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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Thrive Allen County receives \$100,000 Kansas Health Foundation Grant to Develop New Trail System**

**Iola, Kansas** – Thrive Allen County has been awarded a \$100,000 Healthy Living grant from the Kansas Health Foundation to develop the *Lehigh Portland Rail Trail* in Allen County. This new trail system will include walking and biking trails similar to the Prairie Spirit Trail and the Southwind Rail Trail, but will also include mountain bike trails and related amenities that are rare in this part of Kansas. The new trail system will be free and open to the general public year round.

Thrive is one of 22 grantees in the state to receive Healthy Living grant funding, and was selected based in part on the outstanding progress that has been made in the county the past six years developing trails, improving parks and recreation, establishing bicycle routes and sharrows and in increasing the prevalence of physical activity among residents. Allen County's county health ranking has improved by 15 points since 2010, driven in large measure by changes that have been driven and nurtured by Thrive and its partners.

The *Lehigh Portland Rail Trail* will be built just south of Iola on land owned by Iola Industries, Inc. through an easement granted to the Sunflower Rail-Trails Conservancy, Inc. (The Sunflower Rail-Trails Conservancy owns the Southwind Rail Trail that runs from Humboldt to Iola). The trail's name pays homage to Allen County's industrial past and specifically to the Lehigh Portland Cement Company, which purchased the Iola Portland Cement Company in 1917 and operated a major plant in Iola until 1970.

The trail will begin next to Elm Creek Park South on South Washington Avenue and travel east along the south side of Elm Creek to the north side of Elks Lake. From there it will continue eastward and connect to 1600 Street (South Kentucky). The "backbone" trail will be approximately 12 feet wide and constructed of a crushed limestone surface; this portion will be

the main trail for walkers and cyclists. Mountain bike trails will be built adjacent to the backbone trail and will be primarily dirt trails. Steep hills, mature trees and ravines make this an excellent location for mountain bike trails in particular.

Additional amenities to support the trail system will be announced in coming months. Of note, the 1909 “Hegwald Bridge”—that is being moved today from a location on Owl Creek west of Humboldt—will be incorporated as a bicycle and pedestrian bridge on the *Lehigh Portland Rail Trail*.

“The Lehigh Portland Rail Trail is an opportunity to strengthen our local economy by bringing new visitors to Allen County who will spend money in restaurants, hotels and stores,” said John McRae, President of Iola Industries. “This trail, and the Southwind and Prairie Spirit Trails, are also part of a larger strategy to retain the residents we have and attract new ones to live and work in our community. This is not traditional economic development, but it is economic development nonetheless.”

Funding for healthy living initiatives represents one way the Kansas Health Foundation seeks to address issues of tobacco use and obesity in Kansas. Grants were specifically targeted toward programs and initiatives supporting healthy eating, active living and tobacco prevention. Smoking and obesity remain the leading causes of preventable death and illness in the state, and combine to cost Kansas more than \$2 billion annually in unnecessary health care costs.

All grantees—including universities, nonprofit organizations, state agencies and municipalities—received funding through a competitive application process, with individual grant awards of up to \$100,000. In total, the Kansas Health Foundation provided approximately \$2 million in healthy living grants across the 22 grantees. Initiatives funded emphasized strategies intended to lead to implementation of policy, systems and environmental interventions with the potential to impact a broad population. Through this type of grant making, the Foundation opens up to Kansans who have the experience, know-how and inspiration to tackle some of the toughest issues facing public health today and provides the funding needed to see their mission accomplished.

“Providing funding to organizations poised to make an impact on major health issues like obesity and tobacco use is crucial to our work and the overall health landscape in Kansas,” said Jeff Willett, vice president for programs at the Kansas Health Foundation. “These are health problems that affect the lives of many Kansans, and are increasingly concentrated among Kansans of lower socioeconomic status, further compounding health and economic disparities in our state.”

Volunteers will be essential in the development of the trail. For more information about Thrive’s efforts or to learn how you can volunteer or participate, please visit <http://www.thriveallencounty.org> or contact Damaris Kunkler, Thrive’s Program Director, at (620) 365-8128 or [damaris.kunkler@thriveallencounty.org](mailto:damaris.kunkler@thriveallencounty.org).

**About Thrive**

Thrive is a 501(c)3 corporation that works to harness the strengths of local residents in building healthier, more vibrant communities.

Improving quality of life is essential to the survival of small towns. People want to live in communities with healthy, well-educated residents. Businesses want to locate in communities with a robust, adaptable workforce. And young people are more receptive to moving to communities with great schools, parks and trails, and the feeling that the community has a bright future. All of this is what Thrive is working to build in Allen County.

Thrive works to improve the quality of life in Allen County by focusing on health, wellness, recreation and education conditions, and by engaging people and institutions around a common vision for the future. This means working to increase access to healthcare, connecting people to programs and services, encouraging residents to live healthier, more active lives, and providing leadership on important public issues. Beginning in 2013 Thrive also began doing countywide economic development work, blending quality of life efforts with more traditional business recruitment and development efforts. Please visit [www.thriveallencounty.org](http://www.thriveallencounty.org) for more information.

**About the Kansas Health Foundation**

The Kansas Health Foundation is a private philanthropy based in Wichita, but statewide in its focus. Its mission is to improve the health of all Kansans. To learn more about the Foundation, please visit [www.kansashealth.org](http://www.kansashealth.org).