

The Intentional Tourist

by Jarrod McCartney

After a lengthy absence, I've decided to restart this column and rechristen it "The Intentional Tourist." My first few columns will concentrate on dispelling myths and resolving misunderstandings about Heritage Tourism Development.

It's become clear to me that many in the community think I work for the City or the Chamber of Commerce. I feel like I need to say clearly and unequivocally that I do not work for either organization. I serve as the primary lead for Red Cloud's heritage tourism development strategy, which is determined by the Heritage Tourism Development Advisory Committee (HTAC). HTAC is comprised of representatives of the Red Cloud Community Fund (Dennis Hansen, Jay Yost), the Willa Cather Foundation (Ashley Olson), the City of Red Cloud (Kyle Bryan), the Red Cloud Area Chamber of Commerce (Justin Armstrong), a local tourism attraction (Liz Rasser/Starke Round Barn) and myself.

As part of the collaboration, the Willa Cather Foundation provides free office space, provides technical and human resources support, and acts as my employer. Olson is my direct supervisor. We also submit yearly reports to the Nebraska Community Foundation which oversees the collaboration. I do spend a good amount of time promoting tourism connected to Willa Cather. That's because Cather tourism is our biggest asset. Suggesting I do otherwise would be like pretending that the University of Nebraska is a basketball school. The long-term goal is to use Cather to lift up other attractions. We had so much success doing that at the Starke Round Barn that Cal and Liz asked us to scale back.

While Heritage Tourism is a collaboration, it is important to note that nearly 90% of the funding for the office since its inception has originated from Donor Advised Funds at the Nebraska Community Foundation. As such, the focus of the work is on developing tourism assets and related businesses.

The City matches the Red Cloud Community Fund's annual \$15K grant to the Heritage Tourism Development Office. This is for the office and helps us do things like pay for marketing and consultants. That \$15K is not for City Planner or Administrator services—it is to promote tourism development. I am not an elected official or an employee of the City or Webster County. I am not a traditional economic development professional either. There are many other worthy community concerns, especially connected to housing. Additional leadership needs to emerge at the grassroots level to tackle these concerns.

I assure you that there's more than enough Heritage Tourism work to do. Our primary focus right now is the Hotel Garber project, marketing and fundraising, and assisting with downtown revitalization. Those efforts will have a transformational effect on the community. Like all good and sustainable things, they take time and focus. Our Heritage Tourism 5 year plan, updated and approved by the collaboration in 2020, is published on visitredcloud.com and includes a

complete job description. Please contact me and schedule a visit if you would like to learn more.