



**MAXIMIZE
NWMO**

Dream big and grow together.

NEWS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Awards given for vision and leadership in community development

Maximize NWMO holds inaugural annual regional vitality celebration

ST. JOSEPH, Mo., September 18, 2023— The Community Foundation of Northwest Missouri's regional vitality initiative, Maximize Northwest Missouri, recognized three individuals on September 13, 2023. The Maximize NWMO Vision Award was given to Lowell C. Kruse for his longtime involvement in improving the health and wealth of the region. He was involved in establishing The Community Foundation after retiring from 25 years as the CEO of Heartland Health (now Mosaic Life Care). Kruse also co-founded Communities of Excellence 2026 to adapt the Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework to communities nationwide. Thanks to his vision and ability, through radical persistence to inspire others, Kruse has laid a solid foundation for the community leaders working in the 18 counties served by The Community Foundation to maximize the potential of the places where people live, learn, work, and play.

The Maximize NWMO Regional Navigator Award was presented to Max Summers for his role as the first chair of The Community Foundation's Regional Vitality Committee, which is now branded as Maximize NWMO. Summers' experience and passion for helping small businesses grow through his more than 20 years serving as the State Director of the Missouri Small Business & Technology Development Centers made him a logical choice to launch and navigate the Maximize Navigation Team. He led the team through several years of discovery and conversations around expanding support for entrepreneurship in the region. Understanding start-up resources and needs was the first focus. The efforts now pull together leaders from several sectors to discuss what can be done beyond what any one entity or community can do on its own to improve the quality of life in the region.

Linda Place, a retired teacher and active volunteer in her community of Albany, MO, and the region of Northwest Missouri was presented with the Maximize NWMO Community Navigator Award. She has been a positive influence in many lives in the classroom, and the community by leading and helping others navigate several revitalization and philanthropic efforts. Place served as one of the first participants in the Communities of Excellence National Learning Collaborative and in the Maximize NWMO Regional Learning Collaborative, which facilitates learning around a comprehensive community development approach called The Maximize [My Community] Journey Framework™. She gathered many community leaders to also participate and as a result Maximize Albany formed as a group that has launched a Main Street program, renovation projects, and exploration solutions to challenges and opportunities around child care and retirement-focused ventures.

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The celebration luncheon was held at The Pearl at Crawford Farm in Hamilton, MO. More than 250 community leaders were listed as participants in Maximize NWMO's regional events and leadership development programs.

"Maximize NWMO has been established as a regional effort for a decade and it was time we celebrate the milestones and the people that helped us get to where we are today. This effort is one that will span generations, we are still in the infancy of discovering and forming the foundation of what the Maximize [My Community] Journey Framework and the work of Maximize NWMO can do to serve the region. I am very excited about the future and witnessing the work regional and community leaders will do together as we strive to make Northwest Missouri a place where anyone can have the quality of life they desire as we all live, learn, work, and play here."

Interested individuals in community development leadership programs can learn more at <https://www.maximizenwmo.org/maximize-the-nwmo-region>. The next Introduction to Community Excellence: Reaching Common Goals Faster program begins online on October 11, 2023.

The key benefit of the Collaborative according to organizers is learning how to shift from a project-based line of thought where success lives and dies on the shoulders of very few people in communities to a much more sustainable systematic or big picture approach that includes many voices.

Maximize NWMO serves the region in a neutral role providing administrative, communications, data access, and coaching support on systems-thinking and community wealth building for individuals, communities and the region. The initiative's Navigation Team supports leaders and communities who want to *dream big, decide wisely, and maximize our region's potential by growing together*. Maximize NWMO is the regional vitality initiative of The Community Foundation of Northwest Missouri. It has been made possible over the last decade through partnerships with Communities of Excellence 2026, Patterson Family Foundation, the United States Department of Agriculture – Rural Development (USDA-RD), University of Missouri Extension, Missouri Department of Economic Development, Northwest Missouri State University, Evergy, and private donors. www.maximizenwmo.org and together@maximizenwmo.org

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PHOTOS ATTACHED:

1 - Steve Wenger, Maximize NWMO Navigation Team Member, with Lowell C. Kruse, Maximize NWMO Vision Awardee.

2 - Rachel Kagay, Community Foundation of Northwest Missouri Board Member and Maximize NWMO Chairwoman, with Max Summers, Maximize NWMO Regional Navigator Awardee.

3 - Steve Wenger, Maximize NWMO Navigation Team Member, with Linda Place, Maximize NWMO Community Navigator Awardee.