Editor’s note: This is the first in a series of articles highlighting a rural health provider. If you know someone who would be an interesting subject, contact Amanda Gardner at agarnder@kumc.edu.

A native of rural Kansas, Jody Bieker, MD, always envisioned practicing there someday. After a year and a half at Seneca Family Practice Clinic and Nemaha Valley Community Hospital, she and her husband, Roger, are sure they made the right decision. A few years ago they moved to the unincorporated community of Baileyville, which is west of Seneca on Highway 36 in northeast Kansas.

Dr. Bieker presented “Life as a Rural Doctor in Kansas” as part of the Rural Health Education and Services luncheon series April 3 at Rieke Auditorium in Kansas City. A graduate of KU School of Medicine, she completed her residency at Smoky Hill Family Medicine in Salina. Many of the medical school students in attendance asked questions about Dr. Bieker’s daily routine and the steps that assisted her in getting where she is today.

One of the greatest rewards of practicing in a rural area, she said, is not only providing a needed service but becoming a valued part of her community.

Dr. Bieker also values the flexibility of a rural practice: She schedules appointments four days a week and is on-call on Wednesdays and some weekends, which allows her to spend time being a mom to Emma, Max, and Jack. Being able to take the kids to school in the morning was an important consideration for her.

By taking advantage of programs like the Kansas Bridging Plan, a loan forgiveness program for those who commit to practicing three years in a rural Kansas county, she owed $30,000 at the end of her residency, substantially less than many graduates. When searching for a position, she used the Kansas Recruitment Center to help her find a practice opportunity that would be a good fit for her and her family.

The Minneapolis, Kan., native found what she was looking for in Seneca, population 2,200, and took it as an especially good sign when she found many of the town’s young people were returning to raise their children.

In addition to having a hospital and clinic, the county seat also has quality schools, an aquatic center, golf course, parks, playing fields, and numerous commercial businesses and retail establishments. The town is known for its annual car show and Nemaha County Heritage Days, a celebration featuring buggy and covered wagon rides, historic tours, children’s activities, speakers, and live music.

Seneca also has two other family physicians, and recently a fellow resident from the Smoky Hill program, Angela Stueve, MD, has moved to Seneca. Dr. Bieker praises the friendly service, progressive attitudes, and community spirit, which she says are at the heart of Seneca.