

## Background

In 1907, a Kansas City company man established the site of the Great Western Portland Cement Company, along the Katy Railroad, launching the town of Mildred, Kansas.

Through the 1910s, the city boomed; bringing restaurants, hotels, schools, and even a movie theater. Unfortunately, by the end of World War I, the cement business in southeast Kansas started to decline. The cement plant shut down briefly in the 1920s, reopened at partial capacity, until permanently shutting down in the 1930s. Since then, the city of Mildred has steadily dwindled as jobs continue to disappear.

**“The only two things that are left from the original town are the Methodist Church and the store.”**

*-Regena Lance*

During Mildred’s heyday, Brown Brothers store opened in 1915. The store was passed down through three generations, changed names to Charlie Brown’s Grocery in the mid 40’s, and was in operation for nearly 100 years. In 2014, Charlie Brown’s Grocery finally closed its doors, leaving the community of Mildred to travel 10 minutes to the nearest grocery store in Moran.

## About the Community

<b>POPULATION*</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>COUNTY POPULATION* †</b>	<b>12,951</b>
<b>NEXT CLOSEST GROCERY STORE</b>	<b>7.5 miles</b>
<b>MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME*</b>	<b>\$55,322</b>
<b>CHILDREN LIVING BELOW POVERTY LEVEL** †</b>	<b>20.5%</b>
<b>FAMILIES LIVING BELOW POVERTY LEVEL** †</b>	<b>9.9%</b>
<b>LOW INCOME &amp; LOW ACCESS TO GROCERY STORE*** †</b>	<b>19.5%</b>
<b>PEOPLE WITH LOW ACCESS TO A GROCERY STORE*** †</b>	<b>40.0%</b>
<b>CHILDREN WITH LOW ACCESS TO A GROCERY STORE*** †</b>	<b>9.8%</b>

\*ACS 2012-2016, \*\*Kansas Health Matters, †County Level Data

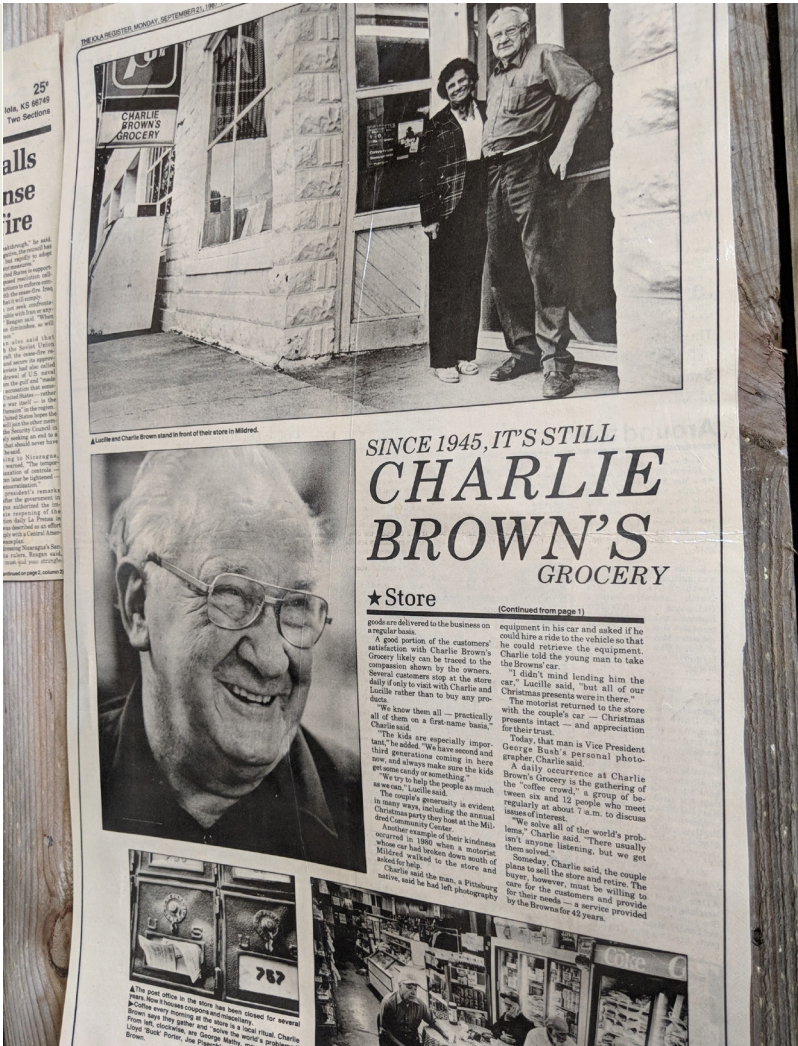
# The Issue

Soon after Charlie Brown's Grocery closed, Regena Lance was baking a cake and needed eggs. Faced with the choice of driving to Moran or Iola, Regena and her husband, Loren decided to buy the store.

Since 2014, the Lances have been slowly rehabilitating the old store. A computer teacher and farmer, respectively, Regena and Loren have learned everything about the grocery business by doing it. Over the past four years, they have continued to add to the store to better serve their community.

**“The community is good, the community wants this store. The problem is that... [we] can't generate more people in the neighborhood to get more people coming in the store.”**  
*-Loren Lance*

With more customers hard to find, Regena and Loren turned to making their operations more efficient.



A 1987 newspaper clipping displayed on the history wall at the Mildred Store.

## Music night brings community together

Once a month, on Saturday nights, the Mildred Store hosts a music night. Mildred Store owner, Loren picks up his instrument and plays a show with his friends. The idea of the music night came from Loren and his buddies meeting up at Mildred Store periodically to jam. Now, music nights bring in some extra income to Mildred Store in sales of concessions and drinks, but the most exciting part is that it provides the community something to do. Music nights sometimes attract more than four times the population of Mildred!



Left, a sign hangs in the Mildred Store announcing monthly music nights every 3rd Saturday of the month. Right, the Eleanor was found in the store amidst 100+ years of accumulation collected by the previous owners.

# The Process

## PROJECT TIMELINE

**1915**

The Brown Brothers store, home to today's Mildred Store, opens for business.

**1944**

The last high school class graduates from Mildred High School.

**April 2014**

Charlie Brown's Grocery announces it will close.

**June 2014**

June 2, 2014: Regena and Loren Lance purchase the Mildred Store.

**October 2014**

Monthly music nights start.

**2016**

Mildred Store receives Huck Boyd Rural Grocery Leader of the Year Award.

**2017**

USDA REAP Energy Audit is completed.

**January 2018**

Mildred Store applies for KHFI funding to purchase energy efficient cooler.

**March 2018**

The Mildred Store receives KHFI funding.

**April 2018**

KHFI supported energy efficient upgrades are completed at the Mildred Store.

The Mildred Store is located in a more than 100 year-old building that is one of the last remaining buildings from the height of the town's beginnings. The heating and air conditioning in this old building is inefficient, to say the least.

A USDA Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) Grant, provided an initial energy audit at the Mildred Store. The energy audit advised installing insulation, upgrading the electrical wiring in the building, and installing an energy efficient cooler.

In January 2018, the Lances applied to the Kansas Healthy Food Initiative (KHFI) for funding to assist in completing these energy efficiency upgrades, and to purchase an energy efficient cooler suitable for fresh produce.

With the new cooler, the Mildred Store has increased the amount of fresh produce offered in the store, while also decreasing total energy use and costs. In the first six months of 2018, the Mildred Store reduced their energy usage by more than 8,600 kWh compared to the first six months of 2017. The decrease in funds spent on inefficient electricity has allowed money to be invested in other areas of the store.



Loren and Regena Lance, owners of the Mildred Store, stand in their more than 100 years-old store.

# Lessons Learned



## Think outside of the box.

Regena and Loren like to think outside of the box. Loren says he “doesn’t want to have the same stuff as Walmart.” Monthly music night, an RV park, solar panels, Dress on a Dime, birthday parties, weddings, grocery delivery service - these are all examples of Regena and Loren’s big ideas. Some have happened and others are yet to be realized. “The intent was to save the store and provide a service to our community,” Regena says. So far, the Lances have done that and beyond.

## Be consistent and persevere.



When the previous owner closed the grocery store, the store hours were inconsistent and the community couldn’t count on the store to be open. With the Lances at the helm, consistency is a priority. It’s so important that they have their cell phone numbers posted on the front door. Community members know they can call on Regena and Loren if they’re in a pinch. This is all new to the Lances, but through the ups and downs of learning the grocery business, they consider every day an opportunity to continue improving their store.



## Build on historical legacy.

The previous owners left behind a rich legacy. Regena grew up going to the store with her family and remembers the previous owner, Lucille, giving kids pieces of candy when they came in. Today, the store has a stash of candy for kids when they visit the store. There is a wall in the store paying tribute to the history of the store with newspaper clippings and photos from the past century.

## KHFI Impact



Increased selection of fresh produce offerings.



Decreased energy usage by **8,604 kWh** in the first six months of operating with energy efficient upgrades.



Projected savings of more than **\$1,400\*** in energy costs annually.

\*Based on [www.electricitylocal.com](http://www.electricitylocal.com)

## Project Successes

**“We are keeping the community alive.”**  
*-Regena and Loren Lance*

As hard as the work is, Regena and Loren take great pride in what they have done to keep this grocery store alive. Thinking outside of the box has helped them provide for their community. Their consistent service allows community members to depend on the Mildred Market, and the history of the Mildred Market adds a layer of purpose to running the store.