

**Get to Know....**  
**TRENTON BUHR**  
from the



*at the University of Nebraska*

Trenton Buhr and Trevor Harlow (see Trevor's profile [here](#)) selected an economic development project for their Rural Futures Institute (RFI) serviceship and the community was lucky enough to be selected by RFI. Both young men have been in town since May 21<sup>st</sup> assisting with various projects, including the creation of a multiyear Economic Development Plan for the City of Red Cloud. One of the ultimate goals of this plan would be to enable Red Cloud to create and implement an LB840 Municipal Option Economic Development Plan after the passage of funding connected to LB357, which is geared towards repairing infrastructure. Their work will go well beyond creating drafts of the plan, however, as they have already assisted with the Cather Conference, BRAN (Bike Ride Across Nebraska), and the Red Cloud Proud Community Cleanup Program. Through the rest of the summer they will also draft a basic strategic plan for the Starke Round Barn, bolster the work already being done with Heritage Tourism, assist with the Good Living Tour, create a grants/loans database for the City, and develop a draft of a housing plan. We truly wish we could keep them year round!

RFI, one of four interdisciplinary Institutes of the University of Nebraska (NU), leverages the talents and research-based expertise from across the four NU campuses on behalf of rural communities in Nebraska, the U.S. and around the world. Through a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, the institute encourages bold and futuristic approaches to address critical rural issues. It works collaboratively with educational,

business, community, non-profit, government and foundation partners to empower rural communities and their leaders. According to RFI's Vision Statement, "Rural America unleashes the full potential of its leadership, economic capacity, cultural creativity and natural resources, creating explicit value for small and large communities within and beyond its geography. Rural places have become the legitimate best choice for leaders, businesses, families, graduates and explorers. Rural people earn global respect for fueling the future of humankind. [View the full RFI Vision Story](#)"

## **TRENTON BUHR**



### **Tell us a little bit about yourself**

My name is Trenton Buhr, 21, son of Kevin and Shelli Buhr. I grew up in Cortland, Nebraska and graduated from Norris High School in 2015. I am a senior at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln studying Political Science, Psychology, and Classics.

### **Can you talk a little bit about what made you decide to become a Rural Futures Institute intern?**

For the first few years of college, I was really struggling to find what it was that I wanted to commit my life to. (Truthfully, I'm still not entirely sure.) For a while, I thought maybe education policy, pursuing elected office, interdisciplinary research of law and psychology, etc. I had all of these little interest areas but not of them made me feel so excited and driven that I was willing to spend my life working on them. In the spring of 2016, my girlfriend and I started a quest to visit all 93 Nebraska counties (and county seats) as well as do just about everything there was to do in the state. We finished in March of 2018. Early on in my Junior year of college (Fall 2017) I began to think about what it was that made me excited. And, truthfully, it was thinking, writing, and talking

about rural areas. In my free time, I look up information about Nebraska towns and villages. I even found which U.S. county seats in the United States are the farthest from a metropolitan statistical area (northwest Kansas and northeast Montana are very desolate places). It is *fun* for me to understand rural communities. For a while, I didn't think there was anything I could actually do in these places. Alongside my passion for the law, this was a hard place to make those sorts of careers happen. Nevertheless, I know that I wouldn't feel satisfied about living my life in a big city. So, I thought for a while about what I could do in the legal field in rural areas. There were a few options: open up a law firm, work for rural policy, find a job in a courthouse, and a few others. Another concern is what I want to do with my education. As of now, I plan to attend law school outside of the state at one of the more competitive institutions. With that kind of background, coming to a rural community would be quite strange. Most of my peers would be going off to big city law firms, clerking for federal judges, or working in Washington, D.C. That's exactly what makes me excited. If you consider how many students from the top 15 law schools work within small communities, you'll be hard pressed to find any. I will be one of the few highly-educated lawyers in the country representing directly rural citizens and communities. I applied for the RFI because I knew that their work could give me a boots-on-the-ground look at rural policy and development. Working with an LB840 project is an amazing way to understand how legislation can help rural communities begin to regain their economic saliency. It is also a way for me to help a community directly. If nothing else, I want to play an active role in my home community's prosperity. What I really want is to have an impact on local, state, and federal level policy that impacts rural citizens around me and around the country. My work experience here and the information I gather listening to all of the different organizations will be vital in my legal endeavors as I will hopefully help solve some of these issues down the road.

### **Why did you decide to do an internship in Red Cloud?**

What drew me to Red Cloud was the work they were planning with LB840. My last answer goes into some detail about this, but I was looking for a real-life interaction with legislation. But, Red Cloud is actually one of my favorite towns in the state. Here are my top *small* towns: Red Cloud, Neligh, Burwell, and Ponca. These are the towns that were very fun to visit but which also need some help to thrive. I didn't know that I was going to be placed in Red Cloud at all; I only gave a preference for the LB840 project (the RFI staff didn't say what town was doing that, though).

### **Prior to your arrival, did you know anything about Red Cloud?**

I actually knew quite a bit about Red Cloud, for not living here anyway. Because I've traveled around the entire state, I'm much more knowledgeable about it than the average person should be. I've visited the Willa Cather Foundation, geographic center of the U.S., and Starke Round Barn before in 2017. I also knew about Cy Young's association with Cowles and Red Cloud, the old street cars coming from the depot, and a few other bits and bobs from spending too much time researching things about Nebraska. For such a small place there's quite a bit going on. That, or you promote it well!

## What is your favorite thing about Red Cloud so far?

My favorite thing about Red Cloud is seeing the amount of activity that can happen in a town of 1,000. Many larger cities would love to host BRAN, the Cather Conference, and other major events. But, even places ten times as large can have trouble finding the volunteers to host that many guests. It seems that a lot of rural communities have accepted their fate as once bustling agricultural centers, left behind at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Red Cloud isn't giving in to that fate and it's amazing how much work they put in to keeping the city relevant and up-to-date. Summed up: I love how much people care about Red Cloud and want to make a difference.



Pictured L to R: Trevor with Trenton Buhr. Both Trevor and Trenton were provided office space in the Willa Cather Foundation to work on their economic development project.

## Do you have any advice for community leaders to help get young professionals to stay in Red Cloud long term?

What would convince me as a young professional is how far you can go in a short amount of time. In only a few years you can rise to a leadership position in any business, if you don't already own it. You can get onto basically any committee or association as soon as you arrive and put in a little time to start leading those. Running for school board or city council is far easier than in a densely populated place. In a place like this, you have the ability to craft the world in which you live. In big cities, you're often left to deal with the decisions of other people. You'll also be a well-known face to everyone and the go-to person for whatever it is that you're good at. You don't

have to make million-dollar homes to be a respected home builder or graduate from Stanford to be a respected doctor.

### **If you could have a superpower what would it be and why?**

I wish I could retain all of the information that I have ever gathered. I already love to learn new things and really love to combine information to reach better results. But, it is really difficult to make sound solutions when you don't have all of the pieces lined up correctly. I'm always afraid that I forgot a major component when considering problems and am fearful that disaster will strike because of it. If only I could utilize everything that I've ever learned effectively.

### **Do you have any hobbies?**

My biggest hobby is band. I've played alto saxophone since 6<sup>th</sup> grade and have kept doing it to this day. I currently play in the Cornhusker Marching Band or the Pride of All Nebraska!, we like to say. I'm not particularly good at playing but I love performing and the relationships that I have gained from being a part of band over the years. Most of my close friends play with me and many of my best experiences have come from it.

### **Do you have any pets?**

Back home we have two cats. My sister has a guinea pig too, but I don't consider that to be my pet. I'm not super big on animals but I actually love cats. Gus is our older cat; she's probably about 11 but we don't really know. When we got her from our cousins, we were told she was a male named Gus. It wasn't until the veterinarian came running out of the clinic as we were about to drive away that we found out castration was not a viable option for neutering our cat. That explains why we have a female cat named Gus. About a year ago our family took in Houdini, another farm cat. Gus doesn't play nice with other cats (or anything that moves) and she is outdoors only so we had to take Houdini inside or risk him running away. Houdini is extremely friendly and playful. Gus is probably one of the most unfriendly cats I have ever encountered. You can *only* pet her head. It's quite the yin and yang duo.

### **Describe what a perfect weekend would be like for you?**

A perfect weekend would probably start on Saturday morning with some yard work. Trimming bushes or mowing the lawn would be great. In the afternoon I'd do something a little livelier, but probably just at home. Maybe reading, playing catch, or driving around. Then something more exciting on Saturday night. Sunday is more relaxing; maybe throw in some more yardwork there. If nothing else, I want to spend a few hours of Sunday night on the porch and the sun goes down. I'm not a super exciting, extroverted person so most of my free time is spent talking with a few friends, reading books, or going to a relaxing concert or activity.

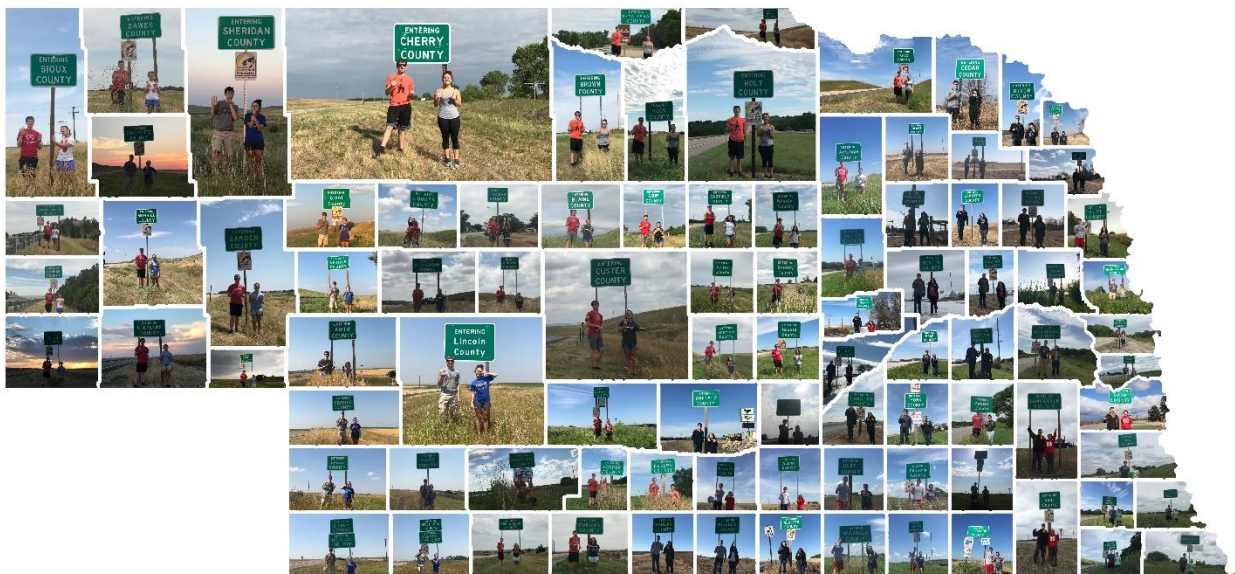


## What would your high school teachers or guidance counselor say about you if we asked?

I don't quite know what they would say about me. They probably have an exaggerated belief in what I am doing with my life. And, they probably wouldn't see me pursuing a legal career in a rural community. For most of them, the last thing they knew was that I was going to architecture school. Most of my academic strengths were in math and science, too, which is a long stretch from my current studies of Political Science, Classics, and Psychology. What they might say which is still true is that I do everything, sometimes too much. I've struggled to learn when to say no to certain opportunities and have usually overextended my responsibilities. In high school it was fine since the opportunities were limited and doing everything was just about enough. I can't do it all anymore and that's a struggle for me to understand.

## What are you most proud of?

Visiting all 93 counties in the state is probably my greatest accomplishment so far. It took a lot of planning to work in almost every activity and pull together the time and money while in college to do this. Many people do this sort of thing for fun—which I also did. But, I also pursued it in a more academic light. Although I was interested in going to these places for entertainment, I was just as curious about differences in how people live around the state. The history, culture, resources, and other factors that are impacting ways of life. [Ed. Note: The picture below is of Trenton in each of Nebraska's 93 counties].



## **Do you have a mantra or mission statement you live by?**

I don't really have a motto, but a lot of my thinking could be summarized in this: to find the truth, not create the truth. By that I mean that I work every day to find out what is "true" for every situation and context. If you're thinking about current issues, it means learning about all sides and not arguing for one side. When it comes to designing a project or making a solution, it means finding the best overall solution, not picking one side and fighting to have take the lead. Taking this approach has defined many things from my political views to my leadership style within organizations. It isn't always easy to do and there are times when my passion takes over and I lose sight of this standard. Nevertheless, I do my best to achieve this.

## **What historical figure or celebrity would you most like to spend a week with? Why?**

This will really get to lovers of Nebraska: George W. Norris. One of our most prominent statesmen. I have always admired his ability to make change in Washington and yet maintain a life in McCook. For coming from a tiny town (relative to D.C.), he was able to make major changes in legislation and for a long time I aspired to be as he was. I probably will not get that far, nor do I want to work in Washington, but I would like to spend a week with him and learn about his life a little more.

## **What is your favorite song and/ or recording artist?**

The Eagles are my current favorite band. Almost all of their music can make you feel relaxed. I also enjoy that their songs aren't all about typical topics such as love and money (although some are).

## **Who is your favorite writer/thinker?**

I have always like the life and work of Benjamin Franklin. He has done so much in so many different areas that it is hard not to be amazed. What I like most is that he had a method to everything. He found a problem and then figured out a way to solve that problem. His autobiography is also the reason I began taking Latin. After I read it I thought to myself, "it seems like all the genius people of the past knew Latin." So, I had to do the same if I wanted to get somewhere. I'm not entirely sure that Latin is an essential anymore. And I also failed to realize that basically any educated person from before the 19<sup>th</sup> century knew Latin. Nevertheless, it's been enjoyable and valuable to learn.

## **Who has been the biggest influence in your life?**

My father has been foundational in my life. Not entirely for good reasons. When I was growing up, he crafted my intellectualism and work ethic. Every summer morning, he made my sisters and I do homework on a range of subjects. 'Bs' were never sufficient for school either. Later, I learned that he was not so good of a student in school and wanted his children to do far better than him. Without a doubt he has pushed me very far. But, as I grew older, I began to question my father in many ways. For one, he

places way too much emphasis on a person's own actions in determining life outcomes. For him, it worked out great given that he found a job that pays him very well and was able to create a good middle-class life. For many others this was not the case. It took a very long time for me to understand that my family is one of the lucky ones. I also now know that my father is often inconsiderate of other people's emotions and wants to think logically at all times. This has its benefits but makes it really difficult to understand others. For better or worse, it also happens to be a trait that I was either born with or acquired early on. All in all, this process of admiring and then questioning my father has helped me better assess the world around me.



RFI Serviceship Interns Trevor Harlow and Trenton Buhr discuss Red Cloud issues with Heritage Tourism & Economic Development Director Jarrod McCartney during the Burlington Depot Social at the 63<sup>rd</sup> Annual Spring Willa Cather Conference. Photo by Rob Olsen.

### **What are some of your favorite businesses in Red Cloud? What is it that you like about them?**

I really enjoy Moonstone Bookstore. I like it because its bold. Starting a bookstore anywhere is a risk and no guarantee of making a steady profit. It takes courage to start a business like that in a city of 1,000.

### **Do you have any advice for someone looking to relocate to rural Nebraska?**

For anyone going to a rural community, I would say that you should be able to make sacrifices before coming. In a big city you can have a newer home at a decent price in a good neighborhood with good schools near a shopping mall and all the other luxuries.



Out here, you'll be hard pressed to find all of those things in the same place. Of course, this comes with many advantages that you won't get in a city. On top of that, be prepared to sacrifice time and money to the community. There are many more cemeteries than city-workers and you might need to take off from work for all kinds of activities.

### **What's your favorite place to visit in Nebraska?**

I say this with a limited understanding because I have only been out there once, but I thoroughly enjoyed the little time that I have spent in the sand hills. And, no, I don't mean in Valentine or Alliance kind of sandhills. I mean Ellsworth, Mullen, and Brownlee kind of sandhills—the most desolate places. There is something remarkable about the lonely untouched places that can't be matched.

### **What do you wish everyone knew about the Rural Futures Institute?**

I wish people understood why it exists and the issues that the RFI is trying to combat. Many people don't realize the effects of urbanization on rural areas, the lack of high-speed internet on business, or the costliness of schools with 15 students in a class. By no means do I wish to undermine the other major problems going on in the world. I just want people to understand that problems (and opportunities!) in rural areas go beyond agriculture



Trenton Buhr (middle, glasses) and Trevor Harlow were tremendous assets during the Spring Cather Conference. Trenton is also a member of the UNL Pride of Nebraska Marching Band!

If you wish to contact Trevor or Trenton please contact Jarrod McCartney at 402-746-4065 or [jmccartney@redcloudnebraska.com](mailto:jmccartney@redcloudnebraska.com). You can learn more about the Rural Futures Institute by visiting their website at <http://ruralfutures.nebraska.edu/>