

The Imperial Republican

Building a rural-urban connection

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Last month I witnessed something special.

At St. Patrick's parish hall in Imperial, I heard laughter, saw smiles and felt the cultivation of relationships in action. Affiliated fund volunteers in Imperial, McCook and Keith County welcomed a delegation of fellow Nebraskans from North Omaha and Lincoln, breaking bread and sharing stories as part of a whirlwind two-day tour of Southwest Nebraska. It was like seeing the mission of Nebraska Community Foundation manifest in real-time, altering perceptions and building bridges with nothing but good will, good food and good times.

In 2020, North Omaha's Preston Love Jr. wrote a letter to Greater Nebraska, suggesting his community and those out west come together, bridge divides and find common goals beneficial to all. His letter, written with passion and honesty, inspired me. Preston and I started talking. We found lots of common interests and opportunities. Our conversations eventually resulted in two busloads of NCF affiliated fund leaders touring North Omaha as a part of NCF's 2022 annual events. The welcome provided by our neighbors in North Omaha inspired NCF volunteers to repay the favor, and in April a bus full of curious urbanites from North Omaha and Lincoln hit the road for southwest Nebraska.

I have no doubt that this tour of McCook, Imperial and Ogallala was a smashing success. We saw so much, and for many attendees this was their first time visiting the area. In McCook we broke into small groups and took walking tours of historic homes and businesses. Residents in Imperial opened their homes to our urban neighbors, and we all shared a night of history, storytelling and performance. The next morning, we dined on breakfast burritos at Wine Glass Ranch outside Imperial, where owners Brianna and



Logan Pribbeno shared the ranch's history, their land stewardship practices and their own love for their community. In Ogallala we got to participate in a mock cattle auction, visit Lake McConaughy and have a delicious meal at the local Methodist church.

This tour was more than a collection of visits to cultural landmarks, however amazing those visits were. The real work happened around dinner tables, at kitchen counters, in living rooms and in conversations on the streets of McCook. It was in those moments that we started building real relationships, founded on a mutual interest in each other and an understanding that success for one community meant success in the other. Our commonalities are many. Our differences are few. Communities across our state do better when focusing on their assets, as illustrated by the support of local, homegrown businesses in Southwest Nebraska and North Omaha. Our conversations led to recognition of a shared passion for creating lasting, generational change to build more shared understanding and prosperity.

On the trek back to Omaha, murmurs of excitement filled the bus. Discussion centered on the potential of these new relationships.

Where will these efforts lead? How can we further build on these new friendships? Quite frankly, the possibilities are nearly infinite.

At Nebraska Community Foundation we believe "change happens along the lines of relationships at the speed of trust." That's what we're doing with this exchange. We're building relationships between Nebraskans to identify commonalities, build trust and find opportunities that are mutually beneficial.

If your urban neighborhood or Greater Nebraska community have an interest in building new relationships with your urban or rural neighbors, please contact me at jeffyost@nebcommfound.org or 402.323.7330.