



DISCOVER RED CLOUD

*Red Cloud Creative District * Red Cloud Community Fund*

Short Report

August 21, 2026

Executive Summary

The Red Cloud Community Fund has kicked off its 7th annual **September Month of Giving** campaign. Fundraising efforts are focused on sustaining the Discover Red Cloud office and its related economic development efforts. RCCF has raised \$337,000 during SMOG since 2020 including more than \$113,000 in 2025. Discover RC has generated nearly \$20 million in revenue since 2015. See the attached flyer at the end of this report for more details on how to donate. RCCF welcomes donations for its other projects, including Hardwick Park, TVCDC, RC Youth, and more. The City of Red Cloud accepted a bid from Thies Construction in Kearney for the **Hardwick Park** project. Project organizers are eagerly awaiting a decision from the Walter Scott Foundation and should hear back from them before Labor Day. We will be pursuing funding from the Community Development Assistance Act (CDAA) through the State of Nebraska and a grant from the Daughtery Foundation as well. The **Red Cloud Creative District** has been selected for the *2027 Creative Districts of Nebraska Poster Series*. The Creative Districts of Nebraska Poster Series is a collaboration between the Nebraska Journalism Trust/Flatwater Free Press and the Nebraska Arts Council that celebrates Nebraska's communities through original artwork. Each year, six artists are commissioned to create images to be printed as posters—four representing selected Nebraska Creative Districts and two celebrating the greater Nebraska landscape and experience. We nominated 5 artists from the area or with ties to the area who will submit work by September 28th. The RC Chamber's annual **Street Car Days** celebration seems to have been a big success with great turnout despite the abysmal traffic conditions created by the roadwork downtown. The alternate parade route worked well. The Lions Club Pancake Feed and Plane rides were more popular than ever. The City of Red Cloud will need to apply for **Leadership Certification** by January 2027 in order to have their previous certification recertified through the Department of Economic Development. Discover RC is more than willing to assist with this but efforts are perhaps best spearheaded by the City and the South Central Economic Development District.

Additional highlights:

- The Nebraska Community Foundation's Assistant Director of **Planned Giving** Becky Ries will lead the August RCCF meeting on August 31st. See the August 20th or 27th editorial in the Webster County Sun for more information on how Planned Giving can sustain Red Cloud's future well-being. An estate planning workshop will be held in the Fall or Winter. It will be open to anyone interested.
- The **Discover RC Small Business Loan & Grant Program** is set to launch, we just need final approval of an agreement between SCEDD and NCF.
- The City of Red Cloud approved the **Recreation Trails Master Plan** at its August meeting. The Recreation Trails committee reformed and will begin meeting quarterly to fundraise and plan.
- Red Cloud/Webster County did not receive **Opportunity Zone** designation. 105 zones applied with only 28 getting the designation. No zone with a population under 8,000 received a designation. Most were much larger than that.
- **Hotel Garber's** new restaurant staff is off and running and will announce an exciting new menu in September! Chris and Adri Coffman are both working to make Forrester's as special as possible. The level of service and quality will increase noticeably.



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Long Report

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Table 1: July 2026 Website Data

	YTD	Jul '26	v. Jul '25	vs. previous month	2026 v. 2025	2025 v. 5 year average
Website users (visitredcloud.com)	35,223	5,353	+57.8%	+28.5%	+38.1%	+22.3%
Website views	55,548	8,915	+27.8%	+24.9%	-18.3%	+18.7%

Analysis: Our numbers this month are really excellent and there's no evidence of bots, scams, or AI web crawlers. Most traffic seems to be organic, derived from people interested in visiting, Street Car Days, and in our features on Dazzy Vance and Sarah Bergman in the Discover RC newsletter. Views being down on the year while users are way up is probably evidence of AI scraping content. Our challenge will be to continue making content that people need to use the website for instead of just using an AI summary. Regardless, we need to keep the website fresh and updated so the AI does not churn out false information from less reputable sources.

Table 2: June 2026 Tax Data¹

Tax source	YTD	Jun 26	v. Jun 25	v. previous month	2026 v. 2025	2025 v. 5 year average
County lodging tax revenue	\$8,813	\$2,466	+17.5%	-1.4%	+56.4%	+42.6%
City sales tax ² payout	\$166,418	\$25,652	+19.0%	-35.5%	+23.7%	-1.3%
Sales tax derived from retail sales	\$137,245	\$24,098	+29.3%	-27.5%	+21.2%	-4.8%

Analysis: This would be one month where I can comfortably say that you should ignore the "v. previous month" data set for City sales tax numbers. May collections were nearly record setting and probably an anomaly. We can only guess why the numbers were so high in May. It may be due to late reporting from businesses or processing issues at the state in addition to increased traffic from annual events and construction crews. June collections were still historically high as evidenced by the sharp increase versus the same time last year. County lodging tax collection was very good versus historic trends though down slightly versus May. We're up a lot for the year but probably finally at a point where we're measuring against a comparable data set since Hotel Garber has existed for more than a year at this point and will no longer skew the numbers so much.

¹ Sales tax in Red Cloud is 7%, with 5.5% going to the State and 1.5% going to the City. These payout numbers only reflect the 1.5% payout to the City. Lodging tax for Webster County is at 5% with 1% going to the State of Nebraska. These numbers reflect the 4% that comes back to Webster County. Lodging establishments collect both sales and lodging tax and are approved to collect occupancy taxes and other taxes that the City and County currently do not collect. The Webster County Visitors Promotion Committee grants revenue from the lodging tax to tourism related entities for marketing and/or improvement projects targeted towards attracting visitors.

² Includes use and motor vehicle tax



Table 3: City Occupancy Tax Data³

Total in account	YTD	Jul 26	v. Jul 25	v. previous month	2026 v. 2025
\$20,587	\$6,028	\$2,011	+24.1%	+782.0%	+141.1%

Analysis: These numbers are really excellent. Again, we're probably going to start seeing these numbers go down now since Hotel Garber has been open for more than a year and we'll be comparing data sets that aren't skewed by data from before when it opened.

NEW BUSINESS

Discover Red Cloud Office

Executive Director McCartney attended the **Destinations International Annual Conference** in Portland, OR last month. This is the premier travel conference in the United States and possibly the world and was made possible by a grant from the Nebraska Tourism Commission. In addition to making invaluable contacts with industry professionals from throughout the United States and Canada, McCartney gathered a lot of valuable information about operating a convention and visitors bureau and especially gained insight in trends in marketing. Of note, most visitors are craving authentic experiences and stories and many loathe AI marketing efforts. At the same time, visitors are also swayed by short form video content and now prefer that over every other form of marketing—at least in terms of what the data says they actually use. There are opportunities to utilize AI in better analyzing a customer's consideration set and ultimate decision making but it's probably best to stay away from that technology in the production of content—or at least be better at hiding it. There's both an opportunity here to do more short-form content like TikTok and long-form video content that tells a deeper story. Other items of note: we shouldn't trust data that brags about impressions and should instead privilege actual tangible engagement. We've all known this to be true intuitively but big numbers are persuasive.

Hotel Garber/Forrester's Lounge

We're going to see some big changes at the restaurant in Hotel Garber in the coming weeks! We want to see the restaurant become a destination in and of itself and not just something that the hotel happens to have. Chris and Adri Coffman are about set to put us on that path. Starting September 3rd, we expect to more aggressively promote the lounge and the restaurant's offerings will be upgraded significantly.

CCC Educational Hub

Kim Danehey Nibbe will take over the coordinator role for the CCC Hub on August 24th! The Fall semester started on August 17th. We are eager to get more activity at the Hub and encourage anyone to reach out to Kim or Jarrod McCartney with needs for small businesses or the community itself. CCC offers many training courses for software, AI, certifications, etc.

Red Cloud Creative District

Open Arts Night

Amy Springer has moved this event to On the Brix and the first event held there was on August 19th. Generally, Springer is going to attempt to hold the event on the 3rd or 4th Wednesday of each month at 6pm. The email list of participants has quickly grown to around 50+. This is of people who have come to the event.

³ As of June 30, 2026. There does not appear to be a submission from Hotel Garber this month which means the July numbers should be better.



Light the Night

The Creative District took this over from the Chamber last year to great success. We will have our first meeting on August 27th at Hotel Garber. Beyond sustaining last year's success, we would like to do more to decorate the community in advance of the event. We're even pondering a parade with Santa. We would love it for more representatives from local businesses to join the planning committee and make the evening's promotions work the best it can for them. We also received grant funding for a "microinfluencer" affiliated with the Nebraska Tourism Commission to come down that evening and make short form videos about the community and local businesses.

Quarterly meeting

The next quarterly meeting will be held October 28th in the Hotel Garber at 5pm

Lunch & Learn & Lounge

We hope to launch this series starting in September. It will be a noon time meeting where we socialize and maybe learn a little about grant funding opportunities for the arts or where we get to know an artist or learn more about programs that support the arts/artists. We may occasionally organize field trips to other communities to learn about what their creative communities are doing.

Poster Contest

See the short report. Sarah Bergman, Rick Houchin, Jon Eggers, Cheyenne Knehans, and Amanda Francescato are all being encouraged to submit a design. Eggers is from Berthoud, CO via Byron, NE and has painted rural Webster and Franklin County previously. The rest of the artists have a direct tie to the community.

Murals

RVAC and Tom Shute have teamed up to put a mural at the Abundant Life warehouse on the south edge of town. It is our hope that we can begin bringing back ghost signage around town and selecting a few sites for murals as well.

Creative Districts Assembly & Statewide Arts Conference

We will attend these events in Kearney on September 2nd & 3rd. Beyond the networking opportunities, there will also be practical instruction on how to promote creative district activities and how to better track impact data. We will also learn about any legislative changes affecting the arts and what's on the horizon for legislative changes in 2027. Mike Flood will be one of the speakers.

Website & Marketing

We reviewed a proposal from Maly Marketing for a new Red Cloud visitors website, a municipal website, and a multimedia marketing campaign on August 11th. We're hopeful that we can do some short term work with this group for social media and other digital marketing content and will apply for grants from Visit Nebraska to help offset costs associated with a possible new website, television, radio, billboard, and other content.

The State of Nebraska will send an influencer down on November 24th to cover the Light the Night event. We'll have more details about this soon.

Red Cloud Community Fund

See short report for details about our Planned Giving efforts and the September Month of Giving. RCCF



also donated water for the RCHS concession stands.

Community Celebration & Banquet

Becky Boesen will be the emcee for this event which will be held on **Nov. 21st** at the Red Cloud Opera House. The RCCF planning committee is reimagining the event a bit this year and hope to feature a little less speaking and more in the way of fun, interactive activities. Awards will be given out for Donor of the Year, Friend of Tourism, Friend of TVCDC, Youth Sports Volunteer, and the Youth Volunteer of the Year. The event will be free of charge and open to the public, but you must RSVP by October 15th. Suggestions for award nominees are welcome

Willa Cather Foundation

As part of the National Endowment for the Arts Creative Aging series, WCF hosted a workshop from artist Yelena Khanesvskaya on August 8th. Additional workshops will be held Sept. 19th and Oct. 24th. The Opera House performance season will kick back into gear for the fall with a performance by Garan Coons and the Many Moccasins Dancers on Sept. 11th. The Virtual Author series with historian Richard Norton Smith will be held on Sept. 17th and 2 special bus tours out of the Omaha-Lincoln areas will hit town on Sept. 19th & 22nd. Tour numbers continue to be impacted by the road construction.

OLD BUSINESS

Discover Red Cloud and Economic Development

As we forge ahead with this new iteration of Heritage Tourism, we expect to focus on 4 things: tourism, RCCF administration and development work, development work related to establishing programs for small businesses, creative district administration. It would be our hope that housing and other sorts of community development work as well as business attraction efforts would develop from this work. We also hope to partner with Central Community College on having a business coach in the Red Cloud office. We are also going to write a new job description for the Executive Director and a Program Coordinator position. We will likely also seek out a new Economic Development study for southern Webster County and perhaps the entire county if there's interest. This would, of course, move the ED's role into additional areas of economic development besides tourism and seems like the natural evolution of the position's focus.

Downtown Revitalization

We are eager to push this conversation forward, but will need to have a better understanding of the Department of Transportation's timeline with the roads project before we can pursue a downtown revitalization grant. It's likely that we will pursue in 2027. It would be something that would pair nicely with the potential RCCF small business development program listed above.

There was some pushback from the community about how we abandoned this. That's simply not true. We were advised to wait until the roads project was completed. It was also the opinion of people working in the Department of Economic Development that we would likely need to wait a bit before we would be given another grant, given all of our recent success obtaining those resources. A further complication is the State of Nebraska's budget shortfall and gutting of DED staff in recent weeks that may make the process more difficult if funding even exists at all.

Passport programs

The *Palace Lounge* is on the *2026 Beef Passport*, sponsored by the Nebraska Beef Council. The *National Willa Cather Center* is part of the Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation's *Wander Nebraska* program. The Cather Bookstore is also on the *Nebraska Book Trail*. People who complete these trails/get



their passports stamped are eligible to receive a variety of prizes. The Cather Bookstore is also listed on the Midwest Independent Bookstore directory, which features some of the best independent bookstores from Michigan to Montana to Kansas and back to Ohio.

Vacancy Ordinance

We continue to support the City adopting ordinances outlined in [Legislative Bill 256](#). We encourage the City Council and City Attorney to study that bill closely and consider adopting it as part of their vacancy ordinances. It would discourage slumlords and hoarders from occupying our downtown commercial district.

Annexation

We also think it would make sense to annex areas north and west of town for a variety of reasons, but also because it would generate more occupancy tax revenue or any potential future revenue from lodging establishments that start later.

Newsletter & Social Media

If you want to keep up to date on most things Heritage Tourism, please [subscribe to our newsletter](#) or follow us on social media ([Facebook](#), [Instagram](#)). We are now on TikTok and YouTube and will be exploring podcasts, apps, and other media applications as time permits

EVENTS

For a full list of visitor related events with more detail, please go to visitredcloud.com/events.



SEPTEMBER MONTH OF GIVING

SCAN TO GIVE



Launched in 2020, the September Month of Giving is your chance to make an immediate impact in Red Cloud through the Red Cloud Community Fund (RCCF). The funds raised will be distributed to numerous organizations and projects in our community. This year we will focus on sustaining the Discover Red Cloud office through the Heritage Tourism account.

\$113,637

Raised in September 2025

\$100,000

2026 Fundraising Goal

\$337,000

Raised since 2020!

GIVE WHERE YOU LIVE!

We hope you will consider giving back to Red Cloud this September. Below are the causes that could use your support. Scan the QR code above to give and select the account you wish to contribute to in the drop-down menu.



General Account

Used by RCCF to support and maintain activities within the community such as the City of Red Cloud's Historic Preservation Commission and Ballfield Improvement projects.



The Valley Child Development Center

Supports sustainable, reliable, high-quality early childhood education and care in our community.



Heritage Tourism Development Account

Further charitable activities related to increasing the economic and community impact of heritage tourism in Red Cloud.



Red Cloud Area Youth Account

Supports charitable activities related to the engagement and retention of youth and young adults in the Red Cloud area.



Hardwick Park Account

An account to be used for the benefit and support of Hardwick Park in Red Cloud.



Red Cloud Nursing Home Account

An account to assure the nursing home has adequate financial resources to continue operating and providing quality care to residents.



Red Cloud Recreational Trails System Account

An account to raise funds to create, improve and/or enhance recreational trails and related infrastructure in the Red Cloud area.



Legacy Endowment

An unrestricted endowment established by a challenge gift from former residents Frank and Shirley Sibert. Earnings from this account are granted annually for local causes by the Red Cloud Fund Advisory Committee.

GIVE BY MAIL

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Designate my gift to: ☐ General Account ☐ TVCDC ☐ Youth Account ☐ Heritage Tourism

☐ Hardwick Park ☐ Red Cloud Nursing Home ☐ Recreational Trails System ☐ Legacy Endowment

☐ Other _____

☐ I have included the Red Cloud Community Fund in my will or estate plan and have not previously informed RCCF

Return this form along with payment to:

Red Cloud Community Fund
PO Box 263 | Red Cloud, NE 68970

Save time and donate online:

www.nebcommfound.org/give/red-cloud-community-fund
Questions? 402.746.0032 | jmccartney@redcloudnebraska.com

Red Cloud Community Fund is an affiliated fund of Nebraska Community Foundation



Map
Reference to the Valley Child Development Center and
other facilities that are currently being planned
Highway 280 and adjacent Indian Creek Road and the
2



7TH ANNUAL Red Cloud Community Fund



SEPTEMBER Month of Giving

Invest in the future of Red Cloud!

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