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Essential news for NMPP Energy members

# Essent

NEWSLETTER

Nebraska Municipal Power Pool • Municipal Energy Agency of Nebraska • Public Alliance for Community Energy • National Public Gas Agency

## LB840 helps breathe new life into Arnold

The Village of Arnold is similar to many rural small Midwest towns. Located in the heart of the Nebraska Sandhills, the village was dying a slow death in the 1990s, shrinking from a population of around 1,000 to 600.

With its future in trouble, a small group of local residents got together in the early 2000s and realized they had to try and turn the community around, said Sandy Hicks, director for the Arnold Economic Development Corporation (AEDC).

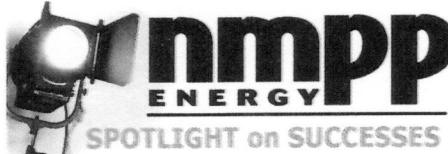
"After 10 years of watching people move away in the 1990s, people got real scared," said Hicks. "Finally, a group of people said 'we have to stop this'."

Their first response was to pass LB840, formerly known as the Local Option Municipal Economic Development Act. LB840 authorizes Nebraska cities and villages to collect and appropriate local tax dollars (sales and/or property tax) for economic development purposes upon local voter approval.

Hicks said since the passing of LB840, economic development efforts have put back about \$250,000 into the community.

"That's how we're building, expanding and retaining is using that money – that's the key to success along with advertising yourself and promoting buying and selling local," said Hicks.

Some of the economic development successes using funds from LB840 include:



This story is part of an ongoing periodic series focusing on community successes within the NMPP membership with the goal of sharing ideas, resources and knowledge for all members.

- Relocation/expansion and retention of a hardware store;
- Construction of a new hotel;
- Expansion of local auto repair business;
- Construction of new fitness center; and
- Expansion and updates to the local theatre.

The second economic development step after getting LB840 approved by local voters, Hicks said, was developing a website.

"The website opens your doors," said Hicks. "Arnold decided the only way they were going to stay on the map was to embrace the outside world or they weren't going to be here."

Hicks, who became director of AEDC in 2011, stressed the importance of not only strengthening your own community through economic development but working with your neighboring communities to strengthen the entire region.

"We all have to do this together to make it work," she said. "You're

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**Our Product is Energy  
Our Mission is Service  
Our Power is People**

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**CLEAN POWER PLAN:** The Environmental Protection Agency is taking comments on the proposed Clean Power Plan.....**Page 3**

**Create it and  
they will come...**

The Arnold, Neb., community created three events three years ago to go with their other traditional events in an effort to bring more visitors to Arnold.



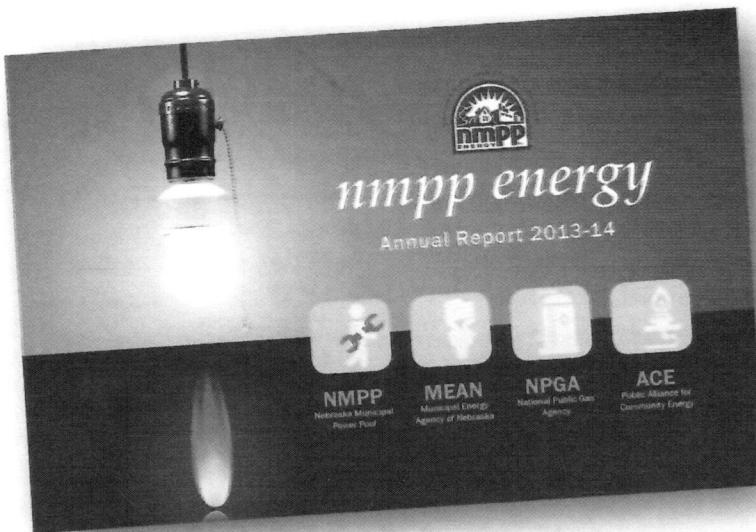
**Arnold River Battle:** This is a timed event involving canoes, kayaks and float tubes.



**Kegs and Corks:** Held close to Valentine's Day and includes tasting Nebraska-made wines and micro-brewed beers and local food, along with vendors selling gifts.



**Devil's Den Bike Show and Rally:** This motorcycle rally and poker run includes live music and several other contests for participants.



## 2013-2014 Annual Report now online...

The 2013-2014 NMPP Energy Annual Report is now available online. Go to [www.nmppenergy.org](http://www.nmppenergy.org) and click on the "Annual Report" link.

## Breathe new life

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not just about you. We may be the shining star, but if everybody fails around us, what's left?"

Hicks said she works with neighboring communities Calaway, Broken Bow and others to move forward with economic development in the region.

### Love of Community Starts with Youth

A primary reason why Arnold is showing signs of life again started with a core group of individuals who had a passion for the community and didn't want to see it die, said Hicks. To instill that love for community, Hicks said it's important to reach the community's youth and try to make a connection. That typically means partnering with the local school for various programs and educational opportunities.

"Hopefully, what part of my job is to pass on that love (for community) to our future. Our students and our youth are so important because, we're here now, but in 10, 15 or 20 years, who is going to take over?"

There are several programs

through which Hicks connects with the community's youth, including through a local Teammates Program, a volunteer mentoring program that pairs fifth grade students up with adults in the community.

"I try to personally engage myself with the school and with youth," said Hicks. "Being available and being on their turf is extremely important. You're opening that dialog. I'm not just that person that is untouchable. You have to do that, especially in a rural community."

Hicks said Arnold is also active in the Ogallala Commons program, a nonprofit development resource network that coordinates a successful student internship program. So far, Hicks said, Arnold has had four kids complete the internship program.

One of the major draws for families to Arnold, said Hicks, is high quality schools and the fact the community has a day care.

"That was huge win for Arnold," she said. The day care opened after a resident returned to Arnold and saw there was a need. "She got trained, certified

and has (the facility) top notch and now she has a day care with a waiting list."

### Embracing Change

Hicks said dealing with change can be difficult, but embracing it can open doors to new opportunities for the common good of the community.

"You have to have a positive spirit," she said. "I always say 'change is constant, therefore I am' which means change is going to happen so you have to embrace it and you have to know how to do that – and that's my whole job, that's why I'm here."

Hicks said embracing change in Arnold has led to three new events, which are still going strong.

"We just threw them out there to see what would happen," she said, "and now each of them are in their fourth year and people look forward to them. And (the events) bring people to Arnold. And that's the thing: if we can bring them here and some stay and if some kids come back that's a win-win, to raise families in a positive environment."