

THE OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE CITY OF GERING KENO COMMITTEE

May 7, 2025

A regular meeting of the City of Gering Keno Committee was held in open session at 4:30 p.m. in the Gering City Hall Conference Room at 1025 P Street, Gering, NE, on May 7, 2025. Present were Committee Members Darrell Bentley, Donna Engleman, Matt Janecek, Don Kugler and Julie Morrison. Absent: Amy Doll. Also, present were City Treasurer Lyndsey Mathews, and Secretary Carol Martin.

Notice of the meeting was given in advance by publication in the Star-Herald, which is the designated method of giving notice. All proceedings hereafter were taken while the meeting was open to the attendance of the public.

A. Call to Order and Roll Call

Chairman Darrell Bentley called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.

B. Open Meetings Act - Neb. Rev. Stat. Chapter 84, Article 14, As required by State Law, public bodies shall make available at least one current copy of the Open Meetings Act posted in the meeting room. Agenda items may be moved up or down on the agenda at the discretion of the Chairman. Additions may not be made to this agenda less than 24 hours before the beginning of the meeting unless they are considered under this section of the agenda and the Keno Committee determines that the matter requires emergency action.

C. Approval of February 5, 2025 Keno Committee Meeting Minutes

Motion by Julie Morrison to approve the minutes of the February 5, 2025 Keno Committee meeting. Seconded by Matt Janecek. There was no discussion. The vote was called. "AYES": Bentley, Engleman, Janecek, Kugler and Morrison. "NAYS": None. Absent: Doll. Abstaining: None. Motion carried.

D. Keno Fund Financial Report

Lyndsey Mathews, City Treasurer, presented the Keno financials as of March 31, 2025. The following figures were reported:

- Pooled Cash: -\$438,980 (negative balance)
- U.S. Bank Keno Account: \$198,327
- Pooled Investments:
 - o Invesco: \$225,808
 - o RBC Morton Capital: \$1,283,276
 - o Total Investments: \$1,509,084

When combined, the total cash available (including pooled cash and investments) is \$1,268,431.

She also reported that there are outstanding taxes payable in the amount of \$8,462. Deferred commissions payable equal \$89,711 and other obligations not yet paid are \$19,527. Julie asked if these amounts are still owed, and Lyndsey confirmed that they represent outstanding amounts due.

Regarding pooled cash in the endowment, Lyndsey noted that the Keno Committee approved a transfer of \$200,000 in February. She further noted that there is still a balance due of \$312,375 to the endowment. If the endowment were to be repaid in full –and excluding the investments– the available cash would be \$186,734.94.

Lyndsey also gave a revenue update. She reported that first quarter revenue was \$43,369.88. The combined revenue for Q4 2024 and Q1 2025 was \$89,174.

Don inquired about the highlighted amounts shown in the financial report. Lyndsey explained that those amounts, totaling \$35,557, are from the previous fiscal year and have since expired. These will be removed from the financials next year. Additionally, Lyndsey noted that there are four pending items set to expire within the week. If not submitted in time, approximately \$4,000 will go unpaid, and applicants will need to reapply.

Darrell explained the financials to Councilmember B.J. Kinsey who was in attendance.

E. Review and discuss applications for Keno Funds

Information taken directly from Keno Application submitted by PVC Monument Marathon:

1) Platte Valley Companies Monument Marathon - \$6,000.00

Description of Event

The 14th annual Platte Valley Companies (PVC) Monument Marathon will be held on **September 27, 2025**, taking runners through the scenic beauty of Western Nebraska from the Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area, through Mitchell Pass alongside the Oregon Trail, and around the Scotts Bluff National Monument. The Monument Marathon is a multi-distance event, with a full marathon (26.2 miles), half-marathon (13.1 miles), 5K, and a half-marathon 3-person relay. From the beginning, the goals of the Monument Marathon, have remained constant:

- Promote a healthy lifestyle
- Introduce and promote scenic Western Nebraska
- Bring outside tourism dollars into the communities of Scotts Bluff County
- Raise funds to support the students at Western Nebraska Community College

Community Impact

WNCC Student Success: Proceeds from the Monument Marathon serve as the major annual fund raiser for the WNCC Foundation in support of student scholarships, programs, and emergency student needs at Western Nebraska Community College (WNCC). All proceeds raised by the PVC Monument Marathon stay local, and as many expenses as possible are contracted with local businesses (supplies, photography, videography, etc.).

In the 2024-25 academic year, the WNCC Foundation awarded over \$326,000 in scholarships and has assisted with over \$11,000 in student emergency assistance. In addition, the Foundation supports college programs, capital projects, and student success initiatives. Since 2012, the Monument Marathon has raised **over \$636,000** to support WNCC students.

Tourism: The 2024 marathon marked record-breaking achievements of 602 registered runners and \$78,672 raised to help students succeed at WNCC. Of the 602, 68% were new to the event and 80% live outside Scotts Bluff County, an increase of 24% over the previous year. The participants of the 2024 Monument Marathon represented 38 different states and 226 different cities both an increase over 2023. We also hosted runners from two other countries.

Additionally, the 2024 tourism survey, given to runners as they arrived to check in at the Expo, showed:

- 39% stayed in hotels – a 3% increase over 2023.

- There were an estimated 141 hotel/motel rooms used, 60 of the 141 were Gering Hotels/Motels.
- 5% increase of non-local race participants that brought 3-4 or 5+ people with them

We continue to expand our tourism impact despite the challenge of replacing over 60% of "one-time runners" each year. Our goal for 2025 is to sustain the steady growth in race participation, with a target of 650 registrations. We will continue building on our strong marketing foundation and the excellent reputation our event has established.

We continue to aim for our target audience to view the Monument Marathon not just as an individual event, but as an opportunity to bring family and friends to experience the immense beauty, rich history, and unique opportunities of Western Nebraska. As a USA Track & Field (USATF) sanctioned event, our race offers competitive runners the opportunity to qualify for the Boston Marathon. In addition to competitive runners, we target full and half marathon runners who aim to run in all 50 states.

The PVC Monument Marathon Steering Committee and Race Crew are thankful for the ongoing support of the Gering Keno Committee and City of Gering. **We hope you will continue to be a Top Tier sponsor for the Half Marathon Starting**
Starting Line Sponsorship Includes:

- Sponsor recognition Full Marathon start line
- Corporate logo displayed prominently on monumentmarathon.com/sponsors
- Corporate logo on event t-shirts and named in most publicity
- Two complimentary tickets to the expo pasta feed the day before the race
- Event day recognition
- Option of sponsor promotion table at expo
- Option to include promotional materials provided in runner race bag
- Option to provide a sponsor banner to be displayed at expo and race
- Up to 4 complimentary race entries and 50% discount for employees

Unique Experience

One of the most appreciated aspects of our race is the rhythm of Native American drums in the last quarter mile, which matches each runner's steps and encourages them to pick up their pace as they approach a small but challenging hill before turning toward the finish. **Grant funding allows us to create this unique experience for the runners by bringing this special performance to our event.** Funding will cover performance fees, travel, and lodging costs needed to secure the drummers for the Monument Marathon.

Marketing

Keno grant funds would allow us to continue expanding our on-air advertising, increase local recruiting efforts, and support local and regional radio. In addition to recruiting across the country, it is also important to keep local interest in our event. Local registrations (inside 100-mile radius) make up one third of our event participation each year. Over 300 local volunteers are needed each year to keep runners safe and the event running smoothly.

Marketing sponsors will be recognized on video clips and in digital marketing where appropriate. All marketing incorporates our website monumentmarathon.com, which includes a list of sponsors/logos and a dedicated link that connects participants to the City of Gering website.

The following is an overview of the marketing done throughout the year:

- Colorado Runner's Eblasts – minimum reach of 50,000
- Nebraska Tourism Advertising Package: 2 Social Media Blitzes, VisitNebraska.com banner ads, 2026 Nebraska Travel Guide supported by a NE Tourism Grant
- Star Herald/Amplified: Print ads
- Radio ads
- Facebook/Instagram/Snapchat advertising
- Google Targeting/Remarketing
- Event website (link in Facebook ads directly to website)
- E-newsletter promotion of the MM by our timing company – 50,000+ runner reach in Summer 2022
- Online event calendars (marathon guide, USATF, marathonomaniacs, 50 States, etc.)
- Save the date cards, magnets, rack cards, posters distributed at key races and tourism locations
-

2) Allred Brothers Fireworks Show – \$7,500.00

Dear Keno Committee,

The Allred Brother's Fireworks Show is made up of myself, my wife Tracie, other family members and close friends. Our show started back in 1994 as a family celebration but, in the last 10 years or so it has grown to a very well attended public show. We all work together and contribute over 250 hours to make this show happen.

If approved, the Keno funds will help offset the \$17,500+ cost of insurance, fireworks, and other equipment for the show. We are requesting \$7,500 from the Keno funds and will work to get another \$9,500 plus through other fundraising efforts. We realize that this is an increase of \$1,500 over last year but, costs have increased substantially and donations have been more difficult to get, cash donations especially. This would be approximately 43% of our operating budget.

The Allred Brother's Fireworks Show provides a fun, safe and enjoyable family friendly Independence Day Celebration and Fireworks Show for citizens of Gering, Scottsbluff and other surrounding communities. The Show was held at The Five Rocks Amphitheater for the first time in 2020, prior to that it was held at the Gering Football Stadium for seven years and on the Gering High School lawn for three years.

We plan to work with Valley Auto Locators again to host a Truck show at Five Rocks prior to the show with food vendors. This has grown substantially over the last few years and is turning into a great and free event for our community!

This show has always been free and open to the public and in the last few years, was the only public illuminations display in the Scottsbluff and Gering area.

In recent years we estimate that there are 3,000+ people of all ages who attend. We believe that most people who attend are from Gering and Scottsbluff but, we know there are people who come from other Nebraska communities such as; Lincoln, North Platte, Sidney and also from places like Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas and even Utah.

Thank you for your interest, time and anticipated support of the celebration of our beautiful free country!

3) Oregon Trail Days - \$4,099.90

Keno funds will be used to purchase a speaker system that will be used at the Don Childs Run, Kiddie Parade, City Band Concert, Car Show and the Craft Show. We have one speaker now, but need another one so we can cover all of the events and not have to pay for a DJ. Other money would be used for the Old Settlers luncheons during Oregon Trail Days. The old settlers are individuals that have been living in the Panhandle 40+ years and are welcome to attend the old settler's meetings and luncheons. We award the half-century and old settlers awards on Friday afternoon.

A. Description of Existing Event

Oregon Trail Days is Nebraska's oldest continuous celebration honoring all old settlers to the area. Now in its 103rd year providing family entertainment to an estimated 38,000 people at various venues throughout Gering, the mid-July event unites the entire tri-city community through the presentation of twenty-five separate activities over four days. Grants, donations, and sponsorships alleviate cost and allow activities to be available to all ages and economic ranges.

Oregon Trail Days benefits Scotts Bluff County by creating encouragement to both former residents and potential tourists to attend the event, purchasing lodging, food, and fuel in the process. Additional Scotts Bluff County entities have the opportunity to promote their own agenda, encouraging attendance at future events.

In 2024, twenty-five foundations, companies/firms, individuals, and others co-sponsored Oregon Trail Days by contributing \$250 to \$1,000.

The target market is everyone with emphasis on honoring the Old Settlers and descendants of pioneers of the area. Every age group is included in activities from the kiddie parade to the Old Settlers gatherings. Grants and sponsorships permit many activities to be free, allowing every financial level to participate.

Zip codes can be recorded for participants (not spectators) of events with registrations. These include the Vera Dulaney Memorial Art Show, International Food Fair, Chili Cook-off, Mud Volleyball, Rod and Custom Car Show, and Horseshoe Tournament. Obviously, zip codes of spectators cannot be obtained.

Oregon Trail Association has applied for funds previously from Scotts Bluff County Tourism Committee and/or Scotts Bluff Area Visitors Bureau. We have not received Tourism funds the past 2 years.

There is a four-point plan for becoming financially sustainable. Depending on the economic barometer at the time, Oregon Trail Association must consider expanding its donor base, increasing participation fees, lowering number of activities, and/or possibly lessening efforts toward free activities or those activities with a poor income to outgo ratio. Self-sufficiency will become more difficult as years go by due to continually increasing costs spread over a continually declining population base, and these factors must be scheduled into a financially sustainable plan.

B. Detailed Marketing Plan

The plan to attract visitors from over one hundred miles away includes use of the local Star-Herald newspaper and Nspire Today! regional publication as both service areas over 100 miles distant (Chadron, Ogallala, Cheyenne). Also, the Star-Herald may be used as a resource to secure advertising in outlying

areas through newspapers primarily serving neighboring areas of a 100-mile radius. Additionally, use of Rural Radio Scottsbluff will be utilized as its signal surpasses the 100-mile mark in every direction; Rural Radio Scottsbluff, KNEB, will be contacted regarding advertising over its sister station, KRVN, of Lexington, Nebraska. In this manner local media and their affiliates will be utilized to reach a larger market.

Marketing Budget

Promotional Merchandising	\$ 7,553.00
Print Media	4,247.00
Audio Promotion	2,500.00
Website Maintenance	<u>700.00</u>
Total	\$ 15,000.00

For most items constituting the Marketing Budget, vendors (local preferred), quantities, and designs have yet to be determined at the time of submission of this grant application.

C. Proposed Impact of Promotion

Scotts Bluff County can expect up to 40,000 people scattered over a four-day period (or longer, if they so choose) expending funds for lodging, food, and fuel. A survey in 2022 showed 180 room-nights were rented at Microtel Inn and Suites, 155 room-nights at Cobblestone Inn and Suites, and 136 space-nights rented at Robidoux RV Park, all of which were attributed to Oregon Trail Days. Just those three facilities totaled 471 room- and space-nights; based on the 2022 \$10,000 grant, that figures to \$21.23 room- and space-night, a quite low figure for that statistic. The amount of lodging tax collected due to Oregon Trail Days could be calculated but would be an extensive project as three of a minimum of twenty-four known facilities generated 471 room- and space-nights during the 2022 event alone. With a proven potential of 40,000 guests, a \$10,000 grant to entice visitors breaks down to a cost of a quarter for every individual.

A not unduplicated count of 37,854 individuals was calculated in numbering attendees at Oregon Trail Days in 2022.

Oregon Trail Association emphasizes staying for the duration of the event through listing all events on the quadifold, our most extensive marketing tool. Interviews and presentations also tell of multi-day stays for event participation.

Gering venues to be utilized by Oregon Trail Days include Five Rocks Amphitheater, Gardner Park, Gering Civic Center, Gering High School, Grasslands, Legacy of the Plains Museum, Legion Park, Lincoln Elementary School, Oregon Trail Park, Scotts Bluff National Monument, and Tenth and other Gering streets.

Comments heard and stories told indicated many first-timers to Oregon Trail Days from outlying areas intended to not only return to a future Oregon Trail Days celebration but also encourage bringing family and friends with them. Other impressed first-timers strategically visited local friends/family to participate in Oregon Trail Days. Arizona-based Frazier Shows Carnival pumps thousands of dollars into the area economy through the purchase of trucks, equipment, parts, and repairs as the owner has developed a favorable relationship with local vendors. All have a positive impact on Scotts Bluff County promotion and economic growth.

D. Dates of Promotion

Promotion of Oregon Trail Days for 2025 began the first of 2025 and will continue through the Sunday July 14, 2025. The dates for which the event is being promoted is July 11-14, 2025.

E. Proposed Locations of Advertising

Advertising is proposed throughout Nebraska, Eastern Wyoming, and Northeastern Colorado.

4. Gering Merchants - \$19,000.00

Gering Merchant Association Keno Application 2025

The Gering Merchant Association would appreciate your consideration for our community projects for the year 2025.

Summer Bash June 7th, 2025 held at the Gering Civic Plaza. We are asking for \$4500 for this project. This is a free family activity in which there is live entertainment all day, games in which kids can win prizes, the zoo brings in different animals to interact with the kids, face painting and bounce houses. There will also be food trucks available for people to purchase lunch. Our costs for this event include insurance, the bounce houses, the entertainment and the prizes for the kids' games. We also do "Merchant Dollars" as prizes. These Dollars can be used at the food trucks and we then pay the food trucks back at the end of the event. This encourages people to support the food trucks. This will be our third year of doing this project and it is growing in popularity.

Oktoberfest October 11th, 2025 held at the Gering Civic Plaza. We are Asking \$5000 for this project. This is a free event for the community. There is a live Polka Band, The Jim Kucera Band out of Omaha, providing entertainment. We would love to support a local polka band but there is not one. There are Oktoberfest games such as the Beer Hoist, Tray Racing, Barrel Rolling and a Weener Toss. There will be a Beer Garden held by Scott Free Brewing in Gering and also Food Trucks available serving German options. We also hand out Merchant Dollars which can be used at the Beer Garden and the food trucks. Our costs for this event include the band, 2 nights hotel for the band, insurance, Merchant Dollars, prizes for the games and any equipment we may have to purchase. This will be our third year for this project.

Santa Village and Holiday Parade. We are asking for \$6000.00 for this project. Our Holiday Parade will be on November 27th, 2025. We will run the route as usual down 10th Street moving south from T Street. We have made significant changes to the Santa Village this year. We moved it to the Gering Civic Plaza. We are also building new Village Buildings to accommodate the space at the Plaza. The buildings are smaller and easier to move and store. The Gering Merchants built the first buildings with the help of the Gering High School building class. We do have groups committed to build new buildings such as Allo, The Gering Fire Department, The Gering Police Department. The costs for this project include the candy for the parade and Santa bags, insurance, Cookies for the village, paying Santa, building more houses, and additional decorations for the Plaza since we will have a bigger space. We have also purchased another order of candy bags since we ran out this year.

The Gering City Band is something The Gering Merchants would like to continue to support. We feel that Gering City Band is a valuable asset to the community. It draws people of all ages but more specifically the elderly. The performances are something they look forward to. This also supports the members of our community who are in the band.

Storage Rental \$2000.00. Tom Cozad has generously donated a storage space for us from the beginning of The Gering Merchants. We have outgrown this space and need a bigger option. All of us have been storing things at Tom's, our houses, vehicles and at Dietrich Distributing. We just need a bigger space

and it will help us keep organized. The storage unit will be in Gering so we will be supporting a Gering business.

Thank you for your consideration.

Allen Taylor – Chairman Gering Merchant Association

5. The Old West Balloon Fest - \$6,000.00

Since its revival in 2015, the Old West Balloon Fest has evolved into a premier event that attracts thousands of visitors each year. Our event has consistently demonstrated a steady increase in attendance, as evidenced by sales tax collections, lodging tax revenue, and rising occupancy rates in local hotels, motels, and RV parks. As we celebrate our 11th anniversary in 2025, we seek to expand our reach outside the state and impact our local community.

Community and Financial Support Matching Funds

The Old West Balloon Fest enjoys overwhelming community support, with significant contributions from local governments and businesses:

- Keno funds from the Cities of Terrytown, Mitchell and the Village of Morrill in the amount of \$2,500 each.
- Pledges from 42 sponsors, totaling over \$45,000 in financial backing.
- An award of \$20,000 from the City of Scottsbluff Community Programming Fund.

Proven Regional and National Appeal

Our ability to attract visitors from across the country and beyond is well-documented. In 2024:

- Parking passes were sold to attendees from 29 different states and 186 zip codes in Nebraska, with strong participation from Omaha, Lincoln, Grand Island, Lexington, Kimball, Alliance, Sidney, and North Platte.
- The majority of out-of-state visitors came from Wyoming and Colorado.

Economic and Tourism Impact

Our mission is to create a joyful, family-friendly, and inclusive community event while significantly contributing to the local economy. The Old West Balloon Fest:

- Draws between 10,000 and 12,500 attendees annually over the three-day event.
- Expected 13,000 to 15,000 attendees in 2025, with expanded growth to over 20,000 attendees in 2026-2028 hosting the US National Hot Air Balloon Championships.
- Enhances local business revenue and increases sales and lodging tax collections.

Long-Term Sustainability Plan

To ensure continued financial stability and growth, we are implementing a strategy to:

- Increase annual attendance through strategic marketing.
- Maintain an event pass fee to help offset operational costs.
-

Target Audience & Marketing Strategy

Our festival appeals to visitors of all ages, from 1 to 99, and we aim to attract attendees beyond a 60-mile radius through an extensive marketing campaign, including:

- Nebraska Tourism Grant Program award for \$2,000.
- Rural Radio Network advertisements leading up to the event.

- Print ads in Inspire Magazine and Nebraska Life Magazine.
- Targeted digital marketing, including:
 - Social media collaborations with Visit Nebraska.
 - Banner ads will run from May through August.
 - Boosted Facebook ads starting in May.
- Official festival program featuring participating balloons and sponsor recognition.
- Website presence, including links to tourism and sponsor websites.

Funding History & Request

The City of Gering Keno has been a valued partner in our success, providing previous funding as follows:

- 2022: \$10,000
- 2023: \$10,000
- 2024: \$6,000

For 2025, we respectfully request \$6,000 to help with the cost of pilot hotel rooms. The City of Gering will receive a full-page thank you ad in the official program, which is distributed to over 4,000 homes locally, and 3,000 copies will be given away at the event.

Additional Enhancements for 2025

We are expanding our festival offerings to enrich the visitor experience:

- Drone Show & Night Glow Expansion: A 200-drone aerial performance at Mitchell Airfield, depicting iconic Western Nebraska scenes alongside the balloon glow.
- Discovery Tent: An educational exhibit to teach attendees of all ages about the science and history of hot air ballooning, complementing the Youth Ballooning Camp.
- Sunday mass ascension and cowboy worship service.

Commitment to Community & Growth

The Old West Balloon Fest is more than an event, it is an economic driver and a celebration of our community. We are committed to ensuring its long-term success by:

- Expanding marketing efforts through Nebraska Tourism, Rural Radio, Inspire Magazine, and social media.
- Maintaining a robust advertising budget of \$18,000.
- Continuing to grow attendance and enhance visitor experiences.

Our event's social media reach is exceptional, with our recent National Championship announcement garnering 285,788 views and 2,701 interactions. We currently have 14,000+ engaged followers, ensuring strong visibility for sponsors and partners.

Conclusion

We appreciate the City of Gering's continued partnership in making the Old West Balloon Fest a hallmark event in Western Nebraska. With your support, we will continue to attract visitors, stimulate the local economy, and provide unforgettable experiences for our community and beyond. We thank you for your time and consideration and look forward to celebrating our 11th anniversary in 2025 with you!

6. Midwest Theater - \$25,000.00

Funding Request for Essential Theater Enhancements: Lighting and Audio Upgrades

As the Executive Director of the Historic Midwest Theater, I am proud to share how our venue serves as a cornerstone for cultural and artistic experiences in our community. From captivating live performances to cherished movie screenings, the theater thrives as a place for connection, creativity, and celebration.

To further elevate the experiences, we provide and to meet the growing expectations of our audiences and performers, we are seeking support for critical upgrades to our lighting and audio systems. These enhancements are essential not only for maintaining the high standards of our events but also for ensuring the theater remains a destination for top-tier performances and cultural programs.

Lighting System Upgrade:

Our current lighting board is barely functional and has limitations that restrict the impact of our productions. A modern light board will enable us to:

- Create dynamic lighting effects that will captivate our audiences
- Allow us to have a streamlined lighting board that is user-friendly
- Appeal to top-tier performers who expect advanced technical capabilities

Audio System Upgrade:

Similarly, our audio setup is due for improvements to maintain clarity and quality. Enhanced audio equipment will allow us to:

- Provide crystal clear sound for film, live performances, and community events
- Accommodate accessibility needs, such as assistive listening devices
- Attract more performers and programming that rely on professional grade sound systems.

Community and Economic Impact:

These upgrades will directly contribute to increasing tourism and cultural engagement in our region. By providing a state-of-the-art venue, we can host larger audiences, welcome renowned performers, and enhance the overall experience for visitors. Additionally, these improvements will strengthen the theater's role as a driver of economic activity, bringing business to local hotels, restaurants, and shops.

We are excited about the opportunity to partner with Gering Keno to bring this vision to life. Your support would help preserve the Historic Midwest Theater's legacy while paving the way for an even brighter future.

Sincerely,
Krista Baird, Executive Director

7. Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory d/b/a Bird Conservancy of the Rockies - \$1,300.00

April 7, 2025

City of Gering
Application for Keno Funds Additional
Information

Explain in detail what the Keno Funds will be used for:

The Keno Funds will be dedicated to creating a taxidermy mount of a locally donated Great Horned Owl, which will play a pivotal role in our environmental education programs across Gering and

neighboring communities. The funds will cover the costs associated with the taxidermy process, including shipping to and from the taxidermist, as well as the necessary materials for safe transport. Once completed, the owl mount will serve as an inspirational and educational tool, highlighting the diversity of local bird species and their ecological importance to western Nebraska. Bird Conservancy of the Rockies possesses the proper federal permit with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state permit with Nebraska Game and Parks Commission in regards to the legal possession and future mounting of this Great Horned Owl.

This owl mount will be featured in various educational initiatives, aiming to cultivate a deeper connection to nature and provide interactive conservation education for students and adults alike. It will be showcased in After School Nature Clubs at Geil and Lincoln Elementary schools, where K-5 students will explore the wonders of the natural world through engaging activities, games, and crafts centered around owls. This project is designed to enhance educational approaches that foster scientific knowledge, critical thinking, and environmental literacy, ultimately nurturing a stronger sense of stewardship for the local environment in and around Gering.

We plan to collaborate with Melanie Hughes from Bearded Hen Wildlife Studio in Ralston, WY, a highly recommended taxidermist known for her expertise in bird taxidermy. Her provided quote for a simple owl mount is \$900, plus up to \$400 for shipping and shipping materials. Although she is not based in Gering, the completed owl mount will be housed at our Nebraska Education office within the Panhandle Research, Extension, and Education Center in Scottsbluff. It will be utilized in various educational events and public outreach programs throughout Gering and the surrounding panhandle.

Describe how your organization impacts the community:

Since 2007, the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies Nebraska Education Program has been actively engaged in serving the Panhandle region of Nebraska through comprehensive environmental education. We believe that people thrive when they are connected to nature and the environment. Over the past 18 years, our programs have reached individuals of all ages through a diverse range of student, family, and public educational initiatives in western Nebraska. In 2024 alone, in the Gering area, we engaged over 1,500 children and 300 adults through programs such as field trips, after-school nature clubs, presentations at senior centers, and bird walks. Our most impactful efforts include after-school nature clubs at Lincoln and Geil Elementary schools, fall bird banding field trips at Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area, and dynamic presentations at Heritage Estates Retirement Homes.

Additionally, we contribute to numerous events and programs in the Gering area, such as leading activities during the Gering Public Schools summer camps and assisting with significant events at Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area, including Outdoor Discovery Programs and Branch Out. We collaborate with the Gering Library during their Summer Reading Program by providing engaging activities at their kickoff event. The Scotts Bluff National Monument is a vital educational partner, hosting our monthly Family Nature Club programs, and we support the monument by participating in their annual events like Christmas on the Prairie and National Park Week.

Thank you for considering the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies for the City of Gering Keno Funds. Your support will enable us to continue enriching our community through nature-based education.

Sincerely,

Delanie Bruce
Education Manager

8. 308 Truck Show d/b/a Valley Auto Locators - \$2,500.00

Describe how your organization impacts the community: This event brings community together through a fun event. We draw crowd from surrounding area also. It is an event that creates excitement for truck enthusiasts. Provides opportunity for younger generation to see career ideas & how we can encourage them to stick around our community. Helps draw food vendor & fireworks crowd also

9. City of Gering Parks Department - \$17,322.00

Explain in detail what the Keno Funds will be used for: (purchasing capital, implementing new programs or a special project. Keno Funds may not be used to supplement an operating budget)

In 2000 the City of Gering installed a beautiful waterfall water feature in Northfield Park and Arboretum. The waterfall was an asset to the park for many years; people gravitated to the feature for weddings and senior photos and almost daily people would stop and enjoy the calming sound of the falls. The water feature also became a vital water source for wildlife that frequented the park as it was a reliable drink of water year-round. The waterfall operated until 2021 when it was determined it could no longer operate due to issues with the pump not being able to deliver adequate water to the falls, leaks and overall breakdown of the liner over 20 years. Each year since 2021 a group of residents and park users has requested the falls become operational again but due to budget restraints the repairs/improvements have not been possible.

Because the community was supportive of the waterfall in the past the Parks Department determined the renovation of the waterfall would be a priority project for Summer 2025. Determining the deficiencies of the falls has been a challenge. The staff has worked with Anita's Green scaping to assess the existing waterfall and determined there were numerous leaks, water input issues and the pump and filters were not functioning correctly. It was determined a new design should be created for the water feature that would address deficiencies, provide ample water volume to allow the pumps to operate correctly and supply the correct amount of water to support the waterfalls and reduce maintenance for the parks staff. In redesigning the feature, a high priority was set on a design that would be a near zero depth water feature, which means water depth that is exposed to the public will not be over 6-8" deep. Currently the lowest pond was approximately 3' deep, this depth was no longer preferred as it is not fenced. A near zero depth feature will reduce the risk of drowning but will still provide shallow pools of water for wildlife and human enjoyment. The newly designed feature will increase in size, have a patio area that is accessed by a flagstone bridge and will have a flagstone pathway along the east edge of the lowest water basin. ADA has been considered in the design and there will be a flat viewing area at the base of the water feature to ensure all abilities will enjoy the amenity. The city plans to reuse all of the boulders from the original waterfall feature, may reuse an existing pump, filter box and pump vault. A concept design

is attached for further reference. There will be a phase 2 of the project that will include landscape plantings but will not be implemented until spring/summer of 2026.

The overall project cost for the new waterfall is estimated to be \$37,322. The Parks Department has budgeted \$15,000 for the renovation of the waterfall and will provide roughly \$5,000 of in-kind parks staff to assist in installing the new waterfall. The City of Gering Parks Department is requesting \$17,322.00 in Keno funds to assist with the renovation of the project. The fund request would cover the material costs and a small portion of labor costs for waterfall renovation.

The Northfield waterfall has been an amenity that not only benefitted the residents around Northfield Park but many from around Gering and the surrounding area spoke of its beauty and it is a novelty to have a water feature in a park. Restoring the waterfall will certainly draw people back to the park and will provide the opportunity to enjoy not only the waterfall but learn and observe unique trees within the arboretum, and encourage a healthy lifestyle by utilizing the walking path through the park. Finally, it will not only benefit people but the wildlife, that call the park home, will have a clean water source.

Describe how your organization impacts the community:

The Gering Parks Department serves the community in a variety of ways and positively impacts the quality of life for Gering citizens. The Parks Department oversees the maintenance and care of 10 parks, the Gering Pool, Five Rocks Amphitheater, Robidoux RV Park, the Gering Civic Center landscape and the Gering Civic Plaza. The parks staff works in alignment with the City of Gering Mission Statement that, "Our team is dedicated to serving our community with integrity, respect, hard work, cutting-edge thinking and the pursuit of excellence. We treat people right. We give an all-out effort, with an all-in attitude."

10. Western Nebraska Youth Summer Camp - \$2,000.00

To Whom It May Concern:

Please find included with this cover letter a proposal and supporting documents for the Western Nebraska Youth with Visual Impairments Summer Camp "Vay, Sports!". ESU 13 is excited to propose a summer camp program for blind and visually impaired area youth to interact with their community. We believe you and our other donors would be an excellent partner in this endeavor.

This proposal centers on the vital skills of self-advocacy, social development, and recreation and leisure. This summer camp intends to provide interested students with an understanding of what activities are available, an understanding of the preparations needed for successfully engaging in community activities, and to develop relationships with stakeholders in the local community.

In the past, these same students had to attend camps and activities in Eastern Nebraska, where they were exposed to activities and communities that they could not access during their daily life in Western Nebraska. This leaves gaps in understanding of what the community has to offer our youth with visual impairments for both the stakeholders and the youth.

Please contact me with any questions, comments, or concerns regarding this proposal. We hope to partner with you to provide a meaningful summer camp that will make a difference in the lives of our blind and visually impaired youth in the panhandle. Thank you for considering this project.

Sincerely,

Megan Macy
Teacher of the Visually Impaired Orientation
and Mobility Specialist

2025 Summer Blind/Visually Impaired Camp Proposal "Vay, Sports!"

Project Narrative

Knowing what is available for Recreation and Leisure activities in the community is just one step toward becoming an active member of society. Students with visual impairments have a significant disadvantage in knowing what is available and then understanding how to advocate to become a part of a team, organization, activity, or club. Making a move is a significant step toward independence, and there are numerous options in our communities for these students to consider. This funding request would allow ESU 13 to host a three-and-a-half-day summer camp for 14 students with visual impairments and dual sensory disability of deaf/blindness. The camp aims to inform students on essential topics related to the prospect of moving away from home. The program will cover 5 key areas: investigating clubs and activities that are available in the local community setting, participating in new activities using adapted sports equipment, advocating for accommodations within the community, communicating with transportation and making reservations, and independent living skills within the dorm setting to include shopping and cooking skills (meal prep).

As this camp will be offered to students in the ESU 13 service region, many campers could potentially be traveling over 2 hours away to get to Scottsbluff. For this reason, campers will stay at the YMCA Trails West Camp with 24-hour supervision, provided by 5 staff members trained and qualified to work with students with visual impairments and deaf/blindness, for a period of three overnights.

This summer camp will be open to all youth with a verified visual impairment. Eligible participants are those students who are verified for and receiving special education or related services under Part B of IDEA and students with a disability for the purposes of Section 504.

Personnel

Educational Service Unit 13 is an intermediate service agency in the Panhandle of Nebraska serving Banner, Box Butte, Cheyenne, Dawes, Deuel, Garden, Kimball, Morrill, Scotts Bluff, Sheridan, and Sioux counties. ESU 13 provides administrative support, alternative education, behavioral and mental health, early childhood, migrant education, professional learning, psychological, special education, and technology services to 21 school districts across 14,181 square miles. ESU 13 has a strong identity within the communities of Western Nebraska as an advocate for schools and parents.

Meet the Staff:

Megan Macy/Project Coordinator: Megan has been an employee of ESU 13 for 5 years. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree from Ashford University, a Master's in Education from National University, a Master's in Education in Sensory Disabilities, and works as the Teacher for the Visually Impaired and Orientation and Mobility Specialist for ESU 13. If this proposal is accepted, this will be the first camp of its kind to exist in Western Nebraska. Megan will manage the project, coordinate with agencies and community entities, and lead one team of student groups through the 3-day camp.

Jessica Cabela/Coordinator and lead fundraiser - Jessica has been a general and special education teacher for 30 years in the Ogallala and Creek Valley School Districts. She has a

Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education and an endorsement in K-8 Special Education. She recently completed her Master's in Education in Sensory Disabilities. She currently works, sharing her time as a Teacher for the Visually Impaired with ESU 13 and Elementary Special Education at Creek Valley Schools.

Maggie Anderson/Coordinator and personal leader- An experienced and dedicated educator with over 15 years of experience in special education, specializing in teaching students with visual impairments. For the past five years, she has focused on supporting and empowering visually impaired students and developing individualized instruction plans to meet their unique learning needs.

Her teaching career has been built on a foundation of empathy, expertise, and a passion for ensuring every student has access to the tools and resources necessary for success. In addition to her classroom experience, she recently completed her degree as an **Orientation and Mobility Specialist** in December 2024, further expanding her skill set to help students navigate their environments with independence and confidence.

(It should be noted that if a staff person is unable to participate due to illness or a scheduling conflict, another qualified staff person will be hired by the project coordinator.)

Other Entities: A variety of organizations will collaborate with ESU 13 personnel for this camp. Agencies that have already been contacted to assist with this project include:
Commission for the Blind (Scottsbluff location)

YMCA

Tallgrass

Midget Fund

ESU 13

Walmart

Discussion regarding Keno Fund Requests:

Motion by Darrell Bentley to recommend \$6,000.00 for Platte Valley Companies/Monument Marathon. Seconded by Julie Morrison. There was no discussion. The vote was called. "AYES": Bentley, Engleman, Janecek, Kugler and Morrison. "NAYS": None. Absent: Doll. Abstaining: None. Motion carried.

Motion by Darrell Bentley to recommend \$7,500.00 for Allred Brothers Fireworks Show. Seconded by Julie Morrison. There was no discussion. The vote was called. "AYES": Bentley, Engleman, Janecek, Kugler and Morrison. "NAYS": None. Absent: Doll. Abstaining: None. Motion carried.

Motion by Julie Morrison to recommend \$4,099.90 for Oregon Trail Days. Seconded by Matt Janecek. There was no discussion. The vote was called. "AYES": Bentley, Engleman, Janecek, Kugler and Morrison. "NAYS": None. Absent: Doll. Abstaining: None. Motion carried.

Motion by Matt Janecek to recommend \$19,000.00 for Gering Merchants. Seconded by Don Kugler. There was no discussion. The vote was called. "AYES": Bentley, Engleman,

Janecek, Kugler and Morrison. "NAYS": None. Absent: Doll. Abstaining: None. Motion carried.

Motion by Darrell Bentley to recommend \$6,000.00 for Old West Balloon Fest. Seconded by Julie Morrison. There was no discussion. The vote was called. "AYES": Bentley, Engleman, Janecek, Kugler and Morrison. "NAYS": None. Absent: Doll. Abstaining: None. Motion carried.

Motion by Julie Morrison to deny the Midwest Theater application due to needing more clarification and a breakdown. Seconded by Don Kugler. There was no discussion. "AYES": Bentley, Engleman, Janecek, Kugler and Morrison. "NAYS": None. Absent: Doll. Abstaining: None. Motion carried.

Motion by Darrell Bentley to recommend \$1,300.00 for Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory d/b/a Bird Conservancy of the Rockies. Seconded by Julie Morrison. There was no discussion. The vote was called. "AYES": Bentley, Engleman, Janecek, Kugler and Morrison. "NAYS": None. Absent: Doll. Abstaining: None. Motion carried.

Motion by Julie Morrison to recommend \$2,000.00 for 308 Truck Show. Seconded by Don Kugler. There was no discussion. The vote was called. "AYES": Bentley, Engleman, Janecek, Kugler and Morrison. "NAYS": None. Absent: Doll. Abstaining: None. Motion carried.

Motion by Donna Engelman to recommend \$17,322.00 for City of Gering Parks Department. Seconded by Darrell Bentley. There was no discussion. The vote was called. "AYES": Bentley, Engleman, Janecek, Kugler and Morrison. "NAYS": None. Absent: Doll. Abstaining: None. Motion carried.

Motion by Julie Morrison to recommend \$2,000.00 for Western Nebraska Youth Summer Camp. Seconded by Matt Janecek. There was no discussion. The vote was called. "AYES": Bentley, Engleman, Janecek, Kugler and Morrison. "NAYS": None. Absent: Doll. Abstaining: None. Motion carried.

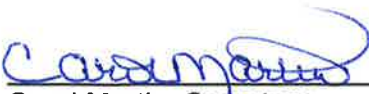
OPEN COMMENT: Discussion or action by Keno Committee regarding unscheduled business will not take place. This section is for citizen comment only. None.

F. Adjourn

Motion by Don Kugler to adjourn. Seconded by Julie Morrison. There was no discussion. "AYES": Bentley, Engleman, Janecek, Kugler and Morrison. "NAYS": None. Absent: Doll. Abstaining: None. Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:22 p.m.


Darrell Bentley, Chairman


Carol Martin, Secretary