

Making McCook an Even Better Place to Call Home

Summer 2025 Newsletter Includes:

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MCFF's Newest Committee Member

MCFF welcomed its newest fund advisory committee member with the addition of Amanda Engell joining the FAC in February. A McCook High School grad, Amanda is the director of housing development for the McCook Economic Development Corp. She is married to Will and has two little boys, Wade and Walter. She was already involved with MCFF, serving on the Beautify McCook subcommittee and the people-attraction program, McCook Connects.



Other MCFF members include: Matt Schnert, chair; Jeff Gross, vice chair; Peggy Been, secretary; Sean Wolfe, treasurer; Cindy Huff, past chair; Dale Dueland, Bill Graves, Gavin Harsh, Linda Taylor, and Pam Wolford.

Bison Alumni Newsletter Going Old-School

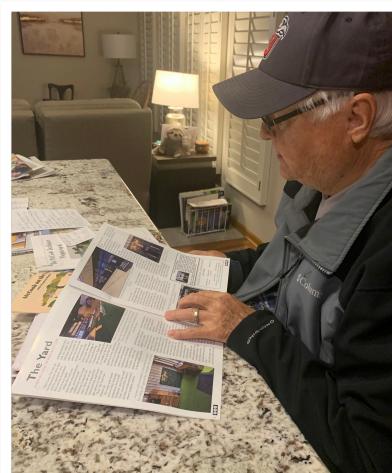
Do you like the Bison Alumni Newsletter, especially a paper copy in your hands? Do you think others might enjoy a paper version of BAN for themselves?

Well, you are in luck. In the fall 2025, BAN will launch the subscription service for the twice/yearly newsletter. For a suggested \$20 yearly donation (more is always welcomed), a full-color, printed copy of BAN will arrive in your actual mail box at your home or office.

Three years ago, MCFF, which has the sub-account for BAN, began paying to have printed copies available around the community. With those copies available, we have heard from others that they would like a printed version for themselves. While everyone will still have access to the email version of BAN, the printed option will soon be available, with the Fall 2025 copy. To keep costs down, at least 200 copies must be printed for each mailing. Consider a copy for yourself, for family and friends as a Christmas or birthday gift. Some McCook classes even print off a copy for their entire class as a way of staying connected.

If this is something that interests you, visit the MCFF website at mccookfoundation.org to find the link to make a contribution. Or you can send a check to BAN Subscription, Box 525, McCook NE 69001. Please include the name of the recipient(s), address and an email or phone number.

For more information, please visit the MCFF website, call 308.340.3412 or email mccffund@gmail.com.



Jerry Beckenhauer enjoys a printed copy of BAN at his house in Papillion, NE.

McCook Volunteer of the Month: Don Harpst

MCFF's McCook Volunteers, the McCook Chamber of Commerce and the McCook Philanthropy Council have teamed up to recognize our local volunteers. People don't volunteer for the notoriety or the rewards, but we need to recognize those who are volunteering in our community to make it grow and thrive. Once a month, a resident of McCook/Red Willow County is named the McCook Volunteer of the Month. The recipient is recognized at their organization and receives a certificate along with McCook Chamber Bucks.

To kick off the McCook Volunteer of the Month program, the McCook Philanthropy Council selected Don Harpst as the first recipient. Don has given of his time for decades. Ironically, on the day he was selected for this award, he formally resigned as a volunteer at Hillcrest Nursing Home, where he not only volunteered but also served as the director for many years. The flowering gardens on the east end of the facility even bear his name.

Don can also be found at the monthly McCook Community Foundation Fund meetings, which he served on for several terms. Now, he attends the meetings to offer sage and meaningful advice.

Yet others may know Don for his dance skills, often leading dance lessons in the community. Don has also given untold hours to community theater, whether it is acting, singing and dancing or as the director for many productions over the years.

And perhaps he is most known with his top hat and

long red scarf to embody Mr. Scrooge. While it has been several years since he portrayed the old curmudgeon on stage, Don breaks out the costume to deliver candy throughout downtown McCook during the holidays.

The McCook Philanthropy Council felt there was no one better to kick off the new volunteer recognition program than to honor Don Harpst, who at 90 years plus still puts in countless hours to give back to the community.

Other recipients this year have included: April, Jeremy Shaw, YMCA; May, Ron Friehe, baseball and softball; and June, Joyce Anderson, Rotary, 4-H, and Humane Society.

If there is a volunteer in the community who should be recognized, please contact the McCook Chamber of Commerce at 308.345.3200 or visit McCook Volunteers on the MCFF website, mccookfoundation.org to complete a nomination form.



Don Harpst receives a Volunteer of the Month certificate from Chamber Director Sarah Schneider and MCFF Coordinator Ronda Graff.

Third Thursdays Take Over Norris Ave.

McCook's Third Thursdays began its second season in May 2025, taking over Norris Avenue with music, food, games and activities. From May to October, an organization or business hosts the evening where friends, families and neighbors are encouraged to put away their phones and join together for fellowship, conversations and just plain old-fashioned fun.

Started as a leadership concept with MCFF to get people involved and to learn how to run an event, MCFF's role is now as a booth at each Third Thursday to share what MCFF is doing in the community and to celebrate the collaboration making this happen.

The Third Thursday's are coordinated by the McCook Creative District committee with more info at mccookcreativedistrict.com.



MCFF members Gavin Harsh, Linda Taylor and Peggy Been at the MCFF Third Thursday booth.

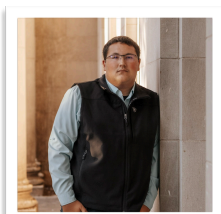
New MCFF Scholarships Awarded for 2025-26

McCook Community Foundation Fund awarded 10 scholarships this spring for the 2025-26 academic year, including the Bernard and Nelda Haag Scholarship, the Barbara Fassler-Neumann Nursing Scholarship and, for the first time, the Frank and Marion Weiland Scholarship.

The Haag Scholarship was able to provide two \$1,000 scholarships this year. Kendall McKinzie, a 2025 Hayes Center High School graduate, will attend South Dakota State University. Jalen Collicott is a 2025 McCook High School graduate, who will attend McCook Community College. The Haag Scholarship selection is based upon leadership and self-motivation through involvement in extracurricular activities in high school; a dedication to agriculture or rural living; and a desire to return to a rural area or Southwest Nebraska.



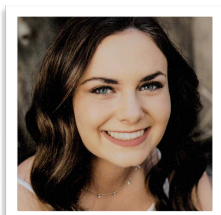
Kendall McKinzie



Jalen Collicott



Candace Magnuson



Addison Knoll



Natalie Roberts

The Barbara Fassler-Neumann Nursing Scholarship provided six scholarships for a total of \$6,000. The scholarship may be awarded to recent high school graduates as well as currently practicing medical professionals who have resided in the area for at least 4 years. One scholarship worth \$1,500 was awarded to Candace Magnuson, a 2024 McCook High School graduate, who attends Fort Hays State University. Four students each received \$1,000 to further their medical education. They are: Addison Knoll, another former MHS graduate, is now studying at the University of Nebraska Medical Center; Natalie Roberts, a 2024 MHS graduate, now attending the University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Logan Barenberg, a 2020 MHS graduate, who attends Creighton University; and Sara Peterson, a

former MHS grad, who will attend UNMC in the fall.

And Leah Spencer, a 2023 MHS graduate, received \$500 to further her education at the University of Nebraska-Omaha.

The Haag Scholarship has been given since 2006, while the Fassler-Neumann Scholarship is now in its ninth year.

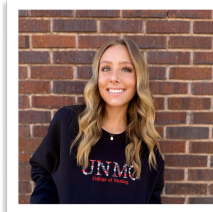
New this year is the Frank and Marion Weiland Memorial Scholarship, started by their grandson Doug Keith of Cozad. Frank served many roles in McCook, including a teacher at the high school and the first pool manager for the original McCook city pool in 1938 and Weiland Field was named after him. With a focus on education, the first recipient of the Weiland Scholarship is Grace Wilhelmson, a 2024 MHS graduate, who attends UNL.

MCFF has also started a new Learn and Return Scholarship with a focus on those who intend to return to McCook after their schooling. They will sign an agreement with the MEDC to stay in the community or they will have to pay back their scholarship funds. The first scholarship was given to Lucas Gomez-Wilson, who attends UNL and plans to return to McCook to work as a teacher in the McCook Public Schools.

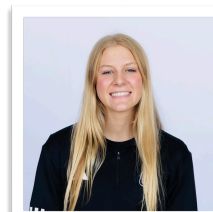
The George and Lois Tiller family also recently gifted funds to MCFF to form another scholarship, which will be available in the spring of 2026. Look for more information in the upcoming months. All of the scholarships are distributed through the McCook Community Foundation Fund, an affiliate of the Nebraska Community Foundation.



Logan Barenberg



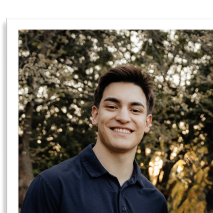
Sara Peterson



Leah Spencer



Grace Wilhelmson



Lucas Gomez-Wilson

Walking Tour & Reality Check Provide Life Lessons for Young People

By Ronda Graff
MCFF Coordinator

MCFF is proud to be part of two local projects which directly impact our local young people, one which gets kids up close and personal with their local history and another which gets them up close and personal with their financial choices.

The annual 6th grade Heritage Walking Tour takes kids on a stroll through downtown

McCook to learn about people and stories which have made McCook what it is today.

Coordinated by the McCook Community Foundation Fund and McCook Public Schools, the junior high students visit historic locations and hear from experts at each site. Hopefully by the end of the day, everyone learns something new.

For example, Stacey Smock shared during her history about MNB Bank that five investors pooled their money to start the local bank, among those investors was a Catholic priest.

The tour also included stops at Sen. Ben Nelson's boyhood home, which included personal tidbits about the McCook native and his role in McCook's rich political heritage; the Keystone Business Center, which always elicits "oohs" and "aahs" when they reach the upper stories, either because of the view or because the students are forced to take five flights of stairs; Ember's Bakery, formerly known as Sehnert's, which ends with the always-appreciated donut gift card; and the High Plains Museum, where the kids are in awe of a rotary telephone just to make the rest of us feel old.

And new this year was a visit to the McCook Mural on West First Street. Led by artist Karrie Steely of the McCook Creative District, the students learned about the history incorporated into the half-block long painting and also had a chance to express their artistic side with drawings of their own.

Speaking of reality, the McCook eighth-graders took part in "Reality Check," which was started a few years ago with a grant from MCFF.

The goals of "Reality Check" are to give students a glimpse of their future in a fun way, help teens become aware of basic financial planning skills, and clarify the need for young people to examine their attitudes about their futures and career expectations.



YCR Sponsor Shelly Sehnert visits with 6th graders during the walking tour at the mural.

Participants are given a worksheet with an occupation and a lifestyle status a 25-year-old person may experience. Jobs range from a mechanic, banker to a teacher, along with a salary and corresponding payroll deductions. They may be single, living with a roommate, married, have a stay-at-home spouse or X number of children - all possible situations the students will face in a few years, brought to life through "stations" during the event.

Some stations had flexibility such as transportation, where you could choose to ride a bike or buy a car; or entertainment, where you could decide if you were going to a movie or staying home to play cards. During "Reality Check," there were kids who were downright depressed by the time they visited all the stations because they were broke and they hadn't even bought food for the month yet. But it was a good lesson in priorities, that maybe you don't have to go out to eat each week; a good lesson in economics, that a \$35,000 salary goes quickly if you want a nice car; and a good lesson in responsibilities, that all the education, bills, or even just figuring out what to make for dinner is hard. Being an adult isn't always all it's cracked up to be but it's a good lesson for the young people to learn.

Ultimately, both the McCook Heritage Walking Tour and Reality Checks provided lessons for our young people about themselves, their futures and their communities.



Congratulations to the Spring 2025 MCFF grant recipients, who are working to make McCook an even better place to call home.

MCFF Unrestricted Endowment:

McCook Public Schools: NORE Science Trip, \$3,000

6th Floor/ArtBank: 2025 Season, \$10,000

McCook Athletic Group: Wrestling Building, \$20,000

Family Resource Center: Unrestricted Expenses, \$4,000

MCFF Learn and Return Scholarship, \$25,000

In Honor of Jean & Walt Sehnert and Sehnert Challenge:

6th Floor/ArtBank: Youth Docents/Intern Project, \$1,250

In Honor of Arvene & Neva Myers and Myers Challenge:

McCook Community College, CNA Scholarship Program, \$5,000

In Honor of Andy and Geri Anderson:

SWNE Genealogy Society, Microfilm Digital Scanner, \$4,000

Matching Challenge Grant:

McCook Humane Society: Dog Kennels, \$25,000

For a complete list of past MCFF grant recipients, please visit mccookfoundation.org. Grant deadlines are April 1 and October 1. Grant applications are available on the website or by contacting mccffund@gmail.com.