



PEOPLE / PROCESS / PLACE

THE MOVE TO NEWTON - FROM LAW ENFORCEMENT TO EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS

Upon graduating from high school, Lester knew he wanted to attend college but wasn't certain what he wanted to study. Rather than heading off to a four-year university, he spent a couple years at Butler Community College. Thus, when he headed to Kansas State University (K-State), he knew what he wanted to study, graduating with a degree in architecture and a minor in engineering (and cum laude at that).

After spending a few years in the Kansas City area, Lester moved to Newton, Kansas on the border of the Flint Hills where he grew up and launched a new architecture firm with several partners. At about the same time, he applied to join the police department as a reserve officer. When asked why he did so, Lester simply responds, "Isn't that what I'm supposed to be doing?"

While the leap from architecture to law enforcement might appear to be significant for many, it was a logical step for Lester. "When I work with a client on a new architecture project, they tell me about their problem," he explains. "We talk about potential solutions and apply the rules.

We evaluate those through codes and zoning and come up with a solution. In law enforcement, when I roll up to a scene, I encounter a similar situation: members of the community who also are trying to solve a problem. Although it might be controversial, I simply listen to their position and process it logically. I don't get upset. I don't get rattled. I know when people are angry, but that doesn't mean they are angry with me."

For 19 years, Lester served as a reserve law enforcement officer, helping the community to solve problems—doing what he was supposed to be doing. "Even though I moved to Colorado, I maintain my retired credentials every year," he notes. "I plan to carry those with me the rest of my life."

When his architecture firm had a chance to work on a project to build early childcare opportunities in the lowest income areas in the Wichita area, he jumped at the chance. "I made these projects my mission for more than a decade," Lester says. "I remodeled buildings. I built new buildings. It was very fulfilling to work with these local communities that had no money to build code-compliant, safe structures that served a critical need."



"Isn't that what I'm supposed to be doing?"

Lester Limón, CEO and Founder, p3 communities™

Lester certainly made his professional mark in Newton. Some of the positions he held include chair of the Newton/North Newton Planning Commission, chair of the Newton/North Newton Code Board, chair of the Warkentin House Board, and member of the Newton/North Newton Historic Preservation Commission. It was also during his time in Newton that Lester went back to K-State—this time for a graduate degree in Community Development.

Lester's interests in Newton were not confined only to community development. Nestled on the western edge of the historic Kansas Flint Hills, Newton is privy to some of the most beautiful prairie in the world. This is one of the reasons that prompted Lester to become an ardent cycloport enthusiast—spending many mornings or afternoons cycling gravel roads that traverse the Flint Hill country. "The Flint Hills were my 'playground,'" he remarks.

INSTILLED EARLY AND RURALLY: A SMALL-TOWN COMMUNITY ETHIC

When Lester Limón is asked why he does certain things, his answer is, "Isn't that what I'm supposed to do?" He grew up in El Dorado, Kansas—a small rural town east of Wichita. His zeal for giving back to his local community was instilled early in life by parents who were life-long educators.

THE MOVE TO WEST CAÑON CITY - SOLE ARCHITECT

In 2015, Lester left the architecture firm that he had helped establish and founded a new one that he named p3 communities™, or p3. Then, when his son graduated from high school in 2017, he decided to take a huge leap and relocate to Cañon City.

p3 would become the only architectural practice in Fremont County. "I was a sole proprietor with no employees working out of my home," he notes. "I took residential and commercial projects. It was a great experience to solve problems using architecture."

Lester initially found out about Fremont Economic Development Corporation's (FEDC) TechSTART center when he met Brad Rowland, partner and general manager for the Emergent Campus and cofounder of TechSTART, at a marketing event. After Brad told him about the vision and mission of the TechSTART and Emergent projects and asked him to move into an office at TechSTART, Lester simply responded, "Isn't that what I'm supposed to be doing?"

Lester immediately signed up for an office in the TechSTART campus in Cañon City and became one of the center's most engaged members. "The TechSTART mission embodies an ethic that resonates with me—whether its commitment to the internship program at the local high school or broader community engagement," he observes. "It is a natural fit."

Recognizing Lester's talents not only in architecture but in community development, FEDC put him to work—initially on some small projects but then on larger initiatives. "p3 is much more than an architecture firm," he explains. "We are able to manage projects from soup to nuts and offload those burdens on our clients. We can go to the planning commission. We can go to the building department. We can go to the state. We just know how to solve problems."



GETTING TO WORK FOR FEDC, LEADING WITH PROCESS COMMUNICATIONS

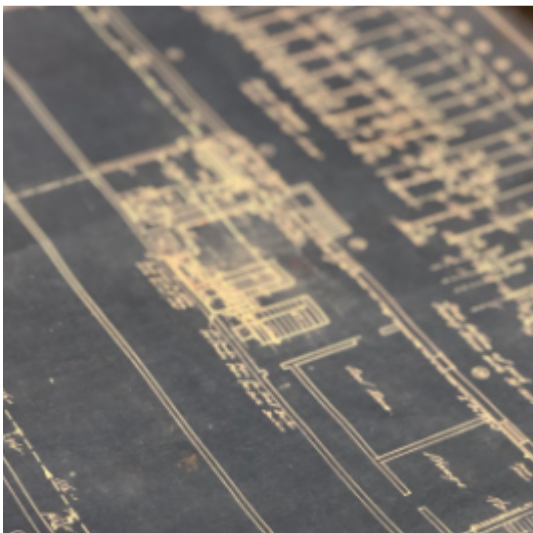
Lester uses the Process Communications model that also employs the Leading Out of Drama program to help the different meeting participants reach a resolution. “I use Process Communications to listen very intently and with purpose and then distill what I hear,” Lester explains. “The solutions I build are not my own, but rather belong to those who provide feedback.”

When the Emergent Campus was founded in Florence, Lester was engaged again. This remodel is quite unique—a former high school built in the 1920s—and there are a lot of different nuances with it.

“Fortunately, we have a very progressive planner who is willing to look at different and creative ways to sort out zoning and use requirements,” Lester comments.

“And with Second-61 as one of the initial occupants in the building, which provides security services to the U.S. Department of Defense, we needed to build the highest level of top-secret security into the remodel design. This is something that I had not done before. I needed to learn something new.”

One of the projects on which Lester has worked for Emergent is the IT Operations Center for Second-61, a service desk for large government customers. “Second-61 is a flagship business for Fremont County, that shows what rural Colorado is really capable of,” Brad says. “Lester brings a unique skillset and perspective that is especially important for remodeling projects like this one.”



p3 communities™

Founded: 2015

**Services: Architecture and
Community Development**

TechSTART Member: October 2019

Relocated to Cañon City: 2017

URL: www.p3communities.com



CREATING A NEW PATH OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Lester forged deep relationships with the Newton community during his 19 years there, and he has engaged in the same ways bringing his “Isn’t this what I’m supposed to do?” attitude across state lines. Since moving to Cañon City, he has overseen the design and rebuild of a number of projects on Main Street. “It is really invigorating to engage with the broader public on these projects,” he relates. “Bringing together all of the different perspectives and ideas and then seeing them come to fruition when the project is completed is a fulfilling experience.”

When the local Cañon City and Florence high schools launched the PalCE (Professional and Internship Community Experience) program, Lester was immediately on board. “I am a steward of my profession,” he explains.

“This profession doesn’t belong to me. It belongs to whomever comes after me. When my generation went to college, there was no career or professional guidance available. The PalCE program gives local high school students a chance to gauge if a particular field is one in which they want to enter—and commit years of education preparing to enter.” For the 2019-20 school year, Lester signed up to work with one intern—and he is adding another one this summer.

"When I work with young men and women, I treat them as adults," he comments. "I tell them from the very beginning that they are adults and need to practice acting like one. As such, I expect them to act like an adult and communicate like an adult."



The objective of the internships is not to convince the interns to pursue a career in architecture or community development. "My primary objective is to help them understand that the world is about communications and interactions," Lester continues. "I treat my interns as if they are part of my team. They work on the computer, go with me to every client meeting, and attend every construction progress meeting. I expect them to ask questions and seek to understand what each of the on-site workers are doing on any given day."

GETTING FULL VALUE OUT OF FEDC TECHSTART

As he has always done in life, Lester jumped headfirst into TechSTART when he moved into his office there. "The cost of an office, as compared to other office space in town, is a steal," he says. "But that isn't the real value proposition of TechSTART, or even the coworking spaces or professional conference rooms. It is the community of businesses and entrepreneurs in the building. I absolutely love the TechSTART experience—whether walking down the hall to bounce an idea or question off of another subject-matter expert or entering the building and

seeing the different business leaders meeting with and mentoring their interns in the coworking spaces." One of the TechSTART members with whom Lester has formed a close partnership is Alex Ewers, the principal of Three Rocks Engineering. "Just as p3 is the only architecture firm in Fremont County, Three Rocks Engineering is the only civil engineering firm in the county," Lester relates. "We've teamed together on a number of projects and our joint clients appreciate the fact that they no longer need to attend meetings in Pueblo or Colorado Springs but rather can send us.

I don't like the fact that rural communities often need to wait in line. They should have services just like everyone else. There have been countless situations where an engineering firm in Pueblo have told a client that it will be three months before they can complete a certain task, and Alex and I have it done in a week."



BUILDING THE NEXT TECHNOLOGY CORRIDOR IN RURAL AMERICA

It is truly an exciting time to be in rural America, where places like Cañon City are creating collaborative technology communities and partnerships that herald the next technology corridor. And Lester is living this dream—whether in Newton or his new “playground” in Cañon City. His next adventure is pursuing a Ph.D. in public policy.

“I want to learn more so that I can help local governments create the laws and ordinances that enable them to thrive,” he reflects. “It will enable me to bring together all of the professional pieces on which I've been working for the past 30 years.”

As to why he is doing it, Lester simply responds, “Isn't that what I'm supposed to be doing?”

Building Architecture + Community Development

Lester Limón founded p3 communities™ (p3) to help local communities realize healthy, sustainable, and prosperous development. The company works with neighbors and friends to establish goals and map solutions for each client and environment.

When creating an architectural plan for a commercial client, Lester employs a charrette process that is an intensive planning and management process where citizens, designers, and stakeholders collaborate on a vision for development. The charrette provides a forum for ideas and offers the unique advantage of giving immediate feedback to designers. It also ensures that all participants are mutual authors of the plan.

The background of the top section is a photograph of a weathered wooden sign. The sign has a dark blue or black painted surface that is cracked and peeling. On the sign, the words "FREMONT COUNTY" and "001-BUILDING" are visible in a light-colored, possibly white or yellow, paint. The text is mirrored, appearing as if it's a reflection or a stencil. The wood itself is a light tan color, showing signs of age and wear.

ABOUT

p3 communities

Architecture and community development are not just practices or sets of services. They represent a desire for healthy, sustainable, and prosperous communities, both rural and urban. p3 was founded on a belief in the capacity of pioneering communities to work hard and lead with vision. I work purposefully with neighbors and friends to set goals and map sustainable solutions unique to each client and environment.

Fremont Economic Development Corporation

Fremont Economic Development Corporation is a 501(c)6 professional economic development organization focused directly on business attraction, retention and expansion in Fremont County, Colorado. With an established and growing network of business, academic and governmental partners, we directly assist companies with competitive location or expansion projects by connecting them with the right people, the appropriate resources and the most meaningful and relevant information. FEDC's TechSTART program is an award-winning tech sector co-working community, creating an innovation catalyst for rural Colorado.