

Community Development Corner
by Jarrod McCartney

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My favorite line to quote from any of Willa Cather's work has to be the opening lines of *O Pioneers!*: "One January day, thirty years ago, the little town of Hanover, anchored on a windy Nebraska tableland, was trying not be blown away." My preference for this line probably has as much to do with surviving some pretty harsh winters here as a kid in the 1980s. This year, while not as dramatically cold or snowy as the 80s, has been a bit of a return to form, reminiscent at least of the winters I experienced when we were all so much tougher and walked both ways uphill in daily blizzards. It's sort of easy to get lost in the dulling haze of winter, but there is hope (and heat) on the horizon.

I've recently completed the yearly event calendars for Red Cloud Tourism (available at visitredcloud.com and in print at some local businesses). We have a fun year ahead of us in 2019, Red Cloud, which kicked off with Billy McGuigan's Buddy Holly tribute at the Opera House earlier this month and which will include acts as far flung as the Mahenwahdose Native American Storytelling performance to tributes to Conway Twitty and Loretta Lynn, the Air Force Offutt Brass Band, Street Car Days, to a renowned exhibit on "Savages & Princesses" that will make stops here and in Oregon, Kansas City, the Seminole Nation land in Oklahoma, and a handful of other places much bigger than RC. Liz Rasser and Linda Brinda are currently displaying their photography in the Opera House Art Gallery and Liz will be holding another event at the Starke Round Barn, tentatively scheduled for Sept. 21st. And that's just scratching the surface. Check out visitredcloud.com/events to keep up to date with things going on in and around Red Cloud.

Next week, the Red Cloud Community Foundation Fund is proud to co-host a Business After Hours event with the Red Cloud Area Chamber of Commerce. It will take place on Friday, Feb. 8th from 7pm to 9pm at On the Brix. Food will be served by the winner of this year's Outstanding Business Award, Hometown Market. The event is free, open to the public, and will honor the donors who enabled RCCFF to meet the Rural Development Philanthropy Challenge. RCCFF raised over \$200,000, which triggered an additional \$100,000 from the Sherwood Foundation. The money will go into an unrestricted endowment and will ensure that there's money available for projects in Red Cloud in perpetuity. The Chamber will also make some announcements at the event, so please do plan on attending. Prior to the event, there will be an artists' reception for Liz Rasser and Linda Brinda at the Opera House—that event is also free and open to the public.

As I mentioned earlier, Hometown Market won this year's Outstanding Business award from the Chamber. Here's what I said about them in my speech: "I'm extremely thankful that Danny and Val Benge bought the grocery store. I'm also thankful for the investment team that came together to help them do that. Grocery stores are vital to the continued survival of small towns—according to research they are right up there with the local school and hospital in terms of small town survival. Hometown Market is not only making sure that a grocery store exists, it's also a place full of friendly people and full of items and choices we simply didn't have access to a year ago. Plus, Val will take your kid to dance class when you're out of town! We've not only kept the grocery store running, we've added a great family! I'm thankful that they're here—and that I can get some hummus without having to drive to Hastings." It's amazing what a locally owned business can do for a community and I am looking forward to working with Danny and Val for years to come and am excited about the possibilities of incorporating the increased range of options available there into services we provide for tourists and alumni.

Some of you are probably wondering what's taking so long with the hotel. Honesty, I am too. Right now, we want to make sure we can get a version of our vision finalized that is also one that we can realistically raise the money for. As of this writing, we are finalizing conversations on design work and should be organizing informational meetings with an investor prospectus within 1-2 months. As we continue to work out these details, I encourage you to maintain optimism about the transformative effect improving that building will have upon downtown Red Cloud. While we will be the ones worrying about the finances of the actual operation, the City and community stand to reap significant dividends from the project. Ord is a prime example of how a new lodging facility paired with things for people to see and do (in their case, Scratchtown Brewery and the Trotter Events Center) leads to economic development. Lodging taxes in Valley County skyrocketed from around \$12,500 in 2013 to nearly \$40,000 in 2017. This upswing correlates with the creation of the brewery and the lodging/events center. While we won't have an events center, we do have more things to do and see than we did in 2015 and we do hope the hotel will be able to host small events and use the community as a campus to host larger events. The windfall the community could receive from this is significant—which is all the more reason we have to take our time and make sure we do everything right. We will get there—and if you want to name the building after yourself I'm accepting applications!