

## Strategic Affiliation Monthly Newsletter

February 2026

### Fort Hays Tech | Northwest to host ribbon-cutting and dedication ceremony honoring the Schears family

Fort Hays Tech | Northwest will host a ribbon-cutting and dedication ceremony on Friday, February 27, 2026 at 1 p.m. (MT) to celebrate the official opening of the Schears Family Center for Innovation and Design and the Tiny Tiger Child Care Facility.

The ceremony will honor the Schears Family for their generosity and lasting impact on Fort Hays Tech | Northwest. The Schears Family Center for Innovation and Design represents a significant investment in hands-on learning, creativity, and workforce preparation, providing students with modern spaces designed to support collaboration, innovation, and technical excellence.

The opening of the Tiny Tigers Child Care Facility further strengthens the college's commitment to student success and community support. The facility will serve as a learning environment for students in the Child Care Specialist program while also providing high-quality childcare services for families in the region.

“This project reflects our commitment to remove barriers, expand opportunity, and create spaces that support both education and community needs,” said President Dr. Corey Isbell. “We are grateful to the Schears Family and all who helped make this vision a reality.”



### Forge Kansas: Building opportunity across Central and Western Kansas

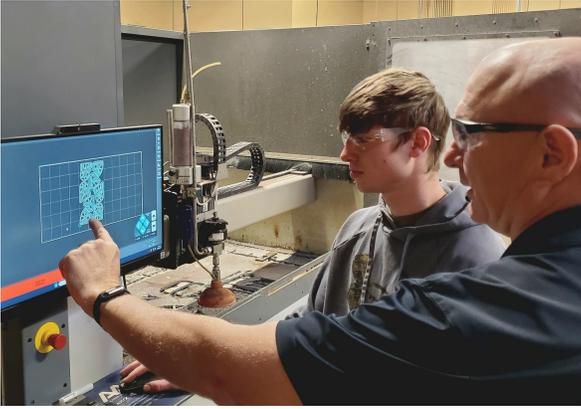
Forge Kansas is strengthening Central and Western Kansas by connecting people, employers, and communities with education, training, and support—right where they live and work. Created through a partnership among Fort Hays State University, Fort Hays Tech | North Central, and Fort Hays Tech | Northwest, the initiative expands access to opportunity while fueling long-term regional growth.

Led by Ben Schears, vice president for economic and workforce development at FHSU, Forge Kansas brings together experienced professionals dedicated to workforce and community success. The team also includes Samantha Voorhees, director of apprenticeships and workforce development, and Shalah Rall, director of apprenticeships and work-based learning.

Forge Kansas offers services in economic and workforce development, housing resources, childcare and family support, and community development. Together, these efforts reflect a commitment to building sustainable prosperity for generations to come.

**Learn more at [www.forgekansas.com](http://www.forgekansas.com).**

## AIT #3 Launches Cross-Campus Applied Learning This Semester



Second-year Welding and Manufacturing student Chase Gibson is pictured alongside Associate Professor Randy Jordan, putting precision and skill to work on the water jet in the Center for Applied Technology. Chase is taking advantage of the “affiliation” pathways.



Second Year Engineering Technology students at Fort Hays Tech | Northwest setting up GPS surveying equipment to complete learning exercises.

This semester, two Applied & Technical Education Initiatives (AIT #3) subcommittees are turning collaboration into action through hands-on learning experiences in advanced manufacturing and surveying.

Through a joint advanced manufacturing project, students from Fort Hays State University and Fort Hays Tech | Northwest will exchange expertise and equipment access. University students will develop and validate multi-axis CNC programs before traveling to Northwest to machine their projects on a 5-axis mill.

In return, Northwest students will design components to be fabricated using FHSU’s waterjet technology. The shared project model gives students access to industry-grade equipment beyond their home campus while strengthening technical skill development and professional collaboration.

In surveying, a total station training initiative will provide university students with immersive, field-based instruction hosted at Northwest. This pilot experience is designed to test a scalable model for future years while expanding exposure to modern surveying equipment and industry partners.

Additional subcommittees are advancing collaboration in heavy equipment operation, estimating and scheduling software, and controls and automation. Each effort reflects the affiliation’s shared commitment to applied, student-centered education and responsiveness to business and industry needs across rural Kansas.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate how the Fort Hays affiliation is leveraging shared strengths to expand opportunity, build technical grit, and prepare graduates for evolving workforce demands.



Mechanical Engineering Technology Instructor, Michael Zimmerman, demonstrating capabilities of their 5-axis CNC mill to second year students.