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Press Release

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***Pathways to a Healthy Kansas*, a Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas initiative, gives \$100,000 to improve Buhler's Becker and Wheatland Parks**

Reno County, Kansas – July 6, 2023 –

A special event was held in Buhler's Albert Becker Park as a check for \$100,000 was presented as part of the *Pathways to a Healthy Kansas (Pathways) Grant*. *Pathways* is a Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas initiative that is administered by the Reno County Health Department. Jake Schmidt, Mayor of Buhler, received the check presented by Michelle Vakulenko, Group Sales Consultant for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas. Participating in the check presentation event were James Perry, Superintendent for the City of Buhler, Keith Pankratz, CEO of Sunshine Meadows Retirement Community, Tegan Meadors, Director of Buhler Recreation, Sarah Glass, Assistant City Clerk for the City of Buhler, and Sara Howard, Deputy City Clerk for the City of Buhler. Not pictured is Candace Davidson, Health Promotion Supervisor with the Reno County Health Department.

The grant money will be used for the Becker and Wheatland Parks Trail and Lighting Initiative that will include developing a one-fifth mile, 8-foot wide, ADA compliant, public shared-use trail around Becker Park in addition to paths connecting the perimeter trail to amenities in the park. Becker Park does not have any trails or sidewalks around the perimeter of the park or paths that provide a route to enter the park to access park amenities. Park amenities include a playground, one-half basketball court, picnic tables, a shelter building, horseshoe pits, and a green space. The trail around Becker Park will also connect to the existing City of Buhler sidewalk system.

Wheatland Park currently has a one-mile loop asphalt trail with additional access paths throughout the park. The trail is one of the most used park amenities in the City of Buhler but has very limited lighting for evening and morning users. Providing lighting along the trail in Wheatland Park will extend the safe operating hours of the trail which will offer more outdoor recreation opportunities to the community.

The funds received from the *Pathways* grant require that the project is connected to a population of focus. The populations of focus for this initiative are seniors living at Sunshine Meadows Retirement Community (SMRC). The construction of ADA compliant trails/sidewalks at Becker Park will create opportunities for seniors living at SMRC to utilize the park's amenities in addition to providing safe walking facilities for seniors with disabilities and impaired mobility.

The project agreement is between the City of Buhler, Buhler Recreation Commission, Sunshine Meadows Retirement Community, and HEAL Reno County as part of the *Pathways to a Healthy Kansas*, a Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas initiative, administered by the Reno County Health Department.

The total cost of the Becker and Wheatland Parks Trail and Lighting Initiative is \$141,485.78. In addition to the *Pathways* Phase 2 implementation grant funding of \$100,000, *Pathways* Phase 2 coordination funds in the amount of \$10,000 will be used for engineering services, the City of Buhler will provide project oversight, in-kind labor, and fiscal management of the Becker and Wheatland Parks Trail and Lighting Initiative valued at approximately \$8,800 and additional funds will be raised as needed.

Improving the walkability of Buhler with the new trail at Becker Park connected to the city's sidewalk system and increasing the lighting at Wheatland Park will enable people to reap health benefits and make the community a better place to live.



About Pathways to a Healthy Kansas

Pathways to a Healthy Kansas is the largest community grant program ever funded by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas. The *Pathways* program provides 16 community coalitions with the tools and resources needed to remove barriers and engage their communities in ways that enable healthy eating and tobacco-free, active living to become a way of life. The grant funding for each community includes a coordination grant along with the opportunity to apply for non-competitive implementation and achievements grants. For more information, visit bcbsks.com/pathways.

About Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas

For more than 75 years, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas has built a reputation of trust with its members and contracting providers by providing outstanding customer service while quickly and accurately processing claims; fairly administering benefit plans and contracts; offering programs, services and tools to help members improve or maintain their health; and operating under the highest ethical standards while being good stewards of premium dollars. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association and is the state's largest insurer, serving all Kansas counties except Johnson and Wyandotte. For more information, visit bcbsks.com.

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