

The Intentional Tourist

May 22, 2025

by Jarrod McCartney

Thanks to my role as the Chair of the Red Cloud Community Fund, I've been blessed to be in the position to both speak and give scholarships to our graduating seniors over the last few weeks. For reasons I still can't fully understand, I was particularly moved by this year's ceremonies. Perhaps it was because one of my nephews (Gabriel McCartney) graduated over in Franklin, making it through despite having to deal with his father suffering a stroke and prolonged hospitalization and his mother being placed into a nursing home. Perhaps it's because as I near the completion of 10 years of work here in Red Cloud, this is the first class of graduates that feel like they're part of my daughter Louise's peer group, almost like older siblings or part of her extended family. Ellarae Rasser and Mariah McDole were some of the first kids to help her feel welcome to the community. I'll try not to feel old as I remember that they were only 7 or 8 at the time. This year was also Louise's first helping student manage the girls' basketball team and my first excuse to travel all over the southern half of the state to watch as much basketball as possible. We'll keep rooting for Ellarae, Logan Brown, Abigail Reyes, Kari Kucera, and Josie Rust and the entire Senior class, whatever they may do with their futures. I think what really got to me, however, was the realization that Louise herself will be walking across that stage and handing out flowers to loved ones in 6 short years.

With all of that in mind, I thought I'd spare you from my typical ruminations about Hotel Garber and tourism this month and instead share the speech I was lucky enough to give to the Senior class at the RC Booster Club Breakfast at On the Brix on May 9th:

I've been asked to speak today to let you all know how much pride this community has for you and how much we care about you—not only because you're graduating tomorrow and that's exciting, but because we know that you'll go on to do amazing things and that that will reflect positively on the Red Cloud community and your families.

I was really moved by something Jason and Stacie Heldt said at the Honors Night on Wednesday: "Hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard." I know a lot of you have a lot of talent and you're going to put it to good use. But the work ethic the Heldts, your families, and others have instilled in you are what is going to get you through tough times. It's going to be what makes you great hires in your future workplace. It's what's going to give you the grit and determination you need to succeed at opening your own small business someday. It's what's going to make you a great member of whatever communities you belong to in the future.

As you all celebrate today and this weekend, please don't look at this as a goodbye or the end of something, but rather the next stage of your relationships with your peers and this community. In terms of your relationship to Red Cloud, I'll be the first to admit that when I graduated I could not get out of this town quickly enough. But don't burn your bridges, because you never know

where your life will lead you. No matter where your journey takes you, you will learn that there really is no place like home.

Should your journey ever take you back home, we'll be here to help. We have non-traditional scholarships that can help you get to the next stage of your career or develop new skills. Next year, you might even consider applying for our Hometown Intern experience which places a local college student with our foundation for the summer. We just hired Avery Rasser for this summer and she'll be working on ways to make this town a little more engaging for youth outside of what goes on at the school. We'd love to have one of you join us next summer.

Thank you all for all you've done for the community in your time here. Your help at numerous events does not go unnoticed. We want you to know that we're proud of you, excited for your futures, and want you to know that you are always welcome back home.

Just so you know, I was able to blame my allergies for the slight sniffle I had while I was reading that to all of them. Hopefully this column will inspire all Webster County readers to attend their alumni banquets. Here in Red Cloud, our banquet will start with social time at the community center at 4pm on Saturday, May24th.

One final actual tourism note: Forrester's, the restaurant inside the Hotel Garber, is now open! You don't have to be a guest to enjoy dinner or a drink at the bar. Check in with hotel staff at 402-746-2545 for the latest on hours, menus, and more. We hope that this restaurant becomes just as much of a destination for visitors as the Hotel. We hope to see everyone there.