



Kosciusko Leadership Academy - Project Proud
April 12, 2022

Presented By:

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Orville Haney – sponsored by Homes Land and Lakes Realty

Kim Strawbridge – sponsored by Lake City Bank

Lois Borkholder – sponsored by Kosciusko Community Hospital



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Roles of the K-County First Team:

- Project Coordinator/Designer: Mitchell Hall
- Writer/Designer/Researcher: Lois Borkholder
- Interviewers/Researchers: Orville Haney & Kim Strawbridge

Executive Summary

Kosciusko County is an incredible place to live, work and play. But what happens when the first responders whom we depend on to keep us safe while we are living, working and playing here start feeling burned out, underpaid and unappreciated? Morale drops which results in a higher rate of them leaving their profession and/or retiring early. When that occurs, residents within the county start feeling less safe which causes some to start looking elsewhere for a community to live, work and play in which creates less support for our first responders and we get caught up in a vicious cycle.

Our Purpose:

There were multiple issues we wanted to address with our project: recruitment, retention and job satisfaction of first responders throughout our county and to bring awareness to the residents within our county of the amazing work our first responders do for us.

According to several websites, the average salary of Kosciusko County employees is 31.9% lower than the national average for government employees in a time when gas and food prices are at historic highs which can be detrimental when looking to hire new responders into our communities. Coupling that with feeling unappreciated and overworked, retention becomes a problem. Since we couldn't directly affect our first responder's salaries, we decided to work on a plan to help them stretch their dollars further.

Our Plan:

We created a multi-purpose vision we are calling K-County First. The first step is to "link arms" with businesses in our county to provide discounts on goods and services that our first responders utilize. The second step is to create awareness in our communities as to which businesses are supporting our first responders, so we as consumers can support them. This not only brings first responders to the forefront of resident's minds, it keeps revenue within our county and can potentially help drive first responder's salaries closer to the national average.

Our Conclusion:

We believe K-County First is part of the solution to the challenge we face in recruiting and retaining first responders in Kosciusko County because of the awareness it brings to our communities of the value first responders provide. We believe first responders will feel appreciated by seeing their community come together to support them by offering discounts to help them and their families stretch their income a little farther. When Kosciusko County works together, everybody wins and we continue to be an incredible place to live, work and play in.

Introduction:

Kosciusko County - a fabulous place to live, work and play! In addition to the beautiful lakes, great schools and prosperous businesses, our county is kept safe and healthy by a fabulous group of first responders. How do those first responders feel? Are they getting the recognition they deserve? Do they feel valued and appreciated within their own communities? Do they feel like Kosciusko County is a fabulous place to work?

In a recent survey conducted by Live Well Kosciusko, it became apparent that something needed to be done to help with recruitment and retention of first responders within our county in order for residents to continue to feel safe living in Kosciusko County. When first responders no longer feel like they are appreciated and add value, they leave their profession and/or retire early which puts additional strain on the first responders who are still working. Add to that the fact that the average Kosciusko County employee's salary is 31.9% lower than the national average for government employees at a time when food and gas prices have skyrocketed, it's easy to see why our first responders feel overworked, underpaid and underappreciated.

By the numbers:

- Kosciusko County Sheriff's Department
 - Approximately 75,000 residents countywide to keep safe
 - 1,196 county roads to patrol
 - 103 lakes to protect (most in any county in Indiana)
- Kosciusko County Fire Departments
 - 25 fire departments in the county
 - One department per 3,000 individuals
 - Rank 55th out of 92 counties in the state for per capita fire departments
- Police Departments
 - 12 police departments in the county
 - One department per 6,250 people
 - Rank 43rd out of 92 counties in the state for per capita police departments
- Ambulance Services
 - 4 services in the county
 - One service per 18,750 individuals
 - Rank 24th out of 92 counties in the state for per capita ambulance services

When you look at these statistics, it becomes easy to understand why morale is low for first responders and their families feel it as well. With the recent calls for accountability and reform in law enforcement in particular, it's no surprise that a June 2021 survey done by the Police Executive Research Forum of nearly 200 police departments showed a 45% increase in retirement rates and a nearly 20% increase in resignations in 2020-21 in comparison to the previous year. If we as a community don't do something, we will continue to lose our first responders at a much higher rate than we are recruiting them at.

Our Purpose:

As we took a look at some of these statistics and in our conversations with Lisa Harman from Live Well Kosciusko and some first responders, it quickly became apparent that we needed to come up with a program that did several things:

- Bring awareness to our community of the amazing services our first responders were providing for us
- Help first responders feel appreciated which leads to job satisfaction and retention
- Enhance recruitment of first responders into our county
- Find ways to help first responder's salaries go further

Our Plan:

The vision of our project, K-County First (named for our county and first responders), is to link arms with businesses throughout Kosciusko County to provide discounts on goods and services that our first responders utilize. This might be in the form of a percentage off or a gift with purchase. Each business has the opportunity to choose how they would like to honor our first responders. The participating businesses will receive a window decal indicating they are part of the K-County First program which will let the general public know if they frequent this business, they are supporting a business who supports first responders so by default, they themselves are also supporting the first responders in our county.

Each window decal will also host a QR code that when scanned will let people access a full list of businesses who are participants with K-County First. The goal is to drive business towards those companies who are willing to give back to our first responders to help compensate for that lost revenue through their giveback. Seeing these decals and QR codes will keep first responders in the forefront of resident's minds and frequenting these businesses will keep the revenue within our county and can potentially help drive first responder's salaries closer to the national average.

When hosting our first responder's focus group, a concern was raised on how participating businesses will be able to identify the first responders who are eligible for a discount if they are off duty and out of uniform. Out of that discussion came the idea to create a business size "ID card" that when presented at these businesses, it would be an indication to apply the first responder discount. The card will host a QR code as well to make it easy for the first responders to see which businesses are offering discounts and will be updated annually to ensure that anybody presenting the card is a current first responder. The participating businesses will be emailed an updated version of the card annually to ensure they know what to look for.

Our Progress:

In order to maximize our time on this project, we thought it would be a good idea to put together a first responder focus group to get their feedback on our overall plan and to find out what particular goods and services they currently utilize for themselves and their families or would potentially utilize if a discount were offered. This was extremely helpful as we were able to narrow our focus to those particular businesses. As of the date of this presentation, we have roughly a dozen businesses committed to being part of K-County First with more on the way as we make connections. The list will be ever changing over the next few months as we anticipate both intentional and organic growth as this project gains momentum.

We are well on our way to creating our marketing materials with the creation of our logo and QR code. We want to thank Jeff Stillson for taking our basic vision for a logo and turning it into something amazing that represents our county and first responders well.

The K-County First QR code landing page will be part of the Live Well Kosciusko website and will be updated and maintained by them. This could potentially be used as a tool for recruiting first responders into our county. What first responder doesn't want to know that he/she is joining a community who loves and appreciates them!

While we have this project off the ground, we know there will be some ongoing tasks such as creation and distribution of the window decals and ID cards and continuing to grow the list of participating businesses.

The Prize AKA The Northernor Award:

If granted the Northernor Award, we will use it in the following ways:

- Purchase window decals for participating businesses
- Purchase annual "ID cards" to distribute to current first responders
- Fees incurred by Live Well Kosciusko for web hosting, database updates & maintenance

Our Conclusion:

We believe K-County First is part of the solution to the challenge we face in recruiting and retaining first responders in Kosciusko County because of the awareness it brings to our communities of the value first responders provide. We believe first responders will feel appreciated by seeing residents countywide come together to support them by supporting businesses who are offering discounts to help them and their families stretch their income a little farther. We believe that when Kosciusko County residents come alongside our first responders, our county continues to be a safe and incredible place to live, work and play in.



References:

<https://www.in.gov/sheriffs/kosciusko/>

<https://www.countyoffice.org/in-kosciusko-county-fire-departments/>

<https://www.countyoffice.org/in-kosciusko-county-police-department/>

<https://www.countyoffice.org/in-kosciusko-county-ambulance/>

<https://www.policeforum.org/workforcesurveyjune2021>

<https://openpayrolls.com/county/kosciusko-county-in>

<http://www.inkfreenews.com/2021/08/27/kosciusko-county-sheriffs-staff-pay-hikes-scaled-back-to-5/>



KLA Project Proud | April 12, 2022



Sheriff's Department

- 75,000 residents
- 1,196 county roads
- 103 lakes





Fire Departments

- 25 in the county
- One department per 3,000 individuals
- 55th in state



Police Departments

- 12 police departments
- One department per 6,250 people/44 square miles
- 43rd in state





Ambulance Services

- 4 in the county
- One service per 18,750 individuals/132 square miles
- 24th in state



The Purpose...

- Grow respect & appreciation for first responders
- Improve recruitment & retention of first responders

The Players...



- Mitchell Hall (sponsored by W.R. Hall Insurance)
- Orville Haney (sponsored by Homes Land and Lakes Realty)
- Kim Strawbridge (sponsored by Lake City Bank)
- Lois Borkholder (sponsored by Kosciusko Community Hospital)

Special thanks to Lisa Harman @ Live Well Kosciusko and our First Responder's Focus Group!

The Plan...

- Business discounts
- Community engagement

The Progress...

- First responder's focus group
- Business reach outs
- Logo/QR Code
- Live Well Kosciusko

The Prize...

- Window decals for businesses
- Annual "ID cards" for first responders
- Website hosting/database updates/maintenance

Resources:

<https://www.in.gov/sheriffs/kosciusko/>
<https://www.countyoffice.org/in-kosciusko-county-fire-departments/>
<https://www.countyoffice.org/in-kosciusko-county-police-department/>
<https://www.countyoffice.org/in-kosciusko-county-ambulance/>
<https://www.policeforum.org/workforcesurveyjune2021>
<https://openpayrolls.com/county/kosciusko-county-in>
<http://www.inkfreenews.com/2021/08/27/kosciusko-county-sheriffs-staff-pay-hikes-scaled-back-to-5/>

Thank you, KLA!!

**What questions do you have for
us?**