The Intentional Tourist

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By Jarrod McCartney

Last month, I restarted this column and gave it a new name: The Intentional Tourist. The title is meant to illustrate that developing tourism is the focus of my job and that it will be the focus of these columns. What sorts of things can we do to improve our tourism attractions and related businesses? How can we improve the visitor experience? What can we do to keep money in Red Cloud instead of losing it to the Tri-Cities? How do we get folks to stay overnight instead of going back to Lincoln or Omaha? How do we get them to stay for a long weekend so even more of their dollars are staying in the community and in the region? These are the fundamental questions I want to explore in these columns and in my day to day work.

I also pointed out in that column that I do not work for the City or the Chamber of Commerce. Both of those entities are involved in the Heritage Tourism partnership, but neither is my employer. I’ve received some feedback from folks who are concerned that this means I “don’t want to have anything to do with the City” or the Chamber. Nothing could be further from the truth. I need to have close working relationships with both entities in order to improve the community. I simply cannot be perceived as the face of either organization if we are to maintain focus and accomplish big things. I will do volunteer work for both the City and the Chamber in my roles as both a concerned taxpaying citizen and as a director of an organization located in the community. I will also do paid work that will benefit both places when my board determines doing so aligns with and benefits the aims of heritage tourism.

That’s not to say that there aren’t tons of other problems the City and Chamber need to worry about besides heritage tourism. There’s probably a good chance that we agree on what those problems are. Rather than indifference, my reluctance to tackle those issues has more to do with a lack of time, resources, and jurisdiction. That said, if there’s something else the community needs to be working on, I invite you to stop by my office and have a conversation. If I am not in a position to help solve the problem, I can probably point you in the direction of folks who can help. The same goes for folks looking to expand or start small businesses.

Moving forward, I promise to not be such a downer or debate the finer points of my job description. Instead, I intend to focus on positive developments in the community. To that end, I plan to spend this summer talking about signature tourism events like Alumni Weekend and the Cather Conference, giving updates on critical tourism projects like the Hotel Garber, and talking about strategies to help make Red Cloud the best small town in America!