

Adrienne Korson – Solar eclipse

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

“A once-in-a-lifetime experience.” That phrase is often overused in our modern society, but it would apply literally to an upcoming event in Kansas: A total eclipse of the sun. The last time a total solar eclipse was visible in Kansas was 99 years ago. In August 2017, a total eclipse of the sun will be visible in northeast Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Adrienne Korson is director of economic development for Doniphan County in the northeast corner of Kansas. Adrienne grew up in Indiana. While exploring colleges, she made the impulsive decision to take a road trip to Kansas. Here she found Benedictine College. “It was a perfect fit,” Adrienne said.

Adrienne graduated in economics and business management. She had gotten an internship with Doniphan County and then served as interim director of economic development. On April 1, 2016, she took the permanent position as director.

“The first thing I did was to completely redo the website,” Adrienne said. “We created enhanced business pages for businesses in Doniphan County so that they could enhance their web presence, and created links for all the towns in the county.”

One day, Adrienne got a call from a *Kansas City Star* reporter who asked about a future solar eclipse in the region. “It was the first I had heard of it,” Adrienne said. She did some research and got excited.

A solar eclipse takes place when the moon is in position to totally block the sun and provide a passing shadow over the earth. Such eclipses are not uncommon around the globe, but are not usually seen in Kansas.

Scientists reported that, on August 21, 2017, a total eclipse of the sun would be visible in a narrow geographic band across central North America. The heart of that narrow band, where the eclipse lasts longest, is called the path of totality.

Adrienne realized that the path of totality went directly through Doniphan County. It was generating interest around the nation and beyond. In January 2017, Adrienne held a community meeting with a presentation by a Benedictine College professor who explained that this solar eclipse would be a rare and remarkable event.

“Being in the path of totality is like winning the lottery,” Adrienne said. “That was the key message from his presentation.”

The county mobilized to take advantage of this celestial opportunity. Using the motto “Eclipse in the Heartland,” a logo was developed. The Highland Community College graphics department did an online version.

Lots of events have been planned on the Sunday before and the Monday of the eclipse. Most events are held in the county seat of Troy, including a beer garden, live music and entertainment, hot dog eating contest, 5K run, and lots of vendors and food options. Organized events are also being held in Highland and Elwood, plus private viewing parties may happen in rural towns like Severance, population 94, and Leona, population 48 people. Now, that's rural.

The eclipse lasts about three hours from start to finish, although the totally dark part is fairly brief. The partial eclipse is expected to start around 11:40 a.m. and the total

eclipse at around 1:05 p.m. If the viewer is closer to the path of totality, then the total eclipse lasts longer.

“The total eclipse lasts about two minutes and 40 seconds,” Adrienne said. “We will see the eclipse for about two minutes and 38 seconds.” Viewers must wear eclipse glasses or welding helmets to prevent eye damage while viewing the sun, except during the total phase of the eclipse.

Atchison, Hiawatha and Marysville plus other northeast Kansas communities are planning watch events also. The Flint Hills Discovery Center is partnering with K-State and Highland Community College on a bus trip from Manhattan to the viewing area.

“I understand scientists from the Vatican are coming to Atchison,” Adrienne said. “This is a huge deal for our area.” For more information, see www.dpcountyks.com.

Once-in-a-lifetime. That phrase would literally apply to this northeast Kansas solar eclipse. We salute Adrienne Korson and all those involved for making a difference by building on this celestial phenomenon. It might be the experience of a lifetime.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.