



**MAXIMIZE
NWMO**

Dream big and grow together.

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Visionary volunteers and national speaker celebrated for building vibrant communities

ST. JOSEPH, Mo., September 30, 2026—Maximize Northwest Missouri, the regional vitality initiative of The Community Foundation of Northwest Missouri, recognized several extraordinary leaders at its 4th Annual Celebration Summit on September 23 at inspireU Children’s Discovery Center in St. Joseph.

Quint Studer, national award-winning leader, best-selling author, philanthropist, co-founder of Healthcare Plus Solutions Group, and owner of the Kansas City Monarchs along with KC Roots, opened the summit with stories of lessons learned in working with Janesville, Wis., Pensacola, Fla., and many other towns. He shared practical advice on building vibrant communities where residents can enjoy a better quality of life.

“Creating places where talent wants to stay and/or come back to, and new talent wants to move to, is what improves opportunities for businesses and organizations of all sizes,” said Studer.

“Quint shared so many great nuggets of wisdom learned through his personal and professional experiences,” said Christel Gollnick, president and owner of JUPER Communications, serving as director of Maximize NWMO. She noted that, with family, former client, and now baseball ties to this part of the country, he showed his genuine interest in our primarily rural region’s struggles with century-long population decline. Population and workforce growth follow the creation and discovery of great places to live.

“We are grateful for Mosaic Life Care’s Platinum Sponsorship of this year’s Celebration Summit, allowing us to fund a keynote speaker,” said Gollnick. “Studer’s can-do attitude, willingness to invest in himself and others, and commitment to generational leadership development is exactly what our Maximize NWMO work and programs are all about.”

Attendees joined breakout conversations introduced by Regional Partner Council members on three shared priorities: “homing” and built environments that support people of all ages; succession planning to help local businesses continue beyond their founders; and investments in Northwest Missouri’s people and places through time, talent, financial support, and in-kind contributions. Maximize NWMO’s team is summarizing the ideas shared and plans to hold public online Discovery Groups in early 2027 to gather expert input and additional resident perspectives for regional partner strategic planning and action.

The Maximize NWMO Vision Award was presented to Bob Hughes and the Hamilton Community Alliance for their longstanding commitment and work toward a thriving rural community. Former Caldwell County Commissioner Bud Motsinger and Hamilton Mayor Cole Crawford were present to support the recognition.

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Page 2 – Awards celebrated

Hamilton, the hometown of J.C. Penney and, more recently, Missouri Star Quilt Company, has built a growing culture of collaboration and community pride. One example is the Highway 13 Butterfly Trail, a 292-mile conservation and ecotourism corridor through western Missouri that began with a big vision and a 10-acre community project in Hamilton. Past Vision Award honorees include Lowell Kruse (Buchanan and Daviess Counties) in 2023 and Steve Wenger (Clay County) in 2024.

Chad Higdon of Andrew County received the Maximize NWMO Regional Navigator Award for his work as the CEO of Second Harvest Community Food Bank and his volunteer efforts supporting the growth of entrepreneurship and improved communication across sectors. He also serves on Maximize NWMO's Regional Partner Council. Past recipients are Max Summers (Buchanan County, 2023), Rachel Kagay (DeKalb County, 2024), and Jackie Spainhower (Worth County, 2025).

Richard Switzer of Linn County received the Maximize NWMO Community Navigator Award for bringing together organizations in Marceline to learn, explore ways to align their work, and improve quality of life. The group calls its shared effort Maximize Marceline. Switzer serves as executive director of the Marceline Industrial Development Association and volunteers with his wife, Mary Beth, at many community events and endeavors connected to the area's Walt Disney heritage. Past recipients are Linda Place, Maximize Albany (Gentry County, 2023), Joe Gagnon, The Clinton County Initiative (Clinton County, 2024), and Caitlin Silver, Maysville Area Improvement Network [M.A.I.N.] (DeKalb County, 2025).

The summit also thanked Studer for his keynote and recognized Stephanie Norling, CEO of Communities of Resilience & Excellence and founding Maximize NWMO Navigation Team Member, who traveled from San Diego, Calif., for the event.

The key benefit of Maximize NWMO's programs is learning to shift from a project-based mindset where success lives and dies on the shoulders of very few people to a more sustainable, big-picture approach that includes many voices, with responsibilities shared across a larger group. The next "Building Strong Teams for Community Excellence" yearlong program is scheduled to start on January 13, 2027. Learn more at www.maximizenwmo.org.

Maximize NWMO serves the region by providing administrative, communications, data access, and coaching support on systems thinking and community prosperity building for individuals, communities, and the region. The initiative's Navigation Team supports leaders and communities who want to *dream big, decide wisely, and grow together to maximize our region's potential*. Maximize NWMO is the regional vitality initiative of The Community Foundation of Northwest Missouri. Over the last decade, partnerships with Communities of Resilience & Excellence (formerly Communities of Excellence 2026), Patterson Family Foundation, the United States Department of Agriculture – Rural Development (USDA-RD), University of Missouri Extension, the Missouri Department of Economic Development, and several other donors have made it possible. www.maximizenwmo.org and together@maximizenwmo.org

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PHOTOS ATTACHED:

1 – (L-R) Rachel Kagay, Board President of The Community Foundation of NWMO (podium), Joe Gagnon (seated), and Keynote Speaker Quint Studer (standing).

2 – (L-R) Christel Gollnick, Maximize NWMO Director/JUPER Communications, Cole Crawford, Hamilton Mayor, Bob Hughes, Maximize NWMO Vision Award recipient, and Bud Motsinger, former Caldwell County Commissioner.

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