

LAWRENCE BUSINESS BEAT



News and information from The Chamber • Friday, August 23, 2024.



DDC Making a Difference

By Joshua Falleaf, Director of Economic Development

Entrepreneur Gavin Ayode received business funding through Diversify Douglas County (DDC) in March 2024 to support the growth of his clothing line Blinded Collections. Committed to authenticity, creativity, and inclusivity, Blinded Collections includes trendy, affordable clothes such as shirts, hoodies, shorts, beanies, and much more. With access to DDC resources, “we’ve expanded our product line and have seen an increase in customer engagement and orders,” says Ayode. “I’m very grateful for the support that has allowed us to grow to this point.” Items available for purchase at <https://blindedco.com/>

With funding from the City of Lawrence, Douglas County, and private investment in the EDC’s “Rising Together,” the DDC program fulfills the goals of each by providing low-interest, low-barrier loans and additional support to BIPOC entrepreneurs in the Douglas County community. For more information about the DDC, visit www.edclawrence.com

BioData Solutions Chooses Lawrence to Call Home

By Chamber Staff

For many college graduates, the siren call of a university town is hard to resist.

KU is no exception, with many professionals looking to return to Lawrence to start businesses and enhance their careers.

The Chamber recognizes that call.

“One of the Chamber’s goals is attracting talent to build the employee pool for local businesses,” says Steve Kelly, vice president of economic development with the Chamber. “We know there are recent university graduates who want to start their careers here. We know there are alumni who want to return. Part of the Chamber’s focus is to help create and support these opportunities.”

Stephanie Pajas-Farmer, founder and president of BioData Solutions, is one of those success stories. Her consulting firm specializes in supporting pharmaceutical, contract research and biotechnology organizations as they navigate the drug development process.

“Of course, science is the foundation of our company,” Pajas-Farmer says. “But knowing the pharmaceutical business and how to run a company is important too. We’re thriving because of our staff. KU is a valuable resource when you’re looking for local talent. There’s just so much here.”

Her relationship with the Chamber is built on developing opportunities for technology companies like hers.

“The Chamber is on the driving edge for establishing new businesses here especially with projects like the Innovation Park,” she says. “The Chamber understands that Lawrence has a lot going for it in terms of resources, employees, cost of living and location. They’re really focused on the future of technology-based businesses starting here, coming here and keeping innovation here.”

Pajas-Farmer knows about the talent at KU because she was one of them. She graduated with a PhD and master’s degree in pharmaceutical chemistry from KU. Then branched out into the world to pursue her career, ending up in the suburbs of Philadelphia.

“I was working for big-name pharmaceutical companies like Merck and Bristol Myers Squibb. I wanted to help move medicine forward,” she says.

While working in the industry, Pajas-Farmer also consulted with private clients as a side gig.

She realized if she wanted to lead the science and make bigger decisions, she needed to start her own firm.

“I became interested in chemistry because I love breaking things apart and putting them back together,” she says. “My education taught me how to take the data we discover and map it back to how it works in humans. It was very fulfilling to me. I loved the scientific aspects and medical needs of my job, but I wanted a larger role.”

She started two companies, BioData Solutions and Ariadne Software, which she later combined. She says it’s rare to find someone with a science background running a company—it’s usually people with business backgrounds making final decisions. “I wanted the opportunity to do more and drive more of the business. Which led me to move out on my own. I think it’s important to show that business can work with science,” she says.

Her firm is headquartered above a restaurant on Massachusetts Street in downtown Lawrence. “Once I realized I could work from anywhere, we began to talk about moving here,” she says.

Pajas-Farmer has lived on the East Coast, the West Coast and Ireland. She’s traveled all over the world for work. But she’s dedicated to growing her business her way—in Lawrence.

“I want to grow in Lawrence and grow Lawrence,” Pajas-Farmer says. “I’m not going to have a large customer base in Lawrence right now, but there’s so much opportunity for the future. And not just for BioData Solutions. Other innovative companies can thrive here too.”

The Chamber works as a network for Lawrence businesses, says Pajas-Farmer. “They work at keeping the lines of communication open by helping us engage with other technology companies. Their network and resources are outstanding. It’s the strength of this network that has led to discussions with other companies on both coasts about what Lawrence has to offer.”

Pajas-Farmer is dedicated to growing not only her company but also other Lawrence businesses. “I want to see pharmaceutical companies come here, grow here or start here,” she says. “I’ve accessed a lot of Chamber resources since moving my family and my company here. Now it’s time for me to give back.”

She says it’s not just about what the Chamber can do, but what she can do for the Lawrence community.

“I’m working with the Chamber on keeping innovation growing here. If I can help secure that, then I will do whatever I can to help,” she says.



Taste of Lawrence: Celebrate with us!

For over 40 years, Taste of Lawrence has been held annually to honor our local educators

and showcase some of our community’s finest food and beverage establishments. Always a great time, the event is aptly named as those in attendance are truly offered a *taste* of the Lawrence community! Help us celebrate over 40 years of Taste of Lawrence by wearing your FINEST 1980’s outfit! Ticket Prices: \$10 Teachers / Educators, \$20 Noneducator. Your ticket includes samples from over 30 food and beverage vendors, and live entertainment & games! Vendor and Sponsorship deadline is September 2. Email Jmartin@lawrencechamber.com if interested!

Meet The Chamber Interns!



If you have attended some of our events recently, you may have already had the wonderful experience of meeting our Communications Intern, Avery Yarbrough and our

Membership Intern, Taiwan Berryhill. Avery is a student at University of Kansas and will graduate in the fall with a degree in Strategic Communications. Taiwan is a Senior at the University of Kansas and a Communications Major, as well. Taiwan is also a Linebacker for the Jayhawks. Both interns have concluded their stint at The Chamber, and we wish them the very best in their last year at the University of Kansas!

The Chamber is now accepting nominations for the 2025 Chamber Board. The nomination form can be found at lawrencechamber.com, or by emailing kgerstner@lawrencechamber.com.

Join The Chamber Today!



Your Chamber and EDC promote growth and prosperity by serving as the leading business advocate, cultivating leadership, and facilitating connectivity.

A Message from Bonnie Lowe, Chamber President & CEO



Greetings,

Summer is coming to a close, and fall is just around the corner. I hope you share my excitement surrounding the start of a new school year and all the fun fall activities with volleyball, soccer, and football - especially KU Football. While this will be a unique season, many plans are being executed to enhance our Lawrence experience. Our Chamber has a more personal tie – one of our

summer interns, Taiwan Berryhill, plays linebacker for the Jayhawks.

We have many things to celebrate as this edition highlights Stephanie Pajas-Farmer, owner of BioData Solutions and Chamber member. She recognized that she could successfully run BioData Solutions from anywhere, and she chose Lawrence. The Midwest is quickly becoming known as a tech hub, and we are excited to help Lawrence and Douglas County grow in that space.

We are also celebrating another win with local entrepreneur, Gavin Ayode of Blinded Collections. Gavin is a recipient of funding through our Diversify Douglas County loan program. With generous support from our partners The City of Lawrence, Douglas County, and our Rising Together investors this program is helping new entrepreneurs grow their businesses.

The economic impact and energy that arrives each year when KU and Haskell students return, reminds us how fortunate we are to call Lawrence “home.” Let’s remember to celebrate our successes and each other. Many thanks to our membership and community for your support.

Upcoming Events 2025 Nominations Open!

Sept. 10 – 2025 Leadership Lawrence Class Announcement Celebration

Sept. 12 – Chamber Coffee Connections

Sept. 19 – Taste of Lawrence

Oct. 9 - For more info and event registration, please view The Chamber calendar online at lawrencechamber.com

Contact Us!

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