

The Intentional Tourist  
by Jarrod McCartney  
June 21st, 2023

The last few weeks have been an absolute whirlwind in the world of Heritage Tourism. Between Alumni Weekend events, the Spring Cather Conference, the Bicycle Ride Across Nebraska (BRAN), and the press around the Cather Statue unveiling at the United States Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., and being named one of the 15 Small Towns to Visit in 2023 by the Smithsonian Magazine, it seems like I have barely had time to do anything else, including write this column.

But as we gear up to launch the next phase of our Heritage Tourism Development project, this surge in activity is exactly what we want to see happen not just for a few weeks out of the year but on a consistent basis all year long. We want there to be so much activity that we have to hire more people and that more businesses see the benefit of taking advantage of tourism and expand their services accordingly.

We still believe that the catalyst that will propel us to the next stage of development in Red Cloud is the Hotel Garber project. That's why it's exciting to see Steve Powell (RCHS Class of 1992) and his crew at Tru-Built Construction so busy at the intersection of 4<sup>th</sup> & Webster. Work on the exterior of that building has begun and we should see the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor begin to be added back on in the coming weeks. There are still naming opportunities connected to the Hotel Garber project starting as low as \$1,000. Please contact me (402-746-2653) if you would like to learn more about how you can be part of Red Cloud history. We still need help to make the experience as great as it should be for visitors and as great as it needs to be to represent the community.

Work on the buildings owned by Dennis & Sally Hansen continues to progress as well. The look and feel of downtown Red Cloud will be transformed by the end of summer and especially by next year. It's almost mindboggling to think how much the look and feel of downtown and many other parts of the community have improved over the last decade. When work is completed on roads and sidewalks downtown in 2025, that transformation will be even more dramatic.

When the BRAN cyclists were in town, I was informed time and time again about how much of a buzz Red Cloud has—how it's different than other small Nebraska communities and how they're confident that Red Cloud has a great future ahead of it. I heard the same thing from alumni visiting over Memorial Day weekend. I heard the same thing from travel writers and tourism industry professionals who listened to my recent presentation about Red Cloud at the Midwest Travel Network's conference in Kansas City.

Our connection to Willa Cather has a lot to do with that—indeed you can find mentions of Cather at the WWI Museum in Kansas City, at the WWI Memorial in Washington D.C., and now you can see an enormous version of her at the National Statuary Hall in D.C. By the time this is published, Cather Center leadership staff will be flying across country again for an international

seminar on Cather in New York City's Greenwich Village neighborhood. Cather's 150 birthday is also part of why the Smithsonian selected Red Cloud as a community to visit in 2023.

But there's so much more to making all of this happen than simply being the beneficiaries of Cather's legacy. What's making all of this happen and making people notice Red Cloud is the hard work people living here are doing to make the place a better place to live. Some of us work at the Cather Foundation, while others own their own small business, others are elected officials, and the vast majority just care about the place we all call home. We're becoming a destination community because it's a great place to be here and now, not just a place to remember what was great about the past. Governor Jim Pillen remarked that it was a "Great Day to be a Nebraskan" during his speech at the Cather statue unveiling ceremony. That's true almost every day in my opinion, but that day was made possible because, as Cather puts it, "Where there is great love, there are always miracles." It may not seem like it when we get worn down by the day to day grind or inevitably start to take for granted what's happening here in Red Cloud, but the progress we're seeing is the result of great love, harder work, and is a bit of a miracle. Here's to making more miracles, Red Cloud!