

Ron Kuhn – RHK Enterprises

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

A multi-million dollar project is underway to dredge a reservoir for water quality and quantity. A Fortune 500 corporation is doing the project, but one part of the design work was done by an engineer in rural Kansas. That same engineer might be designing a multi-million dollar project one minute, but in the next, he might be helping put up his community's Christmas lights. This is a special holiday edition of Kansas Profile.

Ron Kuhn is founder and owner of RHK Enterprises in Admire, Kansas. Last week, in part one of this two-part series on the community of Admire, we learned about Ron's brother Michael. Michael is owner of the Last Chance Café in Admire and editor of the Admire PRIDE newsletter.

The two brothers grew up at Admire. Ron got a degree in Physics from Emporia State and a degree in Civil Engineering from Kansas State. His career took him to an engineering position in Houston, but after 10 years, he wanted to get back to Kansas. He worked several years for consulting firms in Topeka, and in 1998 he started his own engineering firm in his hometown of Admire. Using his initials, he named the company RHK Enterprises.

Today, RHK Enterprises does general civil engineering with a specialty in water projects. For example, RHK does design, analysis and construction inspection on water lines, sewer systems, streets, flood control dams and reservoirs. His customers include cities, watershed districts, and private clients. With dams, he might do design work, inspection, breach analysis and inundation mapping.

In 2009, the community of Horton got a grant from the state of Kansas to dredge the sediment from Mission Lake, the city's water supply, so as to improve water quality and quantity. A large Kansas City firm was contracted to do the project. That firm contracted with Ron Kuhn at RHK Enterprises to do the design for the confined disposal facility for the dredging.

"Instead of building new reservoirs, the state is looking at revitalizing and restoring the older dams and reservoirs," Ron said.

In addition to his engineering work, Ron is active in his community of Admire as a volunteer firefighter and council member. Since 1993, he has served on the city council and is now city council President.

In rural communities, being on the city council is a hands-on position – and I mean that literally. In fact, with Ron's expertise in water systems, he is often the person who is called on when the city's water system has a leak.

Ron is proud of the progress which the community has made in recent years. "We used to have an 8,000 gallon standpipe for our city's water supply," Ron said. "Four years ago, we found a 50,000 gallon elevated water tower which we had moved to the city, installed and rehabbed." The rural county fire district built a new fire station in the city and upgraded the number and condition of the district's firetrucks. Thanks to these measures, the city's fire insurance rating has been improved, thus lowering fire insurance premiums for homeowners.

The city park has been improved with new ballfield lights and fencing, plus utilities were installed for RV owners who wish to stop there.

When the Admire Grade School closed in spring 2010, the city gained ownership of the building and grounds. Now the building is the Admire Community Center, and it houses the new North Lyon County Museum in the old school library and computer lab.

And when it's time for the Christmas lights to go up, Ron Kuhn and other volunteers step forward to hang those lights downtown.

"There are a lot of people here who are working at making this a good place to live," Ron said. Such community support is vital in a rural community like Admire, population 156 people. Now, that's rural.

It's time to leave our engineer in Admire, who is making a difference by designing water systems one minute and helping hang the community's Christmas lights the next. We commend Ron Kuhn and the other citizens of this rural community. Their community spirit is something we can Admire.

Wishing you happy holidays, for the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.