

The Intentional Tourist
by Jarrod McCartney
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By the time you read this column, I will likely have completed my second “Community Connections” event as part of Red Cloud’s “E3” project. You may be asking yourself, “what’s the point of these events?” or even “What in the heck is E3?” E3 stands for “Energizing Entrepreneurial Ecosystems.” The program was launched in 2021 by the Nebraska Community Foundation (NCF). According to K.C. Belitz, CEO of NCF, the “project is connecting entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial communities to build local and statewide economic development frameworks that ‘grow our own’ business leaders...it’s a partnership with six local ‘E teams’ [Red Cloud, Valley County, Keith County, Holt County, McCook, and Sidney] who agreed to become our original cohort and then invite others to join them.” Over a period of 3 years, each of the original cohort communities will host Peer Learning sessions and develop a sense of what helps entrepreneurs thrive in rural communities.

One of the goals of the E3 project is to help communities create a blueprint for small business success that will work in their location. Another goal is to have this project be so successful that politicians and government officials can’t overlook small businesses when it comes to the state’s economic development strategies, particularly in rural communities.

So what, practically, do we hope to accomplish at the “Community Connections” events? We want to offer a space for conversation to discuss anything related to community development or to answer questions you may have about the work we’re already doing. We really hope to see potential and existing entrepreneurs stop by. There’s a good shot we won’t know how to solve every issue, but we can probably connect with someone who can. Come check it out the 2nd and 4th Wednesday of every month from 4pm to 5pm (February 8th at Twisted Petal 2 and Feb. 22nd at Village Pharmacy).

E3 is also partnering with the Chamber of Commerce to organize and reimagine “Business After Hours” events. Our goal is to line up conversations between Red Cloud area entrepreneurs and our local committee. We also want to provide a space where small business owners can talk to each other confidentially. We will also have presentations from experts across the state. Our first event will be held on Wednesday, February 8th at Twisted Petal 2, starting at 6pm and it will feature presentations about financing, marketing, and business training from the Nebraska Enterprise Fund and Grow Nebraska. Future meetings will be held on April 20th, July 13th, and September 21st. We would love it if entrepreneurs from Lebanon, Blue Hill, Lawrence, Guide Rock, Bladen, etc came to these events. E3 is committed to developing Red Cloud’s market area and we would love for this to become a county-wide project. If your business is interested in hosting one of the events, let one of us know. The E3 committee consists of myself, Brad Frey, Danny Benge, Adam Vetter, Ashley Olson, Kevin Daehling, and Dennis Hansen.