

Young Entrepreneurs

Agent Jumps at Chance to Offer Business Leadership Program

SENECA, Kan. – David Key knows that there are some pretty bright Kansas kids aching to become tomorrow’s business leaders. He’s seen it first hand.

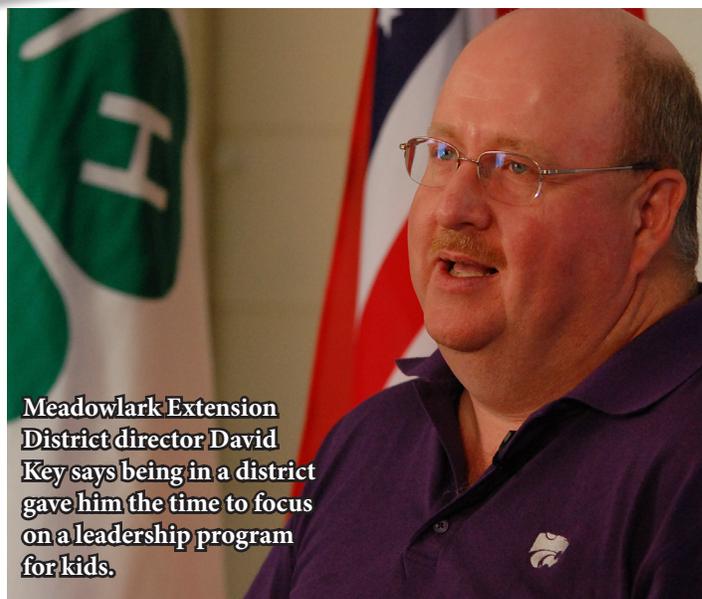
In fact, in the Northeast Kansas Entrepreneurship Academy, he’s watched many of those kids develop a business plan, figure out how to pay for their idea, do their marketing and launch their own business.

“About three years ago, that group came up with the idea to try and work with youth...because we know that if we can capture youth and their spirit of entrepreneurship, maybe someday they’ll be interested in starting their own business and they’ll have a resource background to pull from,” Key said.

Key is the director of the Meadowlark Extension District, a position that in recent years has allowed him to focus his work time on additional community development projects. The Meadowlark District includes Jackson, Jefferson and Nemaha counties.

But Key’s involvement with the academy extends beyond those in his district; kids also come from Atchison, Brown, Doniphan, Marshall, Osage and Shawnee counties.

“We need to be more than just one county, and in the district system, that’s drilled into an agent’s head,”



Meadowlark Extension District director David Key says being in a district gave him the time to focus on a leadership program for kids.

Key said.

“That’s why we bring these things out beyond [county] borders because we can reach more students, more networking, more resource people, [and] those kids learn more. They are meeting people outside their home county; it’s a plus [for these kids].”

In 2012, 12 high school students participated in the academy, which was held at Highland Community College and taught by Silver Lake High School business teacher Loren Ziegler. The students visit with local business owners; attend classes on marketing, public relations, financial management and business etiquette; and participate in team building activities.

Key remembers that in 2011, “we had to pull them out of the computer labs at 11 o’clock at night to get them to bed. You just don’t see things like that... there is passion [to learn] in those kids.”

Each student pays a registration fee of \$100, which covers lodging, meals, activities and materials. At the end of the program, kids compete to see whose business plan is best.

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Key noted that, among past projects, students have developed successful plans for disc jockey, landscaping and dairy goat businesses. Each of those continued at varying levels of success after the students returned home.

He added that K-State Research and Extension's involvement in the academy came as a result of a survey he conducted when the Meadowlark District was formed.

"We surveyed all of our local schools, county commissioners, elected officials...and we found that we needed to be in the schools teaching about business development and entrepreneurship," Key said. "This just followed up on that need."

He adds: "I would not have been able to do this academy if I was in a county program. The reality is that, as a district agent, I am able to focus on this type of activity and better meet programming needs."