is operated by high school students.

Since then, Albion has completed numerous projects, with many being accomplished in the past 10 to 12 years as the town has increased its capacity to fundraise and complete important projects. The creation of the Boone County Big Give event in 2013, which includes the Boone County Foundation Fund, was a turning point for Albion. The event accepts local donations and applies a matching portion to each donation, multiplying the donations they receive. This provided Albion's leaders with one more way to maximize every dollar of donations they receive during the Big Give event.

Albion's success can be attributed in large part to the many community champions who have emerged with each new project. According to Jeff Jarecki, a board member of the Albion Economic Development Corporation, "With each new project, it seems like a new champion emerges to take the lead, even to the point that when you're the point person on a project, and it gets completed, you're more likely to be left alone for a period of time and others will take on the next project. We all realize what it takes to lead these efforts, so it's nice to be able to take a little break once something is completed. It's wonderful that we have so many engaged community leaders and champions of Albion."

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The town of Albion, population 1,699, in Nebraska has undergone a major transformation in the past decade, with nearly a dozen major projects undertaken in and around the town. These projects include a new child care center, a rodeo arena and ag barn, an aquatic center, a walking trail, a theater, and more. The town raised approximately \$14 million, almost all local donations, to build these projects. The success of these projects is a testament to the power of investing in the local community, and the need for residents to invest in making that future possible. More than \$100 billion in wealth will transfer from one generation to the next in the coming decade, and in Boone County, an estimated \$600 million - the majority tied to farmland and ranching - will change hands in the next 10 years. If the local community foundation and other philanthropies capture even 5% of that transfer of wealth, it would mean \$30 million reinvested in the county. This is the target set by Boone County leaders, who are buoyed by recent success. The town is now home to a new community fitness center, a renovated historic theater, an aquatic center, a walking trail, pickle ball courts, and more. The town's success has been gradual, but it has given the community a newfound sense that things are getting better, and can continue to get better still.

Important addition(s) to the story...

While achieving success in their downtown renovations in the mid 2010's the community was searching for the next big project. Rather than just continue, as they had, to focus on the downtown improvements with the folks who lived in town, they decided to reach out to the Ag community around Albion. They asked "what services or amenities would they like to see in Albion?" The result was an Ag Entertainment Center, which has now been added to the list of successful improvements to the City of Albion. In addition, they've built more capacity by engaging the Ag community and picked up a legacy financial donor to support their local 501c3 economic development corporation.

Another primary indicator of the impact of the Ag Entertainment Center is that now, April of 2023, the hotel is adding over 20 rooms onto their existing hotel, increasing the capacity by roughly 33%.

Albion, investing in itself, shows how small towns can thrive

- By [Matthew Hansen](#)
- March 11, 2022
- [Publish this story](#)

If you want to see a small-town crackling with energy, drive to Albion and enter the front door of Boone Beginnings. Nearly two dozen infants, toddlers and young children climb out of car seats and pinball their way into the brand-new child care center, where they commence finger painting, story time and the eating of healthy snacks.

Boone Beginnings opened in November. This option for Albion's young families didn't exist. Not until the town raised \$4.5 million to build it.

If you need more proof of this small town's spark, drive out to the Boone County Fairgrounds, where on a Saturday afternoon you may find the parking lot of the arena and ag center jammed with horse trailers.

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“People competing in local barrel racing,” said Kurt Kruse. “We’re drawing people from fifty miles, 80 miles, hundreds of miles away, and they are spending money in Boone County.”

The Niewohner Arena and Boone County Agriculture and Education Center opened in May 2020. This option for riding, livestock shows, concerts and rodeos didn’t exist. Not until Albion raised \$3.6 million to build it.

The child care center and arena are two of the nearly dozen major projects undertaken in and around Albion, pop. 1,699, in the past decade. And they represent something else to local leaders and rural development experts – proof that small towns can build a better future if residents quite literally invest in making that future possible.

Boone County has raised an estimated \$14 million – almost all local donations – to build these projects as well as an aquatic center, a walking trail, a theater, an endowment and many more.

Local money has driven the change. And the change has driven more money, and more change, gathering speed and mass like a snowball rolling downhill.

On a separate note, Jeff Jarecki stated that a “tipping point” for their success was working with the Boone County Foundation

Boone County Foundation Fund
PO Box 66
Albion, NE 68620
info@boonecountyareafoundation.com

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Bull riding at the Boone County Agriculture & Education Center in Albion. The arena and ag barn, which opened in 2020 after a \$3.6 fundraising drive, now hosts rodeos, concerts and a variety of other local events. Photo courtesy of the Boone County Agriculture and Education Center

“Once our wealth leaves the community, it’s gone forever,” said Jeff Yost, president and CEO of the Nebraska Community Foundation, which works with Albion and 270 Nebraska communities. “Once our wealth is endowed in our community, it’s here forever.”

More than \$100 billion in wealth will transfer from one generation to the next in the coming decade, according to an economic study recently released by the Nebraska Community Foundation.

Roughly half of this transfer of money and assets will happen in the Omaha and Lincoln metros. But far more wealth than you might expect will transfer in Nebraska’s rural counties.

In Albion’s Boone County, an estimated \$600 million – the majority tied to farmland and ranching – will change hands in the next 10 years.

The big question: How much of that money will stay?

Much will travel to the bank accounts of sons and daughters spread across the country, say rural development experts. But if the local community foundation and other local philanthropies capture even five percent of that transfer of wealth, it would mean \$30 million reinvested in this county of roughly 5,400 people.

Boone County leaders, buoyed by recent success, have set that as their target.

“If your kids can’t get along with 95 percent, they probably aren’t gonna get along with 100 percent,” Kruse said.

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It wasn't always like this. The farm crisis of the 1980s devastated Albion. A generation of high school graduates hightailed it after receiving their diplomas. Precious few people put their trust, or their treasure, in Boone County.

"As my dad used to say, it wasn't a place you chose to live necessarily," said Jay Wolf, an area rancher.

Even during the dark times, Albion leaders did manage to avert disaster. Crucially, they held onto their hospital, which today has grown, employs 18 doctors and physicians' assistants and is the area's single biggest employer, Wolf said.

And Albion started a local community foundation, one that existed sleepily for years before jolting wide awake.

The success started in the 1990s with the construction of a new community fitness center that boasts an indoor swimming pool and spinning classes not available in most small towns.

In 2002, a group of citizens, teachers and high school students renovated the town's historic theater. Today, the Gateway Theater shows first-run movies on weekend evenings. The theater is run by a high school class focused on turning teenagers into budding entrepreneurs.

Roughly 15 years ago, city and community foundation leaders decided they wanted to raise \$2.5 million to redo the local nursing home.

One problem: "We had never raised even \$250,000 for anything in this town," Wolf said.

They pushed aside doubts and raised the money. And then, when it became clear the nursing home needed it, they raised \$2.5 million more. A metaphorical light bulb went on inside the heads of Wolf and other community leaders.

"It started to happen. It happened gradually, but it did happen," Wolf said.

A decade ago, the community raised funds to replace its ancient pool with a brand-new aquatic center. More recently, the community raised money to build a 2-mile walking trail and pickle ball courts. Albion now boasts a local brewery, two new restaurants, two boutiques, a good coffee shop, a nice 9-hole golf course, a renovated school, a renovated hospital and a newfound sense that things are getting better, and can continue to get better still.

"It seems like when one person takes a risk, it nudges someone else on the edge, and they do it, too," said Lindsey Jarecki, a one-time Omaha schoolteacher who moved to town with her husband, an Albion native, when he started a law practice a decade ago. "So much of this stuff simply wasn't here when we got here... You can practically feel the confidence building."

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Lindsey Jarecki (left) and Kendra Krohn, both board members of the Boone Beginnings Early Childhood and Family Development Center, pose for a photo at the reception area of the facility. Darin Epperly for the Flatwater Free Press

The biggest risk may have been the twin projects that scared Jarecki and other local leaders because of their size and importance.

Boone County, like most rural places, has for years desperately needed affordable, accessible child care.

And many in Boone County wanted to emphasize the area's rural roots by improving the fairgrounds and building a new arena and agricultural center.

These two groups of community leaders wanted to raise money for these projects simultaneously.

"There was fear, so we had to come together," Jarecki said. "We decided we were gonna support each other no matter what... We trusted each other... and the community trusted us."

Here's how much Boone County trusted them: Jarecki and her early childhood counterparts raised some 80 percent of the funds for Boone Beginnings from inside the county line.

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Three-year-old Avery waters a plant at Boone Beginnings in Albion. The young student is one of nearly a half-dozen enrolled at the early childhood center, which opened in November. Photo courtesy of Boone Beginnings
For years, panicked parents of young children in Albion clawed to get into the limited spots of area child care providers, Jarecki said.

Since Boone Beginnings opened, nearly two dozen sets of parents “no longer have to worry about where their kids are or how they are being cared for,” Jarecki said. “These parents are happy. These parents are calm.”

Eight more babies are expected to start soon.

Simultaneously, the leaders of the ag project raised nearly all their money from local donors and county funds.

Since opening, it has hosted major cattle shows that drew attendees from eight different states. And a sold-out bull riding event. And concerts, barrel racing, dog trials, junior rodeo.

It’s an entertainment option for local families. It’s a serious tourist draw that simply didn’t exist a few years ago.

“One cool thing that happened is a lot of people gave to both projects,” said Kruse, who helped spearhead the project. “But the ag building also attracted some rural people who hadn’t previously given.

“Both these things...will help the area grow. They will bring people to town.”

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Hundreds of attendees from across Nebraska and the region attended a recent cattle show at the Boone County Agriculture & Education Center in Albion. The arena and ag barn has become a tourist draw. “We’re drawing people from fifty miles, 80 miles, hundreds of miles away, and they are spending money in Boone County,” said Kurt Kruse, who helped to spearhead the fundraising project to build the center. Photo courtesy of the Boone County Agriculture and Education Center

The twin projects give Boone County leaders confidence that they can continue to raise millions by capturing some chunk of the coming transfer of wealth.

Baby Boomers are aging in Nebraska’s small towns. Many of their sons and daughters live elsewhere. The antidote is a years-long effort to educate residents about the importance of keeping some money in their hometowns, Yost said.

“One thing that divides the haves and the have nots is a handful of community leaders in these places who look at this as generational work. Because that’s what it is,” he said.

There are still many problems to tackle in Albion. Housing is in crisis, like it is across rural Nebraska. It’s hard to find a middle-class home, and wildly costly to build, leaders say.

And the size of the local community endowment needs to get bigger.

Right now, roughly \$7 million is parked in the Boone County Community Fund and related charities. Local leaders Wolfe and Kruse say that number needs to get closer to \$30 million.

But that fundraising may be easier in Albion than it is in many other small towns, Yost said. It may be easier because Albion has already proven itself.

“My sense is that, in the last 20 years, the conversation has shifted dramatically in Albion,” Yost said. “We work with a lot of places that have one or two successes. In Boone County, they now have almost a dozen things they can point to and say: ‘Look at that. We did that.’”

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Additional info 3/29/23

Spoke with Lori Krohn, Director of the Chamber of Commerce, and she gave me some more insights to the successes in Albion.

- New Brewery, only 3 yrs old
- Boone County EDA has young entrepreneur's program
- Kyle Mock, photographer of their annual fair and many other events. Kyle's number is 402-741-1041, she said he would be a great contact for photos and videos.
- Michelle Olson is the Director of Boone County Development and she can be reached at michelleolson@boone-county.org
- Albion Economic Development Director is Maggie Smith 402-416-9531
- Add a community pool to the list of good ideas.
- Add Light Parade f/events at Christmas time
- Photo's might be available through the Albion Area Art Council
- [2017-DTR-PLAN_Final-Version.pdf \(albionne.com\)](#)

Photos and Images for Albion:

Before



After



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Link to BCDA Entrepreneurs video [Start Your Business - Boone County Development Agency \(boone-county.org\)](https://www.boone-county.org/Start-Your-Business)

Additional links and information below from Maggie Smith, Economic Development & Housing Director for the Albion Economic Development Corporation.

Good morning, Jerry! These pictures were shared with me by the Albion Area Arts Council and have been cleared for sharing with you for use.

Thank you for highlighting, Albion! The people here are doing great things. In late March we submitted a housing grant for which the businesses of the community created a local matching fund of over \$550,000; if granted that money will be matched 2 to 1 for a total revolving fund created of over \$1.5 million. It's an amazing community!

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Some of our community highlights:

Boone Beginnings (state of the art child development facility)

<https://boonebeginnings.com/>

Boone County Health Center (2023 Top 100 Critical Access Hospital and a millions of dollars expansion to clinic and hospital services in 2022-2024)

<https://boonecohealth.org/>

Boone County Recreation Trail: Phase 1

<https://albionnewsonline.com/2018/10/23/trail-officially-open/>

Niewohner Arena & Agriculture and Education Center

<https://boonecountyarena.com/>

Boone County Raceway

<http://www.boonecountyraceway.com/>

Olson Nature Preserve

<https://www.prairieplains.org/preserves/olson-nature-preserve.html>

Boone Central Public Schools

<https://www.boonecentral.org/>

Albion Area Arts Council (2023 is the second year of the Summer Concert Series, bringing in nationally recognized and touring artists for free Thursday concerts in downtown.)

http://albionartscouncil.org/site/?page_id=13

Thank you again for reaching out! And for helping me to make a connection with Brittany Gipson. What a treasure!

In gratitude,
Maggie

Maggie Smith

Economic Development & Housing Program Director

Albion Economic Development Corporation

o: 402.395.4453

c: 402.416.9531

msmith@cityofalbion-ne.com

Wear gratitude like a cloak, and it will feed every corner of your life. *Rumi*

An adventure is only an inconvenience rightly considered. *G.K. Chesterton*

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Art Council:

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Summer Concerts:

