Category: Population 3,000 – 9,999

Orange City’s Phoenix project was born in June 2008 from the ashes of the fire that destroyed the Hawkeye Building on the city’s historic Central Avenue. Even as the community gathered to watch the fire department extinguish the flames, the early seeds of rebuilding were sown.

Daryl Beltman was Orange City mayor when the blaze took the Hawkeye Building. “That night I had colleagues and friends come up to me and say and encourage that this was going to take a major community effort to overcome a fire like this, especially for a main street.”

As the community began to envision what could be done to fill the hole left in its downtown core by the Hawkeye Building, other community needs were recognized. The community was in need of an event center and Unity Christian High School was in the process of fundraising for a performing arts center.

Eventually, an ambitious three-phase plan came together to address all three needs. First, the Hawkeye Center would go in place of the burned structure, replacing the burned street-level business spaces as well as creating five second-level condominiums. Second, the Prairie Winds Event Center would provide 17,000 square feet of meeting and banquet space in the Highway 10 commercial district, an area that had ample room for the parking such a facility would need. Third, the city would partner with Unity Christian to create a 750-seat performing arts center on the school campus.

The total price tag? $13.8 million. To make it all happen, Orange City leveraged several funding sources, including city funds. A Vision Iowa Grant provided $922,000 toward the Prairie Winds Event Center, along with $200,000 from the Orange City Municipal Electric Utility. The voters passed a $4.5 million general obligation bond in November 2009 to support all three projects.

The Hawkeye Center opened in 2011, with a Hallmark store and an ice cream and coffee shoppe filling the street-level locations. All five second level condos were sold. The Prairie Winds Event Center, which is owned and operated by the city, opened in June 2012. The facility has spurred further development in the Highway 10 district, most notably a Hampton Inn just east of the Event Center. The Knight Performing Arts Center at Unity Christian High School opened in the fall of 2013, in plenty of time to host the annual Tulip Festival’s musical, a community production of “The Music Man” in May 2014.

Current Orange City Mayor Deb DeHaan, who stepped into the position after the project completed, marveled at the community response. “I was impressed at how they rallied around and knew how important this was to our community.”

Marty Guthmiller, vice president of the Orange City Development Corporation, feels the key to the community’s support was communication. “When presented with factual and correct information, the community makes the right decision. It’s not always ‘yes,’ but they make the right decision.”

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