

Western Iowa Development Association (WIDA)

Lori Holste, the Executive Director of WIDA spoke at the Optimist Club on Saturday, October 15. WIDA focuses on Pottawattamie and Shelby County. Their goal is to break down barriers for business development. They emphasize four pillars of a business, Leadership, Entrepreneurship, Philanthropy, and Youth Involvement. They have a staff of 2 full time and one half time person.

WIDA is funded by \$120,000 from the county, \$30,000 by the REC in Harlan, and by member communities that contribute \$2/person.

Lori told a story about Ord, Nebraska in 2002. Their community was dying, so the community leaders set 20 priorities for economic development in the community. Within five years they had 104 new or expanding businesses and 372 new full time jobs. This was the first growth the community had seen since 1930. It resulted in \$89M invested locally.

To encourage youth to return to their home community, Avoca and Walnut gave each graduating Senior this year a mail box with an invitation for them to come back to their community after college. She said that many youth have never been asked to come back.

Working with schools in grades 7-12, WIDA gave youth a survey on their plans for the future. The students were asked to rate their community and suggest changes that would improve their community. The Heartland Center is helping compile the survey.

WIDA also helped sponsor a Young Professionals Club for ages 21-35. The club plans to meet monthly. The focus is to encourage youth to do what they want to do right in their hometown area, instead of moving far away.