

SPEAKER AND PARTNER BIOS

Aaron Collins

Owner- Green Waves Lawn Solutions, LLC

My name is Aaron Collins, and I own and operate Green Waves Lawn Solutions LLC, formerly known as Aaron's Lawn Care. What started with a push mower five years ago has grown into a trusted local lawn care, landscaping, and seasonal lighting business serving Leavenworth County and the surrounding areas. I'm a man of faith, a father to a beautiful daughter, and a purpose-driven entrepreneur who's been blessed to earn first place in the Grow Leavenworth County Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge three years in a row and receive Exemplary recognition at the State level. I'm passionate about building a business that serves others with integrity, excellence, and heart.

Brian Faust

Leavenworth Director of Public Works

Brian Faust came to the City of Leavenworth in 2021 as the Public Works Director, bringing with him more than 30 years of experience. Mr. Faust has previously worked as a civil engineer for Topeka, Gardner, Paola in Kansas and Raymore and Callaway County in Missouri. He holds a bachelor's and master's degree in civil engineering from the University of Missouri. He also worked for about 10 years in the private sector as a stress engineer, helping to build the McDonnell Douglas F-15E Strike Eagle and the F/A-18 Super Hornet.

Kristina Mease

Regional Director for the University of Kansas Small Business Center

Kristina Mease is the regional director of the KU Small Business Development Center (SBDC), where her passion for supporting small businesses drives her every action. Originally from Emporia, Kansas, Mease fell in love with the charm and sense of community in Lawrence while pursuing her undergraduate degree in art history at the University of Kansas, which she completed in 2014. Mease then earned her MBA from the University of Kansas in 2017, with an emphasis in marketing. Since joining the SBDC in 2017, Mease has combined her academic knowledge with practical experience to support local entrepreneurs effectively.

Celeste Carlson

Founder- Growing Good and Lead Organizer, 1 Million Cups Kansas City

Celeste Carlson is the founder of Growing Good, a consulting firm dedicated to strengthening the capacity of nonprofits so they can thrive. With more than 20 years of experience working alongside purpose-driven organizations, she has partnered with nonprofits across the globe to help build stronger boards, increase resources, and scale their impact. Celeste holds an MBA with an emphasis in Nonprofit Management, which informs her practical and growth-focused approach to nonprofit development.

Her passion is rooted in firsthand knowledge of the challenges nonprofit leaders face. Drawing on her decade as a program officer at a community foundation—where she connected donors and the community through successful community initiatives—Celeste brings a unique perspective that blends business acumen with nonprofit values.

She is deeply committed to ensuring the nonprofit sector flourishes, offering strategic, business-minded support that empowers leaders to focus on their missions and maximize their resources.

Based in Kansas City with her husband and daughter, Celeste enjoys discovering new coffee shops, building connections with innovative leaders, and volunteering her time.

Chris Gutierrez

President of Kansas City SmartPort, Inc.

Chris Gutierrez is the President of Kansas City SmartPort, Inc., a non-profit economic development organization that works to attract freight-based companies, such as manufacturing, distribution and warehouses, to the 18 county, bi-state Kansas City region. SmartPort is an affiliated group of the Kansas City Area Development Council (KCADC).

Chris is also the President of the Greater Kansas City Foreign Trade Zone, the grantee for the Foreign Trade Zone program in the KC region.

Chris has been active in logistics and international business for more than thirty years. He has worked in the public and private sector in economic development, international business and logistics.

Kim Portillo

Leavenworth Planning and Community Development Director

Kim Portillo took over the role as Planning and Community Development Director for the City of Leavenworth in 2024. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in architectural studies and a master's degree in urban planning, both from the University of Kansas. Kim grew up in Kansas City, Kansas, and has previous experience working in Wyandotte County and Johnson County, Kansas before joining Leavenworth. In her current role, Kim oversees Planters II, Community Development/CDBG, Code Enforcement, the RideLV Microtransit Program and Planning/Zoning.

Lisa Haack

Executive Director of Leavenworth County Development Corporation

Lisa Haack leads the operations and mission of the Leavenworth County Development Corporation (LCDC), a public-private 501(c)(7) organization dedicated to fostering job creation and capital investment throughout Leavenworth County, Kansas. Through strategic business attraction, retention, and expansion efforts, she works to strengthen the county's economic vitality. Lisa joined LCDC in 2017 and holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Kansas. She is also a 2021 graduate of the University of Oklahoma's Economic Development Institute.

Marcia Irvine

Pioneer Center Director, KCKCC

Marcia Irvine has worked for Kansas City Kansas Community College for over 25 years. She has been the director of the Pioneer Center since it opened in 2015. She has a Master's degree in Adult and Continuing Education from Kansas State University. She has been married to John for over 43 years, they have 2 children and 3 grandchildren.

Samantha Carpenter

Executive Director of Leavenworth Main Street

Samantha Carpenter, the Executive Director of Leavenworth Main Street beginning in September 2025 previously served as the organization's Marketing and Events Coordinator since June 2024. A proud Leavenworth resident for 11 years and former florist at Leavenworth Floral & Gifts, Sam brings creativity, event expertise, and a deep appreciation for the community to her leadership role. Under her direction, Leavenworth Main Street remains focused on revitalization, business support, and community-driven growth, guided by the proven Main Street America Four-Point Approach.

Sara Kobe

Financial Advisor for Edward Jones

Sara is a financial advisor with Edward Jones, bringing over 30 years of financial services industry

Scott Peterson

Leavenworth City Manager

became the vice-chair in 2024. She grew up in a small town in Iowa and is a strong believer of investing in her community. She is married to her husband, Jack, and they have two "adult-ish" boys, Jackson, age 23, and Logan, age 20. The city has a \$63 million annual budget and serves three federal partners – Fort Leavenworth, the Eisenhower VA Medical Center, and the Federal Correctional Institution (Bureau of Prisons). Scott brings previous

experience as the City Administrator of Knob Noster, Missouri, home to Whiteman Air Force Base. He has also served as the Assistant City Administrator in Edgerton, Kansas.

Scott earned a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from Kansas State University and a Master's of Public Administration (MPA) from the University of Kansas. Scott and his wife, Mackenzie, live in Leavenworth with their three year old son, Nolan.

Penny Holler

Leavenworth Assistant City Manager

Penny Holler and her family moved back to Leavenworth in 2021 for her job as Assistant City Manager/Economic Development Director. In her current role, she oversees the 81-acre Business and Technology Park, Municipal Airport at Sherman Army Airfield, \$4 million in various funds and 14 team members across various divisions. Prior to that she earned awards and honors for her economic development work and volunteer contributions serving military families. Her broad perspective comes from her BA in International Relations and time living in South America. She also holds a city management degree from the nation's top-rated local government program (University of Kansas MPA) and is working on an economic development certification through the International Economic Development Council (IEDC). She maintains an open door policy at City Hall for all Leavenworth businesses and start-ups.

Holly Pittman

Mayor, City of Leavenworth

Holly Pittman is a dedicated public servant, business leader, and community advocate, currently serving as the Mayor of Leavenworth, Kansas. She is also a realtor, the president of the Leavenworth Public Education Foundation, the vice president of Riverside Resources, a board member of Country Club Bank and past president of the Leavenworth Lions Club. Her extensive leadership experience includes serving as president of CASA, Leavenworth Main Street, and the Women's Chamber of Commerce, demonstrating her deep commitment to strengthening the community. Her impact has been recognized through several prestigious awards, including the 2017 Athena Award, Be The Change Award, Lions International Melvin Jones Fellow, and the Women of Action Award from Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. Mayor Pittman holds a degree from the University of Kansas in public health.

Christian Hopkins

Deputy Director, Small Business Office, Kansas Department of Commerce

Christian Hopkins is the Deputy Director to the newly launched Small Business Office at the Kansas Department of Commerce. Prior to his current position, Christian worked as a Program Specialist and Advisor at the KU Small Business Development Center, analyzing small business financial statements, assisting with business plan development and cashflow projections and educating with the business loan process. Christian earned his Bachelor's Degree in Business from Haskell University and his Master of Business Administration (MBA) from the University of Kansas.

Kristi Lee

Director, Leavenworth Convention and Visitors Bureau

Kristi Lee has been the Director of the Leavenworth Convention and Visitors Bureau since 2016. In that role, she directs the marketing and activities of the tourism office including the Sister City Committee and the CVB Tourism Advisory Board. Prior to working in Leavenworth, Kristi was the Executive Director of the Franklin County Convention and Visitors Bureau for eight years and Kingman Chamber of Commerce for three years. She is a graduate of DMI.

Chuck Magaha

Director, Leavenworth County Emergency Management

Chuck Magaha is the Director of Leavenworth County's Emergency Management Office. The Emergency Management Division of the Leavenworth County Sheriff's Office is responsible for coordinating all four phases of emergency management with federal, state, and local governments, as well as private sector businesses and institutions.

Chuck has been with Leavenworth County for 34 years. His busiest time of year is spring and summer, also known as storm season. Chuck's job is crucial for being prepared to respond to any emergency that develops in our community.