

## New sales tool: Window displays

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Submitted photo - Steve Adams (left) of ISU Extension to Communities accepts a \$10,000 check from Mark Edlemon, interim chair of Community Vitality Center, for the Window Showcase Pilot Project.

Southwest Iowa craftsmen, artisans, musicians and specialty food producers interested in expanding their exposure to a wider customer base have a new option, courtesy of the Iowa Sales Network.

The network, a new endeavor of several southwest Iowa organizations, will focus on getting area products in front of the public.

"We have so many people working out of their homes or garages making products," said Lynn Adams, project coordinator. "A lot of them don't have the money for marketing," she said.

Adams said it is not necessarily true that "If you build it, they will come." "You need marketing," she said.

The initial ISN project, Window Showcase, invites area entrepreneurs to display their goods in community window displays.

"We will have 20 communities with window displays," Adams said.

"For example, in Red Oak, we are using an insurance company window. In Creston, we are using the extension office."

Adams said 10 windows have already been secured for the project, set to be operational by the end of June. She said other southwest Iowa communities interested in featuring a display can contact her.

"The main criteria is that the storefront be on main street or around a town square. Visibility is the key."

Adams suggests vacant buildings might be considered. "It will make the street look nicer," she said.

In addition, Adams said she is looking for vendors who wish to showcase their goods.

"The only real criteria is the product must be made in southwest Iowa," she said. It could range from jewelry to jams, rockers to rock door stops.

Adams said interested vendors must fill out an application. If selected, there is also a \$50 fee per item displayed. She said one vendor can display wares in several community storefronts, but each window costs \$50.

Adams said nonprofits may also use the Window Showcase to display fund-raising items, such as cookbooks.

The ISN project is partially funded with a \$10,000 grant from the Community Vitality Center, located on the Iowa State University Campus, Adams said. ISN hopes to secure state and private money to expand efforts to help rural communities grow and prosper, she said.

Adams said she thinks June will be a good time to kick off the windows project.

"There will be tourists and family members coming to visit," she said. "Most Iowans will buy from Iowa merchants if they are available," she said. Window Showcase is designed to increase that availability.

In addition to having a prominent window to display items, Adams said participating communities must also have a viable Web site, where buyers can go to purchase items. "It can be a city site, a chamber of commerce site, or any viable site," she said.

Adams said her organization will design the Showcase Web pages and provide links to other communities participating in the project.

"Customers viewing products in one window showcase will be introduced to, and may then virtually visit and view the products in, the additional 19 available showcase windows," she said. "Brochures will also be published with vendor contact information and placed in high-traffic areas within the individual communities."

Adams said participating vendors must live within the counties served by the project's sponsors - the Southwest Iowa Coalition, the Grow Iowa Foundation Inc. and the Wallace Foundation for Rural Research and Development.

The counties include Adair, Adams, Audubon, Carroll, Cass, Clarke, Crawford, Decatur, Fremont, Greene, Guthrie, Harrison, Madison, Mills, Monona, Montgomery, Page, Pottawattamie, Ringgold, Shelby, Taylor and Union. Adams said Iowa State University Extension to Communities is assisting in the effort.

"Window dressing and signage is being designed and produced by the Iowa State Campus Department of Design "

Adams said. "The design will create a consistency through use of color, copy, and quality and will use the Iowa Sales Network name in order to begin establishing an image for the branding of southwest Iowa products."

To become a community participant or vendor, or for more information contact Lynn Adams, project coordinator, Iowa State University Extension - Extension to Communities at [southwestisn@mchsi.com](mailto:southwestisn@mchsi.com), PO Box 292, Red Oak, IA 51566, (712) 623-5521 or Roxanna Sieber at [rtsieber@netins.net](mailto:rtsieber@netins.net), (712) 826-8159.