



The Osner family standing in front of Hired Man's Grocery & Grill, Inc. in Conway Springs, Kansas.

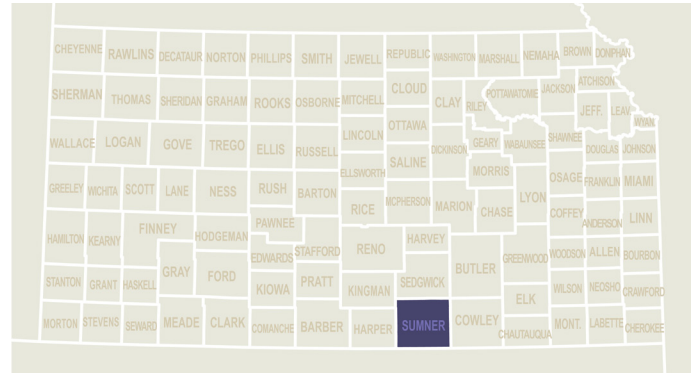
Background

Conway Springs is located in South-Central Kansas along the Oklahoma border. The town was founded in 1884 and was named after its pure spring water. The Conway Springs spring house can be visited today in Conway Springs City Park. The spring water was once believed to possess healing qualities, which attracted people to the city.

This region of Kansas has a rich agricultural heritage. Sumner County is sometimes referred to as the "Wheat Capital of the World." Much of the land surrounding Conway Springs is farmed in wheat. Otherwise, residents are likely to commute 30 miles into Wichita for work.



The produce section in Hired Man's Grocery & Grill, Inc.



About the Community

POPULATION*	1,408
COUNTY POPULATION*	23,509
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME*	\$52,000
MEDIAN AGE*	34 years
CHILDREN LIVING BELOW POVERTY LEVEL** †	14.8%
FAMILIES LIVING BELOW POVERTY LEVEL** †	9.4%
LOW INCOME & LOW ACCESS TO GROCERY STORE** †	10.0%
PEOPLE WITH LOW ACCESS TO A GROCERY STORE** †	29.0%
CHILDREN WITH LOW ACCESS TO A GROCERY STORE** †	8.4%

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

The Issue

Conway Springs used to have a grocery store called Joe's Market on Main Street. Once Joe's Market shut down in 2007, residents were forced to buy groceries out of town. The closest full-service grocery stores were located a minimum of 15-25 miles away.

At the time, Clint Osner was working as a welder at an airplane manufacturing company in Wichita, and he was bored. While getting his car washed, a long-time Conway Springs resident, Mary Kay Hunt, approached him and announced, "You need to put in a grocery store." Clint told her he had been thinking about it, so Mrs. Hunt countered with, "Well, quit thinking about it, and do it!"

The idea to open a grocery store in Conway Springs was Clint's way out of his welding job, and a way back to the community. Clint's conversation with Mrs. Hunt at the car wash was the spark that led a hometown couple, Clint and Jenny Osner, to consider opening and operating a grocery store in Conway Springs, Kansas.

George's Meats Live On.

During Clint's childhood, his father worked in the local butcher shop at Joe's Market. When Clint and Jenny decided to open a grocery store, Clint asked his dad, George, to help out in their meat department. Clint recalls asking his dad, "Give me a month or two in the butcher room, and I'll have it..It's been 10 years, and he's still back there with my mom."

When Hired Man's Grocery & Grill, Inc. opened, their house-made sausage was on the shelf as, "Original Sausage." Everyone knew George was helping out in the meat department, and asked for his specialty sausage. It was already on the shelf, but the Osners realized quickly they needed to label it. Today, you can buy George's sausage in original, garlic, italian, or jalapeno, in bulk or stuffed packages. Their meat department is a point of pride for the store. People come from as far away as Alaska to take home George's Sausage and other meats.

Clint describes the meat department as, "A lot of work. If I didn't have a meat department, I'd be a fishing, hunting fool. Now I have a meat department, and I don't go fishing or hunting very often."



George Osner stands in front of the meat department at Hired Man's Grocery & Grill, Inc. Image Credit: Hired Man's Grocery & Grill, Inc.

The Process

TIMELINE

2007

A community member approaches Clint Osner at the car wash, and suggests he open a grocery store.

November 2007

Construction of Hired Man's Grocery & Grill, Inc. (Hired Man's) begins.

July 2008

Hired Man's opens for business.

May 2011

Clint starts working at the grocery store full-time.

November 2014

Hired Man's begins distributing to Eagle Grocery in Norwich, Kansas.

June 2015

KSU Rural Grocery Initiative (RGI) partners with Hired Man's on a nutrition education grant, and awards the store with funding for a community betterment project which is put towards benches at the local swimming pool.

March 2017

Hired Man's extends their weekend hours in anticipation of Dollar General opening.

May 2017

Dollar General opens across the street from Hired Man's.

June 2017

Hired Man's, in partnership with RGI, sends out community survey.

September 2017

Hired Man's starts distributing to Raider Pride grocery store in Argonia.

May 2018

Jenny Osner starts working full-time at Hired Man's Grocery & Grill, Inc.

October 2018

Hired Man's paves its entrance and adds a larger parking lot based on customer feedback from the community survey sent out in June 2017.

Clint and Jenny Osner both grew up in Conway Springs, dated in high school, and have been together since. The Osners' family was a huge support in building the grocery store. It took about 9 months of working on the weekends to build. "We'd build on the weekends – my 3 brothers, my dad, my uncles, my brothers in law... it depended on what part of construction we were doing and who showed up," Clint describes.

Clint continued to work full-time for 3.5 years before it made sense for him to work at the grocery store full-time. Jenny, a school teacher, continued to work for the local school district until May 2018, when she decided to work full-time at the grocery store.

Hired Man's Grocery & Grill, Inc. celebrated their 10-year anniversary in July 2018. Still, they acknowledge that the grocery business is hard. For Jenny and Clint, failure was not an option and they've learned a lot since their start 10 years ago. Clint jokes that he's learned as a grocer, he only has to work six half-days a week - a half day being 12 hours a day.

"For some people, we are their grocery store, for others we are their get-through-until-they-make-their-big-trip-to-town store, but we need all of them, we need every single person that walks through that door." - Jenny Osner



Rural Grocery Initiative (RGI) Director, Dave Procter, presents Manager, Nancy Koester and owner, Clint Osner, with funding for a community betterment project as a thank you for participating in a nutrition education grant project conducted by RGI.

Lessons Learned

✓ Diversify and transition income streams.

Clint and Jenny both had other full-time jobs when they opened Hired Man's Grocery & Grill, Inc. This allowed them to maintain an outside income, and have benefits like insurance. Clint and Jenny feel this was critical for their financial stability. They were lucky enough to have Jenny's mother, Nancy Koester, serve as their daytime manager since opening, and to have Clint's parents, George and Donna Osner, helping in the butcher room. By not having to pay their own salaries from the grocery store, Clint and Jenny have been able to make ends meet regularly and pay down their initial loan more efficiently.

Find experts and use them. ✓

When the Osners were building the store, they worked closely with their distributor. At that time, the distributor suggested square-footage that was way beyond what Jenny and Clint could have dreamed. Sure enough, 10 years later, Hired Man's Grocery & Grill, Inc. has achieved those projections. The Osners maintain a great working relationship and feel comfortable asking tough questions of their distributor, Associated Wholesale Grocers (AWG). "AWG provides a great team of support staff to help with our success," says Jenny. Hired Man's Grocery & Grill, Inc. has 30 local employees that are their local experts. The Osners are proud to employ their community members.

✓ Community Community Community.

Clint and Jenny are most proud of their connection to their community. They know most everyone that comes into the store. They use social media to share happenings at the store and in the community. They participate in an annual food drive competition, celebrate their store's anniversary with the community, enter a float in the Fall Festival parade, and have many customers giveaways throughout the year. They send store care packages to community members that are deployed, and the list goes on. Jenny says, "We all have to help each other in order for this community to work...they are our neighbors, it's our community, it's our kids, so we all help each other. We like to say we are 'homegrown'."

Project Successes

The Osners have established a thriving community grocery store in their hometown. They have built a community-centered store, found experts to help them move forward, and made business savvy decisions to ensure long-term economic sustainability of their grocery store. They call their daily grocer's jobs, "living the dream." What's next for the Osners' store, only time will tell.

"We say that we built a grocery store in our 30s, now we have to decide what we're going to do in our 40s."
- Jenny Osner



Hired Man's Grocery & Grill, inc. employees pose in front of the store. Image credit: Hired Man's Grocery & Grill, Inc.