

20 Questions

with
Jill Swartzendruber, Finance and Business Manager
at



Jill Swartzendruber joined the Willa Cather Foundation as the Finance and Business Manager in October of 2017. In this role, she supports the organization's financial management, human resources, and administration while also working with the leadership team to oversee operations. Swartzendruber was raised in Shickley, Nebraska and holds a Bachelors of Arts Degree in Business Administration and Marketing from Doane College.



Why did you decide to work in Red Cloud?

The position with the Willa Cather Foundation was a perfect mix of finance, business, and marketing and my goal was to stay in a small, rural town. I was also

very impressed with how the town has progressed in the last few years and has plans to keep the momentum going.

What is your favorite thing about Red Cloud so far?

I grew up in Shickley so I was surrounded by flat land and cornfields. I love the hills, trees, and open space. Red Cloud itself also has a lot of character for a rural, small town. I like the brick streets and the historic buildings.

Since you're a new resident, is there anything the community could do in general to be more welcoming?

Honestly, I have been so pleased with the way I have been treated since moving to Red Cloud. Everyone is very welcoming and friendly.

Along those same lines, do you have any advice for community leaders to help get young professionals to stay in Red Cloud long term?

I think it is important for rural communities to market themselves as progressive towns that offer a safe, clean community with reasonable housing, amenities (stores, restaurants), and things to do. It is good to keep promoting your town by holding events and activities for all ages.

What are some of your favorite businesses to shop at in Red Cloud? Why?

I have always liked unique stores in small towns so I have enjoyed shopping at Lizzy's, The Village Pharmacy, and the Willa Cather Foundation's bookstore. I also like stopping in at Prairie Plum Coffee and On the Brix, they both offer fun, relaxing atmospheres.

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

I think I would like the superpower of being in two places at one time or at least having the ability to travel quickly from one place to another. I lived in the same town as my two nieces for six years and spent a lot of time with them; it has been hard for all of us with my moving. It would be nice to be able to attend all their programs and events and then quickly be back in Red Cloud. Also, I tend to be a pretty bad traveler; I get somewhat impatient sitting in a car for longer than twenty minutes.

What do you wish everyone knew about The Willa Cather Foundation?

One of the things that I've come to realize over the last three months is that there is so much more going on behind the scenes at the Foundation than what one may see by just walking through the door. The Foundation is not just about promoting Willa Cather and her literature, but also striving to keep a community that was very important to Cather alive and thriving. From the maintenance of the historical sites, to the Opera House shows, to the restoration of historical buildings; it is exciting to see everything that can be accomplished when people work together. The organization has many people that are truly passionate about their mission and it is refreshing to be a part of this team.



The *American Bittersweet* Exhibit at The National Willa Cather Center. The Exhibit is free to view. Contact the Cather Foundation at 402-746-2653 for more information.

Do you have any hobbies?

I love to read, bake, shop for antiques/junk jaunts, and I attempt to be crafty. Unfortunately, the craft projects don't always turn out like the Pinterest pictures.

Do you have any pets?

I do not have any pets; unfortunately as I aged I acquired dog and cat allergies. My family is made up of dog lovers so I've enjoyed my share of pets. Our family's first pet was a husky that my grandpa gave my brothers and me when I was two years old. He lived until I was 16 so we had fun growing up together.

What is your favorite pastime?

I love spending time with my family. We've always been very close and it is always fun to get to spend time together.

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

I think they would say that I've accomplished quite a bit since I graduated and that they are glad I am in a field that I discovered I enjoyed beginning in high school.

What are you most proud of?

I am proud of the fact that I have been a member of the Shickley Rescue Squad as a first responder for the past 12 years and just last year received my EMT license.

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

I do not really have a mission statement, but am inspired by a quote I read once, "You have more to do than be weighed down by pretty or beautiful. You are a fiery heart and a wicked brain. Do not let your soul be defined by its shell."

What historical figure or celebrity would you most like to have dinner with?**Why?**

I think it would be interesting to talk to one or more of the founding fathers, possibly Thomas Jefferson, just to ask what his thoughts are on how the country has changed over the years.

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

I would suggest they actually visit the town before they make their decision. You cannot tell what all may be taking place in a community without talking to community leaders and residents.

What is your favorite song and/or recording artist?

Well I have to say my favorite song is the one hit wonder, "Come on Eileen" by Dexys Midnight Runners. I always have loved 80's music. I think I would have flourished as a teenager in the 80's.

Who is your favorite writer?

I don't really have one favorite writer, but enjoy reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Great Gatsby*, and am somewhat of a hopeless romantic so any book that inspires a Hallmark movie. Yes, I am one of those women who watch every Christmas Hallmark movie.

What is your dream vacation?

I have always wanted to go to Vermont in the fall or Switzerland.

What's your favorite place to visit in Nebraska?

I love visiting Nebraska City, especially in the fall. It has the Arbor Lodge, Morton Mansion, and is very pretty in the fall.

Who has been the biggest influence in your life?

I think my Mom, Kay, has been a major influence in my life. She is one of the most kind-hearted, selfless, and strong women I know. She has been through some very hard times in life, but still loves with her whole heart, puts her family first, and always trusts in the Lord.



The National Willa Cather Center

Completed in 2017, the National Willa Cather Center is a sight to behold. In addition to being the headquarters of the Willa Cather Foundation, the building features a climate-controlled archive, a bookstore, a museum, and conference rooms. The NWCC is a testament to the Willa Cather Foundation's dedication and a shining example of the organization's mission statement: *to promote and encourage increased understanding and appreciation of the life, times, settings, and work of Willa Cather*. The fully restored building also features 3 apartments and 3 retail bays.

The new National Willa Cather Center gives visitors ample opportunities to delve into Cather's life and work through exploration of an educational exhibit, *American Bittersweet: The Life and Writing of Willa Cather*. Guests may also visit the archive and study center to discover the Foundation's vast collection of documents and artifacts.

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