

The Intentional Tourist
by Jarrod McCartney
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Another Spring Willa Cather Conference has come and gone. 2024 was particularly memorable given that it featured a dedication ceremony to mark the completion of renovation of the Childhood Home. It's often easy to forget that that home is the reason for the tourism industry here in Red Cloud. It was nice to see it get the spotlight it deserves. I strongly encourage anyone reading this—whether they've been to Red Cloud once or whether their family has been in the community since the days of homesteading—to take a tour. Painstaking attention was paid to every detail, from the wallpaper in Willa's room to tinting the sidewalks to make sure visitors feel like it might be 1885, if just for a moment. People taking tours of the Childhood Home, the Farmers & Merchants Bank, the Burlington Depot, the Pavelka Farmstead, and several other historic sites are critical to Heritage Tourism having continued relevance in the region.

I promise you that if you haven't been in a while, all of those aforementioned sites have been transformed into professional museum sites while maintaining their quaint, historical charm. Anyone interested in Nebraska or pioneer history should check them out. Pair it with a visit to the National Homestead Monument just down the road in Beatrice. From there, trek on down to the Pawnee Indian Museum site in Republic, KS. Maybe grab a beer from Irrigation Ales and grab some fresh produce from Depot Market in Courtland, KS. And of course go see our friends in Smith County, KS where you can check out the Center of the Lower 48 states, the Home on the Range Cabin, and eat at the one and only, almighty Jiffy Burger! In a few months, you'll be able to book a room at the historic Hotel Garber. Right now, you can find a variety of places to stay in Red Cloud including new AirBnB sites like the 345 Building Apartments, Villa Willa, the Dove Cottage, The M Guest House, the Cather Second Home Guest House, and the RC Refuge. Grab some breakfast at Alley Cats before you gas up at Olson's and set off on your next adventure.

Why did I take precious space in this column to praise our neighbors and suggest you visit them? Beyond the fact that they're interesting, it's in our best interest to promote the region, especially as we strive to become a hub for lodging between I-80 and I-70. The more people have to see and do in the region, the more likely it is that they stay multiple nights and spend more money. The more positive references we get from our neighbors, the stronger our relationships become and the more likely it is that we all benefit.

One final note: we have begun organizing for the annual September Month of Giving. This year, we need help more than ever as we attempt to finish fundraising for the Hotel Garber, attempt to build a recreation trail system around Red Cloud, try to save the Nursing Home, and try to complete the Hardwick Park Rehabilitation & Donald G. Stratton Veterans Memorial. And that doesn't even include our existing commitments like The Valley Child Development Center, Heritage Tourism, the Red Cloud Area Youth account and more. If you or your business is interested in sponsoring, please let me know ASAP at 402-746-2653 or

jmccartney@redcloudnebraska.com. Gifts of grain and livestock are always an option and can have considerable tax benefits. You can donate now at <https://www.nebcommfound.org/give/red-cloud-community-fund/>