

2026 Kansas FCE State Conference Speaker Bios

Opening Keynote Speaker Information



La Rochelle Young, Atchison Kansas Mayor and Conference Keynote Speaker

BIO Like Amelia, La Rachelle calls Atchison home. Her career path has taken her to Washington, D.C. to serve as a legislative aide. She assisted the late Congressman John Lewis to establish the Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education historic site. La Rochelle would return home to Kansas to lead the Kansas Department of Children and Families-Faith Based Initiatives program. A graduate of Kansas 4-H and KU, she has continued her studies related to juvenile justice reform. Today, you will find La Rochelle continuing on a path of civic engagement serving on numerous local boards and current Mayor of Atchison. She credits her 4-H public speaking skills for her career advancements; today she is teaching the next generation importance of public speaking skills as a high school teacher.

Soaring To New Heights

Amelia Earhart is known around the world for her aviation achievements. Nearly a century later, few recall the challenges she faced before becoming a celebrity. She would face challenges, set backs, and even planes crashes on her life flight. Her words provide wisdom today; **'Use your fear... it can take you to the place where you store your courage.'** Our daughters, granddaughters and nieces, continue to admire her grit, adventurous spirit and determination. La Rochelle promises to challenge us about the importance of *learning to fail forward* if we want to soar to new heights. Or as Amelia said, **"I want to do it because I want to do it. Women must try to do things as men have tried. When they fail, their failure must be but a challenge to others."**

Conference Closing Keynote Speaker Information



Ron Wilson, Humanities Kansas Speaker & Director of Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development

Humanities Kansas is an independent nonprofit leading a movement of ideas to empower the people of Kansas to strengthen their communities and our democracy Ron Wilson is director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University joins this effort as Humanities Speaker.

With a B.S. in Agricultural Education and a Masters in Mass Communications from K-State, he became a legislative assistant to Senator Nancy Kassebaum, a staff member for the U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee, and vice president of the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives. In 1985, he returned to Kansas to become a vice president of the Farm Credit Bank of Wichita and in 1990 became director of the Huck Boyd Institute. Ron has written and produced more than 1,000 features about small town Kansas entrepreneurs and community leaders through his weekly radio program and news column called "Kansas Profile-That's Rural"

A graduate of Leadership Kansas, he has published numerous articles, spoken at national and international meetings, and appeared on C-SPAN. But today introducing Ron, we should pause to give credit to the value of the FCE organization. Ron was raised by his mom -who was an active EHU member- and shared the values of Family Community and Education to a young lad in rural Pottawatomie County.

Tumbleweeds, Talents and FCE in Kansas Communities

How can small town Kansas succeed? The answers can be found in what we have termed “ruralpreneurs” – innovative entrepreneurs who have built successful small town enterprises. But another often unmentioned factor is community volunteer groups like FCE. Often serving in a role of community sparkplugs; members efforts lead the way to stronger communities. Kansas FCE has had a powerful impact across Kansas for the past 90 years. Join the celebration as we reflect on the importance of a spirit of service and community. The presentation also honors the emerging role of diversity, technology, and telecommunications that have brought about so many changes in society. This fascinating, inspiring, fun, and informative presentation highlights rural Kansans and builds pride in our state.

About Humanities Kansas

Humanities Kansas is an independent nonprofit leading a movement of ideas to empower the people of Kansas to strengthen their communities and our democracy. Since 1972, our pioneering programming, grants, and partnerships have documented and shared stories to spark conversations and generate insights. Together with our partners and supporters, we inspire all Kansans to draw on history, literature, ethics, and culture to enrich their lives and serve the communities and state we all proudly call home. Visit humanitieskansas.org.

Note: Need to include as part of the grant process.