



## HOLDREGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOUNDATION

### *Giving Back to Education*

### ***HHS Alumni Recognition Feature!***

*Dear HHS Alumni and HPS Foundation Supporters,*

Holdrege High School is fortunate to have many very successful graduates. We are excited to continue sharing the stories of some of those HHS Alums thanks to the journalistic talents of Kristine (Long) Jacobson, Class of 1990.

We also welcome your suggestions and comments and encourage you to join the Duster Alumni Association (*see form below*).

Sincerely,

*Teresa Kroll, Chairman  
HPS Foundation Committee*

### **Chris Erickson - Class of 2000**

#### **HHS graduate cultivates passion in urban redevelopment**

By Kristine Jacobson

Chris Erickson has made the most of the 15 years since he graduated from Holdrege High School. The Class of 2000 graduate gained skills in engineering, real estate development, and consulting through his education and work experiences. With those skills, he and a business partner started a development company in December 2012 called City Ventures, which has already become a multi-million dollar business with more than 50 employees.

"In the past two years, we have acquired or developed about \$40 million worth of real estate and business assets, which is a pretty monumental undertaking for a couple of young guys," Erickson said. The assets include two shopping centers (one in Lincoln and one in Omaha) and two full-service car wash/detail businesses, also in Lincoln and Omaha. Those assets were purchased to generate cash flow for the company's real passion - urban redevelopment.

Their first major urban redevelopment project is The Corvina in downtown Omaha's Old Market area. It's a 200,000 square-foot project that will include commercial tenants and 125 apartments. The Corvina, with its resort style swimming pool and modern apartments, is designed to be one of the most luxurious addresses in downtown Omaha. "It's got potentially one of the best amenity packages in downtown Omaha," Erickson said. Work began on The Corvina in May of 2014 and is expected to be completed by the end of 2015. Commercial and residential tenants may start moving in as early as the spring of 2015.

Erickson and his business partner also recently started a framing company to help with their many projects. City Ventures is hoping to break ground on another major urban redevelopment project this summer.

Because of his business success, Erickson was recognized in 2014 by the Midlands Business Journal as one of Omaha's top 40 business leaders under age 40. "It was a very nice honor," Erickson said.

He was nominated for the award by the Director of inCommon Community Development ([www.incommoncd.org](http://www.incommoncd.org)), a non-profit organization that works to prevent poverty in neighborhoods. Erickson has served on the board for 3 years and works directly with residents to empower them to make their neighborhoods thrive. He helps with fund-raising and with identifying needs for projects, such as building a community center where residents can host GED classes, ESL classes, etc.

Starting a multi-million dollar company is a big bite for someone who is only 33 years old. But Erickson said it didn't stress him too much, as he and his wife, 2000 HHS graduate Trisha (Keeler) Erickson, had been carefully preparing for this move. "A very important key to being a successful entrepreneur is having the ability to take risk," Erickson said. "The most important thing you can do for yourself is to build an affordable life because it gives you the financial freedom to take risk."

Chris described his Omaha home as "modest" and said they don't have car payments or use personal credit cards. Trisha works as a charge nurse at Bergen Mercy Hospital in Omaha. She holds a degree in dietetics and nursing and is working toward her master's degree in nursing. "I'm very proud of my wife," Chris said. "She's a wonderful



person and very successful in her own right." They have two children, 3-year-old Brady and 7-month-old Oscar.

Erickson said living modestly was just one of the steps to his success. His path to success started on his family's farm south of Holdrege, where he learned to work and solve problems. His parents are Bill and Alice Erickson. "When you work on a farm, you are always building something or trying to create something to make something easier," Erickson said. The farm is also where he learned his good work ethic, which Erickson said "has been a major difference maker in my career."

"I learned to work until the job is done and to really enjoy work, which is important if you are going to undertake the type of entrepreneurial activities I have," Erickson said. "I do really enjoy what I do, and I don't feel like it's work."

Erickson attended R7 Elementary School until 8th grade and recalls Principal Leroy Walker teaching algebra to a small class of four students. "I felt like that was a good foundation," he said. "He pushed us pretty hard."

He enjoyed math and science classes in high school taught by Larry Lum and Tom Brestel. He said his physics and calculus classes pushed him toward a degree in engineering. And although his passion was math and science, he liked Barbara Blackburn's senior English class. "I felt like she made it fun and interesting," Erickson said. "I felt like she challenged us at writing, which is not something that I was naturally good at."

Outside of the classroom, basketball was his passion in high school. "I learned a lot about leadership and working with a team through basketball, which is obviously critical to success in business," Erickson said. "And, I also gained self-confidence and a willingness to step up and take a shot."

After high school, Erickson earned a degree in civil engineering from Iowa State University. During his college summers, he did surveying work for Tagge Engineering in Holdrege and then later, he interned for Peter Kiewit, where he learned more about construction and cost estimating.

After college, he accepted a job at TST Inc. Consulting Engineers in Fort Collins, Colo. He was introduced to the company through his Holdrege connection to Darold Tagge. And, his love of fly fishing drew him to the Colorado location.

His work at TST included helping start a planning and landscape architecture division of the company and adding storm water management services. He was the youngest person serving on the strategic planning team for the company.

After five years at TST, Erickson realized his passion was real estate development rather than consulting. "I realized the future was in urban redevelopment, urban infill, vertically-integrated mixed-use type projects," Erickson said. So, he started looking for a job that would prepare him for starting his own development company. He found that with Shamrock Development in Omaha, one of the pioneers of redeveloping mixed-use projects in downtown Omaha in the last 15 years.

While at Shamrock, Erickson managed the historic renovation of the Barker Building in downtown Omaha and became familiar with tax credits and other funding for urban redevelopment.

He realized that urban development was a trend that was going to continue. "The younger generation and the baby boomers who are retiring are looking for that cultural experience that you can't get in the suburban markets," Erickson said. "They want to come to places that have a wide range of cultural diversity and diversity in arts, culture, and entertainment."

After two years with Shamrock, Erickson made the leap to start City Ventures. "I feel like we've accomplished an immense amount," Erickson said. "I'm very proud of what we've built in a short amount of time."

And an unexpected challenge and benefit was being able to provide work to so many people. "We didn't launch the venture with the expectations that we'd bring this many employees on board, but that's been a rewarding result as well," he said. "It's important to realize that business isn't as much about numbers as it is about people. If you support the people, typically the business will be successful."

When Erickson is not working, he tries to find time to enjoy fly fishing and classic cars. He also is a guest lecturer for the University of Nebraska at Omaha's engineering economic class and for the architecture department at Iowa State.

To learn more about City Ventures, visit the web site at <http://www.city-ventures.com/>

## About Us

*The mission of the HPS Foundation is to support and enhance the educational efforts of students and teachers of Holdrege Public Schools by providing funding for innovative and challenging programs, learning experiences, and activities.*

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