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O'Malley works to build leadership in Kansas

BY: Nick Lauber, Staff Affiliate

Former Prairie Villager and state Rep. Ed O'Malley serves as the first president and chief executive officer of the Kansas Leadership Center.

A \$30 million gift from the Kansas Health Foundation enabled the center to open in January in the foundation's Wichita facility. The center eventually will have a stand-alone site and opened to enhance civic leadership in Kansas.

"What we want to do is inspire, educate and connect to make Kansas a better place," O'Malley said. "Through strategic processes we are convening Kansans together, working with select communities and different organizations throughout the state. Whether it's 100 or 500 people, we are excited about the ripple effect."

This center is unique in the country.

"It's absolutely fascinating to be a part of this," O'Malley said. "The reason I served in the Legislature is because I wanted to help Kansans. This is a lot like public service, working to provide Kansas leaders. It's an opportunity to do what's never been done before. Nothing is like this in the country. It's great to be a part of this organization with access to its potential resources."

An old saying states leaders are born, not made, but O'Malley said people can learn to lead.

"Some people have innate leadership qualities," he said. "Anybody can be taught leadership skills. You can teach people how to collaborate, think strategically and inspire people to have courage to step up and serve. We are working on creating an environment conducive to that learning."

O'Malley said he found leaving family and friends in Johnson County to go to Wichita difficult.

"What's amazing though, is what's on the minds of people in Johnson County is the same here, just a different context," O'Malley said.

Staff is drafting procedures and approaches to different scenarios for the center.

"The biggest question is what do we do to enhance civic leaders. Soon we will have a permanent facility and a full staff. We will need to begin employing programs and initiatives throughout Kansas to touch a number of communities, and we are on our way," O'Malley said.

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