



CONNECTING YOUNG NEBRASKANS

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

OUR MISSION

We *connect* young Nebraskans and *empower* them to *lead* and *shape the future* of our communities and state.

2023 CYN Summit a Success!

Connecting Young Nebraskans hosted the 2023 CYN Summit in Kearney this October.

The event kicked off on October 18 with a Creative Crawl organized by local volunteers and business owners. Attendees spent the evening meeting inspiring local entrepreneurs and touring innovative businesses and historic treasures.

On October 19, nearly 120 ambitious young Nebraskans gathered to network, learn, and ask themselves, “Why Not?”

Nebraska Public Media helped kick off the conference as “What If...” host Mike Tobias led a panel discussion with entrepreneurs representing communities across Greater Nebraska. Attendees then participated in multiple breakout sessions on a vast variety of topics from defining your personal brand, to grassroots organizing, to storytelling.

“This was the best CYN Summit I have attended yet, and I believe it was my third!”

The lunch program, led by Erica Wassinger of Proven Ventures and Jamel Hamilton of the Nebraska Enterprise Fund, challenged participants to “Think Like an Entrepreneur” and afternoon programming concluded with the Young Nebraskan Awards presentation (see next page), round table free-form discussions led by attendees on topics important to them, and lastly, an escape room experience facilitated by Encrypt Escape Rooms of Norfolk.



CYN's post-event survey revealed just how meaningful the event was to those in attendance:

- 71% of respondents said they felt more connected to their community as a result of attending
- 91% said the CYN Summit inspired them to make a difference in their community
- 63% reported feeling less isolated
- 64% said they made meaningful connections they plan to maintain

Best of all, the Summit inspired dozens of young Nebraskans to become even more engaged with the CYN network with many volunteering to plan future events, Summits, and even take on leadership positions within the organization.

[Click here to watch a brief video recapping our time together in Kearney.](#)

Thank you to all who attended and supported the 2023 Summit. The request for proposals for the 2025 Summit location will open in early 2024!

And the 2023 Young Nebraskan Award-Winners Are . . .

Prior to the Summit, CYN invited nominations of exemplary young professionals who are making a positive impact in their workplaces and communities. Awards were presented in six categories to ambitious young Nebraskans across the state.



Courtney Glock of Grand Island received the **Community Involvement & Impact Award** for significant contributions to her community through civic engagement and involvement with charitable organizations. Glock serves as vice president of the Grand Island Area Chamber of Commerce as well as

coordinator of the Grand Island Young Professionals, which has seen significant growth under her leadership. Glock worked to connect Hastings, Kearney and Grand Island Young Professionals chapters and the groups now host three tri-city events every year, connecting hundreds of young professionals in the area. Glock also coordinates over 800 volunteers at the Nebraska State Fair, helped launch a soft-skills development program and has also lent her skills to numerous charitable organizations including Northwest Education Foundation, GRACE Cancer Foundation, Make-A-Wish and Big Brothers Big Sisters.



Nina Lanuza of Schuyler received the **Diversity & Inclusion Award** for her dedication to creating a welcoming environment and fostering a sense of belonging for all people, especially for those of diverse cultures, backgrounds, identities and experiences. As a Senior Community Organizer at the Center for Rural

Affairs, she meets with community leaders to discover their challenges and assists them with bridging gaps across cultural divides. During the pandemic, Lanuza launched a YouTube channel to distribute public health information in Spanish. As the first Latina to serve on the Schuyler Public School Board, she was often the only line of communication between the board and Spanish-speaking parents. She has also served the missions of the Immigrant Legal Center, Heartland Workers Center, Schuyler Chamber of Commerce and Centro Hispano Comunitario de Nebraska.



The **Entrepreneurship & Innovation Award**, which aims to recognize innovators who have contributed significantly towards the development of a new business or idea, went to **Josh Holmquist** of Burwell. Born and raised in Burwell, Holmquist didn't see many career options of interest upon graduating

high school. Today he gives young people and fellow Nebraskans the advice he would've liked to hear: think outside of the box and use the resources in your community to try careers that aren't always front and center. For Holmquist, that was becoming the co-owner and Chief Operating Officer of Normal Roasting Company, a small batch specialty coffee roasting company located in Central Nebraska. Josh is also a plumber, electrician, speaker and mentor to numerous Midwest coffee shops through his newest business venture, Theory Coffee Tech.



The **Leadership & Professional Development Award** which recognizes an individual who has made a significant impact on their peers in the workplace went to **Courtney Burbach** of Kearney. As Program Leader at the Kearney Family YMCA, Burbach has positively impacted thousands of young people,

adults and families by launching a new creative arts program as well as programs for people with special needs. She recruits and trains nearly 2,000 volunteer coaches and recently led an event that raised over \$14,000 in a single day for the Strong Families Campaign. Burbach has also served numerous organizations in a volunteer capacity, among them Kearney Area Young Professionals Network, TeamMates, Alpha Omicron Phi, UNK, Kearney Area TOPSoccer, St. Jude's, the ARC of Buffalo County and Millard North High School Unified Special Olympics.



The **Young Professional of the Year Award** went to **Melissa Norgard** of Sidney. Norgard is the owner of Sam & Louie's & Boss City Brewing, chair of the Sidney and Greater Area Fund and lead of the Creative District and Historical Preservation Board. In her spare time, she writes grants for the City

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2023 Young Nebraska Award-Winners Continued ...

of Sidney (including a housing proposal that was recently awarded \$1.5 million). She worked tirelessly on a 90-plus page application for Sidney to be a certified Creative District and is also active in the local Energizing Entrepreneurial Ecosystems initiative, volunteering her time and giving guidance rooted in her experience in economic development and small business ownership. Norgard also serves on the Historic Preservation Board and has worked to retool programs to update dilapidated historic buildings downtown.



Kayla Schnuelle of Diller was named the **2023 CYN Network Weaver**—an individual who embodies CYN’s mission to connect young Nebraskans and empower them to lead and shape the future. Schnuelle’s professional passion is the intersection of leadership development and facilitation, and she

specializes in strategic planning, organizational capacity building, meeting facilitation and design and leadership development. Schnuelle volunteers for the Diller-Odell Booster Club and the Diller Community Foundation Fund and was instrumental in launching Diller’s Youth Serviceship Camp, which is teaching young people the importance of community and how to be of service to others. Schnuelle is also credited with founding the Connecting Young Nebraskans organization and remains deeply engaged with the group.

“Now What?” Program Series

Connecting Young Nebraskans continued its “Now What?” online webinar series with four new programs in 2023. “I Need a Mental Reset for 2023” offered members a safe space to discuss and reflect on how the events of the past year impacted their well-being and how to move forward into the new year with a positive mindset. “I’m Curious About Becoming an Entrepreneur” explored the questions entrepreneurs ask themselves before diving into business opportunities and what questions they wish they had asked. “I Want to Create Community Change Through Fundraising” discussed the components of fundraising, leveraging your network, getting comfortable making the ask, and sharing resources. “The CYN Summit is in October” discussed the 2023 Summit and identified the benefits of attending, navigating the schedule, following up with new contacts, and getting involved with CYN.

Visit [CYN’s YouTube channel](#) to watch all recorded webinars.

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