

## JACKSON'S FUTURE

# Speaker: Young are key to city

By Chris Gautz

cgautz@citpat.com — 768-4926

Making a community viable for the future and ensuring its success means identifying energetic entrepreneurs and making sure students appreciate the greatness of their hometown.

That's according to Milan Wall, who spoke Monday night on strategies to reshape the future of small towns to a crowd of about 120 people at the Ella Sharp Museum Community Room.

Wall is co-creator of Home-Town Competitiveness and co-founder of the Heartland Center for Leadership Devel-

opment, an independent non-profit corporation in Lincoln, Neb., that helps leaders plan for their communities' futures.

It's not all about attractive tax rates or good public-relations ploys, Wall said. One of the best ways to bring young people back to their hometown is utilizing the ties people have to their former home. "Connections make the difference," he said. "Connections are the motivator."

Too often, young people don't think it's an acceptable choice to come back to their hometown after college because they grew up with parents telling them the only way

**"We spend so much time doing things for kids, rather than with kids."**

— Milan Wall

Expert who spoke about reshaping small towns Monday at the Ella Sharp Museum Community Room

to make it was to move to the big city, Wall said.

Wall has done work in communities across the country for more than 20 years. In his research, he has found there are four critical issues communities face: youths leaving, loss of small business and farms, erosion of leadership capacity and generational wealth transfer.

Wall said communities should ask young people what they want and allow them to be more engaged.

"We spend so much time doing things for kids, rather than with kids," he said.

When students are allowed to decide things in their community or school, they take ownership in it. They also are more apt to become involved

in their communities as adults, he said.

The Jackson Citizens for Economic Growth, The Enterprise Group and the Greater Jackson Chamber of Commerce brought Wall to Jackson.

"We see this meeting as a very important first step forward," said Bruce Inosencio, spokesman for Jackson Citizens for Economic Growth, which was founded in early March and includes about 30 business and community leaders. The group's mission is to ensure the economic health of Jackson County through partnerships with local and governmental agencies.