

The Intentional Tourist
by Jarrod McCartney
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Over the last few weeks, Red Cloud has hosted Alumni Weekend, the Red Cloud Community Fund banquet, and the Annual Spring Cather Conference was mostly in-person for the first time in 3 years. There were sports events, including the Conway Insurance Golf Tournament, a basketball tournament, and an all-star game. As a tourism director, nothing is more exciting than seeing a bunch of out of county and out of state license plates on vehicles that are taking up most of the available parking spots. As a development professional, I get excited about new money coming into town as it leads to new opportunities.

Two entrepreneurs who are doing a fantastic job of seizing the opportunities in front of them are Todd & Lisa Mahin. After successfully launching The M Guest House, Todd & Lisa recently opened Back Alley Bicycles. Both businesses complement Red Cloud's Heritage Tourism initiatives. Todd & Lisa are improving the community's housing stock and providing a quality lodging option. They are also providing visitors with something to do and enabling them to more fully explore the Red Cloud area. When the recreation trail and the Hotel Garber are eventually completed, they will be in a prime position to profit off the increased foot traffic those projects will create.

This makes at least five businesses started by the Class of 1997 in Red Cloud that all support Heritage Tourism initiatives in some way (On the Brix, Hometown Market, Subway, The M Guest House, and Back Alley Bicycles).

There was still something a little off about this year's events. Mainly, it didn't seem like there was a lot of participation by locals. That's not surprising given that we've all gotten into new routines over the last 3 years and given all of the different activities going on this time of year. Part of me wishes we could create more separation between community and Cather Conference events. I have always wished we could turn that weekend into more of a festival and less of an academic conference, but that would diverge from the Cather Foundation's mission and alienate core supporters.

Regardless, there were missed opportunities over Cather and Alumni Weekends. One Cather visitor expressed being dazzled by our downtown and upcoming projects. He wanted to spend more money in the community but stores were not open. I think there's a number of ways we can address these issues, like more businesses having special hours and everyone (myself included) marketing more aggressively. We also need a community event during the Cather Conference. Not one that gets local people to go to the conference, but one that celebrates the fact that we have people visiting and gives them (and ourselves) fun things to do. I would like to bring back an event at the Burlington Depot and/or have something in the City Park within view of the Childhood Home. If you would like to help me plan such an event, let me know and we can get to work planning for 2023!