

\$492,435 Department of Commerce grant fuels affordable housing initiative in Hays

A recent \$492,435 Kansas Department of Commerce grant awarded to Fort Hays Tech | North Central, Hays Campus, will allow the college to finish construction of the Construction Innovation Center building, which will house the Construction Technology, Electrical Technology, and Plumbing, Heating, and Air Conditioning (PHAC) programs. To fulfill the obligations of the grant, these three programs will work together to build one single-family house and one duplex each year for the next three years.

The Kansas Department of Commerce created the Fostering Residential Advancement through Mentoring and Education (FRAME) grant to support technical and community colleges in Kansas as they enhance or expand programs to train the next generation of skilled trades workers while addressing housing needs in the state. The program provides funding to colleges to build homes, foster collaboration with local high school students, and ensure the sustainability of these programs for future generations.

The actual plans, or blueprints, for the three homes to be built will be designed by each Construction class. They are given parameters of square feet (typically around 1,900), bedrooms, and bathrooms, and then each student designs their own home. The instructor then reviews each student's proposed plans, discussing the positive and negative elements based on their experience and market demands with the class.

"The FRAME grant will enable us to complete the facility we are constructing, allowing us to have a greater impact on workforce generation

in the construction industry and providing three additional housing options each year for our

region," said Mendi Anschutz, Director of Advancement.



As a class, they will collectively create the final plans to build the three homes for that year. Those plans are then shared with the Electrical and PHAC classes so they can create schematics on how to run the utilities in the house and meet code requirements. The city code enforcement inspectors inspect the construction of each home to ensure they are built to code.

The college owns the homes built by the college, and they will be sold at auction. Once sold, the homes are relocated at the buyer's expense to a property owned by the buyer using the house mover of their choice. All proceeds of the sales are returned to the college to sustain the program.

Meet Fort Hays Tech | Northwest transfer student, Ella Wolf

Born in Liberal, but raised in Kanorado, Ella is the third of six children, ranging in age from one to 25. She grew up on a pig farm, where she helped her family raise, among other things, Berkshire pigs.

Ella was actively involved in 4H from a very young age, where she was drawn to raising and showing her Berkshires, arts, crafts, shooting sports, photography, and cooking.

"I won a competition once by making a cookie that looked like a slice of watermelon," Ella said.

While still in high school, Ella began to take classes at Fort Hays Tech |Northwest (then Northwest Kansas Technical College).

"I always thought I'd be in agriculture, and I still would love to return to it," Ella said.

One semester, she was told she had to take a drafting class. Initially, she was unsure, as she didn't really know what was involved in drafting, but soon grew to love it, especially using old-school hand drafting techniques.

After some exploring and experience in woodworking and welding, Ella decided to settle on mechanical engineering technology at Northwest.

One of her proudest achievements at the technical college was a capstone design project she completed to build a prosthetic leg for a sheep named Bob, who lives on her aunt and uncle's farm south of Burlington, Colorado. "Bob is five now, but when he was born, he had a contracted ligament in one of his front legs, and they had to amputate the leg," Ella said.



When Bob's full fleece came in, the extra weight made it hard for him to stand and move. Ella designed the leg, created the schematic drawing for the prosthetic, built the prototype, and even created an owner's manual for installing and using the device. All that is left of the project is for Bob to try it out. Ella's aunt and uncle are waiting for her to test the device on Bob when she returns to Kanorado.

Ella graduated from Fort Hays Tech | Northwest with her associate's degree last year, before finishing high school.

She thought the next step was to go straight to work, most likely in agriculture, like her dad. However, her dad encouraged her to take some time and explore. He wanted her to find what she really wants to do for the next 30 years.

"I really felt like I was already far ahead with my educational journey, and that it would be OK to spend the next two years exploring my career options and experiencing college life," Ella said.

Ella Wolf is enrolled this fall at FHSU as a manufacturing technology major.

