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BC RURAL CENTRE
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Fall 2017

A FRESH START

Earlham, Iowa



A Rural Success Story



Expanding cultural and recreational opportunities for Iowans through the restoration and redevelopment of the historic Bricker-Price Block in the heart of the vibrant, rural community of Earlham, Iowa.





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DOWN BUT NOT OUT — EARLHAM'S STORY **INTRODUCTION**



THROUGH A COMBINATION OF PERSEVERANCE, COMMUNITY RESILIENCE, TIMING, AND GOOD LUCK, A SMALL IOWA TOWN TAKES A BIG STEP TOWARD COMMUNITY RENEWAL.

This small Iowa town didn't fear its future. It just didn't know if it had a future at all.

Residents worried Earlham might be over the hill, past its prime.

This town's struggles and dismal downtown business district were all too familiar across the sparsely populated Iowa rural landscape.

But this year, Earlham made a major breakthrough: The combination of a wealthy, connected donor and engaged residents has made it possible for the town to get ready to open a \$2.1 million social hub a year from now, with a restaurant, events centre and more.

Supporters hope it sparks a downtown rebirth.

Earlham is only 30 miles west of Des Moines, but is a world apart from Iowa's demographic centre of gravity. Its 1,450 residents live just beyond the metro's near orbit and just south of Interstate 80. An Iowa State University study two years ago showed that more than three-fourths of Earlham residents commute outside the county to work.

A third attempt here last year to pass a \$5 million school bond was voted down. And yet, gradually, a palpable sense has grown in recent years that residents were eager to

attempt an economic revival. Slowly, things began to change.

A dentist office opened in town.

A young couple moved back home to take over the grocery store.

The downtown strip boasts a bank. A chiropractor. A renovated bar.

Owners of a store with vintage and handmade wares briefly flirted with opening a second shop in downtown Des Moines' East Village. But ultimately they chose to shutter their urban address and stay in Earlham.

Former Des Moines Register photographer Steve Pope, who already publishes the newspaper in his hometown of St. Ansgar, has revived the dormant Earlham Echo.

And then there's the organic sheep rancher who came to town — a rancher with access to more than the standard set of resources and connections.



A TALE OF SHEEP & MONEY

"It's such a genuine and kind and proud community. I just fell in love."

— Sharon Krause

Eight years ago Sharon Krause bought 220 acres a few miles north of Earlham, where she established Iowa's first organic sheep ranch, Dalla Terra.

Krause's husband, Kyle, is the CEO and owner of Kum & Go, a convenience store chain currently building its new \$151 million headquarters in downtown Des Moines with a design by Italian architect Renzo Piano.

The Krauses live in unincorporated Booneville on the southwestern fringe of metro Des Moines. By spending every workday at her ranch outside Earlham, Krause began to meet her new neighbors while shopping for groceries and hardware. She invited school kids to the ranch for lessons in conservation, and hired local students from Earlham as ranch hands.

"It's such a genuine and kind and proud community," she said. "I just fell in love."

One fateful weeknight in September 2015 the couple sat down to dinner at home. They chatted about the construction progress of the Kum & Go headquarters and how the capital city core had flourished in the last 20 years.

"I'd love to see the same thing happen," Krause said to her husband, "but on a different scale, in Earlham."

These kinds of small-town-turnaround conversations percolate across rural North America. The difference here was that, first,

personal relationships developed organically over several years. And then, suddenly, a direct pipeline to urban money and expertise opened up. Krause was a bridge: she had become a local farmer, but was also a member of the urban executive class.

A week after the Krauses' dinner conversation, fate intervened: A once-glorious historic wreck at the centre of downtown Earlham went up for sale.

The Bricker-Price Block at the southwest corner of Chestnut Avenue and First Street is made up of two adjoining buildings that date to 1900. The C.D. Bricker Building (originally home to a grocery) and W. Price Building (opened as a general store) were given a unified facade and matching cast-iron storefronts. A staircase between buildings climbs to their second floors.

A year after it was built, Bricker-Price in 1901 was credited with saving much of the rest of downtown from a fire that gutted the wooden commercial district to the south. The flames were thwarted by the new masonry structure.

But then gradual decay over decades culminated in the summer of 2015 with roof damage from a rain storm that doused Bricker-Price's apartment dwellers upstairs and the Montross Pharmacy on the ground floor. That left only a hair salon in the 1919 addition tacked onto the building's west side.



THINGS START ROLLING



"She doesn't have to have meetings. She doesn't have to be involved in the community. I think she's going about it the right way."

— David Hopp

Krause approached Earlham's mayor, who was eager for ways his town could invest in its own growth. His wife also happened to be a founding member of a local grassroots philanthropy known as Chicks With Checks.

Chicks With Checks began a couple years ago among four friends and quickly grew into 34 women who each contribute \$100 quarterly. Members vote on which projects they fund. Some leverage corporate match dollars from their employers.

Chicks With Checks projects have been as simple as a diaper changing station for the new football stadium, a tuba for the school band, or a public skating rink fashioned from tarp and lumber.

"That's when I knew this project in Earlham could work," Krause said of her welcome into Chicks With Checks and the town at large. "These women have deep-rooted community pride."

Krause conducted public brainstorming sessions in March and April, and eventually purchased Bricker-Price for \$125,000.

The public conversation continued as Krause stood in front of more than 60 local residents at yet another town meeting to outline the updated plan.

"She doesn't have to have meetings," said David Hopp, the registered nurse whose three sons have worked for Krause. "She doesn't

have to be involved in the community. I think she's going about it the right way."

The collective vision for the building includes a restaurant. An events space for everything from yoga to culinary classes. A teen centre.

In six years, a local nonprofit will own and operate the 9,000-square-foot venue. Its board will be made up of representatives from the city, county and local school district.

An executive director will be hired later this year.

A request for proposals will be issued to choose a restaurant tenant to occupy the first floor, with farm-to-table fare and service for the event space upstairs.

"We're not going to create a sushi bar if a sushi bar isn't what Earlham wants," Krause said to the gathered crowd. She had taped large sheets of paper to the wall with lists of ideas. Townsfolk were asked to place colored stickers next to what they liked. Some scrawled their own additions: "Jazz band perform" or "Dressy dinner once per week."

Next came the challenge of finding the money to make the \$2.1 million project, scheduled to open a year from now, a reality.

CONTRIBUTIONS

The Krauses agreed to contribute \$400,000 of their own money. Then they turned to wealthy Iowa friends, including Maytag CEO Leonard Hadley, and have so far raised an additional \$250,000



GRANTS/FUND RAISE

Chicks With Checks ponied up \$20,000. An additional \$675,000 in grants have come in to-date. And a "Gifts of Grain" fund raiser that allows local farmers to contribute crop bushels aims to bring in another \$125,000.



LOANS

The Central Iowa Power Cooperative has extended a 10-year, no-interest line of credit, providing working capital to bridge periods prior to receipt of grant funds.



CONCLUSION

Recently, dozens of townsfolk were invited inside Bricker-Price to wander through the shell and imagine its future.

Residents were photographed holding signs with quirky messages about why they support the project. Messages like:

"Because cow-tipping is overrated."

"Because I can use the 'arts' as an excuse for skipping chores."

"My wife hates my cooking and I need to learn to make a souffle."

The real message however is that there are myriad ways small rural towns can renew and revitalize themselves. Not every community has a Bricker-Price building waiting to be developed. Or a Sharon Krause with the will and financial means to help make it happen. But every community has assets, from local pride to empty storefronts. Assets just waiting to be tapped.

For information — and inspiration — on rural revitalization, visit our website, or email us, we'd be delighted to hear from you!

www.bcruralcentre.org/focus/population-attraction/
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SOME USEFUL LINKS

EARLHAM, IOWA: <http://www.earlham-ia.org/>

NEXT UP-AND-COMING TOWN IN CENTRAL IOWA?: <https://heartdesmoines.com/businesses/next-coming-city-central-iowa/>

BRICKER-PRICE BLOCK PROMO VIDEO: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOunVbpvND0>

PRE-RENO BRICKER-PRICE VIDEO TOUR:

<http://www.desmoinesregister.com/videos/news/2017/02/09/take-look-inside-earlham-s-bricker-price-buildings/97689734/>

BRICKER-PRICE BLOCK FACEBOOK PAGE: <https://www.facebook.com/Brickerprice/>

CULTURE RULES IN NEW YORK MILLS, MINNESOTA: <http://americanprofile.com/articles/new-york-mills-art/>

CULTURE & RURAL DEVELOPMENT — THE NEW YORK MILLS STORY:

<https://www.bcruralcentre.org/2017/04/18/culture-rural-development/>

RURAL REVITALIZATION: <https://www.bcruralcentre.org/focus/population-attraction/>



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