

Community Development Corner
By Jarrod McCartney
February 27th, 2019

If you read this column regularly, you know that I am a proud member of the Red Cloud Community Foundation Fund (RCCFF). That pride was in full effect on Friday, February 8th when the Red Cloud Area Chamber of Commerce arranged a Business After Hours event at On the Brix to help RCCFF celebrate the successful completion of the Rural Development Philanthropy Challenge, which added over \$307K to our unrestricted endowment. I want to thank everyone who attended, especially some of the 246 different donors to the campaign. As a reminder, the annual RCCFF Community Banquet will be held on Friday, May 24th at the Red Cloud Opera House. We are busy preparing for this year's banquet and hope to be making some major announcements about it soon.

Besides celebrating our donors and our collective achievement for the Red Cloud community, the Chamber and Heritage Tourism made a major announcement during the Business After Hours event that I would like to cover in more detail now. We announced that the Chamber and Heritage Tourism brands are merging for marketing purposes. Instead of having a separate brand and duplicating our efforts, we've combined forces and from now on will organize Chamber and Heritage Tourism initiatives under the brand name of Red Cloud Tourism & Commerce. We will use the script logo that we created for the "Red Cloud: America's Most Famous Small Town," and alter it for whatever event or organization related to the Chamber or Tourism needs it. The new logo simply reads: "Red Cloud: Tourism & Commerce." We'll do the same thing for Street Car Days, the Farmers & Merchants Banquet, and anything else where it seems to make sense. We will also be merging all of our different social media accounts so that there is one voice and one brand for marketing Red Cloud. In the coming days and weeks, you should expect to see parts of the visitredcloud.com website updated as well. My hope is that we can reorganize the website so that the City and local government portion is easier to find and non-profit and community organizations can have a greater presence. I will strive to make these changes by the summer.

For most people, this merger will mainly result in it being more obvious who you should contact for more information and where you can go to find information on your own. It will help visitors understand who they need to talk to in order to make plans; it will make it obvious for potential new residents who it is they can contact to learn more about Red Cloud. On our end, we feel like this will help professionalize the Chamber, which is solely run by volunteers at present, and it will also get everyone working on the same page instead of working at cross purposes or duplicating work. In the jargon of the time, we feel like the merger will create efficiencies. A clear example of this is that I will no longer have the unwieldy title of Heritage Tourism Development Direct. That title was already long enough but when I'm asked about it, I usually have to say something along the lines of, "Well, it's Red Cloud's version of an economic development director" which usually results in someone assuming I work for the City. I then reply, "no, it's a collaboration between the Willa Cather Foundation, the Red Cloud Community Foundation Fund, the City of Red Cloud, and the Red Cloud Area Chamber of Commerce. Technically, I'm an employee of the Willa Cather Foundation." Now, I will simply be able to refer to myself as the Tourism & Commerce Director or the Director of Red Cloud Tourism & Commerce and it fairly clearly communicates what it is that I do without misleadingly conveying that I'm an elected or appointed official. I also feel that it is a more inclusive term for all of Red Cloud's development strategies.

Some of you may be wondering what is going to happen to the Chamber. For all intents and purposes, the Chamber will retain its identity (this is especially necessary for dispensing and receiving grants) and

Justin Armstrong is still the President, etc. It's probably best to think of the Chamber and the Heritage Tourism Advisory Committee as boards with joint oversight of the activities of Tourism & Commerce. These entities will continue to exist but our advertising and marketing will all be under Red Cloud Tourism & Commerce. Nebraska City has been doing something like this with even more groups under the joint logo for years to great effect.

It is my hope too that while we can now all begin to operate under the same brand, that subcommittees will form that focus strictly on Street Car Days and particular events so that the same group of 5-10 people are not all struggling to put together things at the last minute. It is also my hope that this will make the Chamber and my office a better resource for small businesses. It will also result in making the Chamber more aware of and involved in community development projects and create opportunities for the City, the Chamber, and the Community Foundation to work in close partnership with one another on making Red Cloud a great place for visitors, residents, and also help us avoid burnout of volunteers. I feel it also creates opportunities for more voices to be involved in the decision making that goes on with community events and development. If you've ever been curious about joining the Chamber or helping organize events or have ideas about what we should do differently, I encourage you to contact me, Justin, or attend a Chamber meeting. If you want to join but know you only want to work on one or two things that would be great too.