



Tour Harvests Kansas Roots

Faculty and staff traveling on JCCC's first Kansas Tour stop to breathe before heading on to the next church/historical site/roadside art display/wind farm/feedlot/cemetery/library/museum ...

Outreach

Cover: Dr. Jay Antle and Dr. Jim Leiker, leaders of JCCC's first Kansas Tour, focused the trip on the state's history, geography, economy, environment and culture.

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Things learned on the Kansas Tour:

- Kansas' hills, ridges and canyons can't be seen when speeding along I-70.
- Small Kansas towns that treasure their traditions also harbor a lot of individualists who disregard them.
- Winter wheat was not carried here in a Mason jar by a little Mennonite girl.

That's just the beginning of a long list of insights, facts, impressions and questions engendered by JCCC's first tour of the state.

At the end of May, 15 JCCC faculty and staff members set off in a bus for a six-day tour of Kansas. Led by Dr. James Leiker and Dr. Jay Antle, both associate professors of history at JCCC, the group crisscrossed the state, focusing on Kansas history, ecology, economy and art. Dr. Deborah Williams, assistant professor, environmental science, and Dr. Allison Smith, assistant professor, art history, shared perspectives from their fields as well.

"We realized long ago that JCCC faculty and staff had a disconnect, like many folks in this part of the state, between what happens in the KC metro area and the rest of Kansas," Leiker said. "We hear often about globalization and so we focus on 'big picture' teaching when the local and regional context is just as important."

Days were packed with visits to the Eisenhower Library in Abilene; research into sustainable agriculture at the Land Institute in Salina; the Grass Roots Art Museum in Lucas; roadside art at Mullinville; the Cathedral of the Plains in Victoria; the African-American town of Nicodemus; the Sternberg Museum's fossil fish-within-a-fish at Hays; Punished Woman canyon, the site of an 1870s battle near Scott City; the wind farm outside Spearville; the feedlots of Dodge City; and the reconstruction of Greensburg. The group braved cow pies, the threat of rattlesnakes, 35-mile-an-hour winds, and imminent tornados, and learned a lot.



S.P. Dinsmoor's Garden of Eden in Lucas is a cement monument to populist thought.

Even lifelong Kansans found surprises. “I thought I had a good understanding of what Kansas has to offer,” said David Smith, associate professor, hospitality management. “But Jay and Jim showed me things in the state that caused me to be excited about the diversity of things I can share with my students.”

And then there was the camaraderie. “The group brought back memories of the first years of my employment at the college at a time when the faculty and staff intermingled to a degree inconceivable today,” said Kevin Gratton, professor, chemistry. “The cross-fertilization in ideas and motivations was exhilarating.”

And that was the point. “We’re believers in experiential learning,” Antle said. “Immersing yourself in a place brings about intellectual development.”

The bus will pull away for the second Kansas Tour in May 2009. More information will be available throughout the year. 🌿

Story by Julie Haas

Lovingly maintained, Kansas’ old churches are a testament to the immigrant populations that built them.



The wind farm outside Spearville stands in a field of wheat, economically combining energy and agriculture.