

# MAKING A DIFFERENCE



## Grand Challenges

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- Water
- Health
- Community Vitality
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K-State Extension  
Shawnee County  
1740 SW Western Ave  
Topeka, KS 66604  
785-232-0062  
[www.shawnee.k-state.edu](http://www.shawnee.k-state.edu)

**KANSAS STATE**  
UNIVERSITY

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## Grand Challenge: Community Vitality

### Title: Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge

### Why is this issue important?

In Kansas small businesses make up 99% of all state businesses employing roughly 50% of Kansas's workforce. According to the Kansas Department of Commerce Small business is the primary driver of job growth in Kansas.

### How did Extension address this issue?

Through a partnership with the Topeka E-Community, Network Kansas, the Topeka Center for Advanced Learning and Careers, and Go Topeka, Shawnee County Community Vitality Agent Candis Stiles organized the 2026 Shawnee County Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge.

The Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge (YEC) helps young people learn how to become small business owners and entrepreneurs. The three-part contest for students in grades 7th-12th includes a business plan, a trade show booth, and a business pitch based on a student-created business concept.



### What was the impact?

In 2026, Shawnee County had 11 business entries, with 23 students participating in the contest. This is double the number of students we had last year. A large part of that growth can be attributed to the partnership with TCALC and the participation of their business students.



Additional participants came from Hayden High School, Topeka High School, Washburn Rural Middle School, and homeschool programs.

The winning business concept, *Pathless*, will represent Shawnee County at the State YEC contest at K-State on April 29. One parent shared this about the YEC learning session and contest: "As a parent, the experience for our youth in learning how to engage, make eye contact, and communicate an idea is invaluable."

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service  
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