WEATHERING THE PANDEMIC IN ORD

Pivoting to Abundance amidst Crisis

ABSTRACT

In March 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered communities worldwide. In Ord Nebraska the shutdown lasted 3 months after which the community started its journey back to “normal” life. This was only the most recent in a series of severe crises that Ord has faced in its past and especially the last twenty-five years. This natural experiment allowed us to examine just how Ord/Valley County responds to crisis to better understand how it has become a truly abundance community with a dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem, ever increasing its capacity for proactive intentionality. Distilled from the individual narratives of its residents and building on baseline narratives captured earlier, we explore the lessons embodied in its actions in order to provide instructive development options for similar small communities throughout “rural” America. We use the capital assets sustainable livelihood approach to frame the discussion and introduce a new taxonomy for characterizing small, dynamic environments woven into the rural fabric of an increasingly metropolitan and globalized America.

David L. Iaquinta, Ph.D.

Forward and Acknowledgements

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When my friend and colleague Don Macke first approached me to work on the Ord Story capture, our goals were clear but the pathway murky. Inspired by earlier work by Vaugh L. Grisham, Jr. on Tupelo Mississippi, the Ord story has the potential to be an important permutation emphasizing scale differences and a substantially different contemporary context. Blending Don's long experience as a rural economist working in community development across the country with my own decades of work as a demographer-sociologist across five continents has proven to be a rich collaboration.

The goal of this pandemic work was to capture the experience of Ord in the words of its residents as they navigated and reflected on the COVID-19 pandemic experience. Because the larger project had begun well before the pandemic we have been able to build on baseline story capture and detailed economic analysis over several decades. The structure of this larger project can be found in appendices E and F and will soon be released as a teaching and learning website where other communities can jumpstart and accelerate their own progress to abundance as a community and an entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Above all I need to thank the residents of Ord, Nebraska and especially Bob Stowell for unstintingly sharing their stories, their time, their honesty and above all their trust. Without their participation there would be no story to tell and no ability to tell it. However, any errors or misrepresentations contained herein are solely my own. These are not extraordinary people, though they have created extraordinary results. This is an important reminder to others so that they can see themselves as actors of the same measure in their own communities.

I have learned a great deal from the citizens of Ord and they have given me an opportunity to apply lessons learned working with communities around the world to those in my own backyard. It is my hope that this merger of understanding can be useful to many others seeking to build livable and sustainable communities challenged by the forces of globalization, metropolitan consolidation and capture. All communities face crises, but not all are able to thrive beyond them. I say ***beyond*** *rather than* ***in spite of*** *because as you will read, the residents of Ord see their ability to thrive as just as much* ***a consequence of*** *the pandemic. While true, we observe that their success is equally due to the supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem that they already had in place due to past intentional actions. I have endeavored to write in an accessible and non-jargon laced style without sacrificing academic rigor in the hopes that the material will be publicly accessible to researchers, developers and laypersons in equal measure. I hope you find the Ord story both inspiring and practical. And, I hope my wife Pam will forgive the long hours I have spent immersed in the story at the expense of warm dinners and on-time engagements. She is the center of my own little ecosystem.*

– David L. Iaquinta, November 2021

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Introduction

Throughout their past Ord and Valley County Nebraska have endured a number of crises on their journey to becoming an abundance community. Recurring agricultural crises over the long-haul, a hospital crisis in the nineties, early factionalism and distrust in the community, flooding, and more have all challenged them. Amazingly, they have in each instance weathered the crisis and emerged stronger. Both their resilience and ability to grow from adversity have been remarkable. While we can document the outcome of each challenge we are unable to fully examine **the process** of meeting each challenge. Beginning January 2020 Ord and Valley County were confronted with their most recent crisis, one shared with the world, the COVID-19 pandemic. Because we had invested substantial time capturing the Ord story prior to the current challenge, the pandemic provided a rare opportunity to examine just how this abundance community mobilizes and acts to weather a crisis. By extracting the essential elements of the current response, we can understand more about how these elements developed in response to earlier crisis management in Ord.

Our accounting of Ord/Valley County and its experience through the Covid-19 pandemic from January 2020 through summer of 2021 is organized around four concept pairs. While two of the pairs are framed primarily as a dichotomous, path determinant choice between mutually exclusive opposites the other two should be seen as interacting dimensions of human concern that produce synergetic outcomes when balanced.

- Interests **versus** Positions
- Collective **and** Individual
- Public **and** Private
- Crisis as Catastrophe **versus** Change Point

These pairs are also sequenced by intention. The source for change in a community must start with recognizing the need to shift perspectives from positions to interests. By their nature positions set up win/lose bargaining, whereas interests allow participants to recognize that they have something to build on even if when disagreements remain. Basically, interests allow for flexibility and creativity in meeting community challenges. Once interests become primary individuals can begin to reckon with balancing their personal interests **with** broader community interests. This balancing act produces a holistic understanding of the entrepreneurial ecosystem as something more than a zero-sum game. It is perhaps easiest to see this ecosystem consequence in terms of the narrower business ecosystem, but movement toward a true entrepreneurial ecosystem awareness requires broadening perspectives to include the integration of private **and** public concerns. Agency is involved in both sectors and they need to be seen as complementary rather than adversarial. This requires broad and longer-range consideration of issues, consequences, and benefits.

With the first three dimensions in place a community is poised to take the action steps necessary to become a truly abundance community. This requires intentionality of mindset and careful consideration of when to reset and when to change direction or pivot. Intentionality of mindset is essential to seeing the opportunities for change but actively choosing how that change is manifested must be contextualized in terms of its impacts. *"Letting the chips fall where they may"* is not a good prescription

for a healthy abundance community as it can produce significant resentment among *"losers"* whose welfare is not considered. Actions will always have consequences and some of these will be negative and unavoidable. However, simply leaving individuals *"hanging out to dry"* is a poor response for them and the ecosystem. Awareness, consideration, and attempts at accommodation produce healthier ecosystem outcomes. Listening and genuine caring are necessary even if it is impossible to completely remediate negative impacts.

In this account of Ord's journey through the pandemic, we also introduce two master thinking frames for characterizing places like Ord. These thinking frames help us identify and organize the capacities that individuals, organizations and the community drew on to address the challenges of the pandemic.

- Transition from Rural to Village Periurban to *Nanopolitan* Area
- Sustainable Livelihoods Approach and Types of Capital

Embedded throughout the discussion are the "lessons" of Ord as narrated by its voices, including:

Gaylord Boilesen	Ord businessman with multiple enterprises (NAPA stores, ethanol plant, trucking company, Cobblestone hotel and event center)	*"I think adverse times usually make people take another look at things and say, 'what can I do differently?'*
Bob Stowell	Lawyer and elder community statesman	*"It takes imaginuity"* *"We all do better when we all do better"*
Caleb Pollard	Owner of Scratchtown Brewing Company and former Ord Economic Development Director	*"They saved my life, no really!"* *"You can't hide here"* *"There is happiness in struggle."*
Nancy Glaubke	CEO, Valley County Health System	*"Our decisions were based on the best facts at the time, and our team really rose to the occasion"*
Dan Petska	Ord Mayor	*"Getting 25 families to move to Ord is the same as getting one new business in terms of economic development"*
Jeana Hackel	Owner, Hackel Construction Company	*"What's your highest intention?"* *"I still had a scarcity mindset buried down underneath all these new beliefs."* *"I'm not who I was before this."*
Sarah Brinkman	Owner of Utopia Health Spa and rancher	*"We're a tribe"* *"We've been around for a long time."* "*For me, I have a big family ranch. That's going to be my whole life."*
Heather Nebesniak	Superintendent, Ord School System	*"The kids are worth it"* *"Our mission … is character, academics, and community*

Doug Smith	Principal, Ord Elementary School	*"We'll Ord 'em up (honesty, love and trust) because I see more positive as a school system than negatives coming out of this"*
Melanie Bowden	Owner-operator, Jubilee Catering and nurse	*"Pause is good for reflection; catering makes me sing, but I have to run it like a business"*
Riley Smith	LICSW, LIMHP - Wholeness Healing Center	*"We were in a war time mode (lost sense of time, triage, and waves of shifting need)"*
JJ (Johnnie James)	DJ and announcer KNLV-FM (103.9 FM, "King FM")	*"We don't want each other to fail. We just don't want it to happen."*
Kristina Foth	Ord Economic Development Director	*"I focus on the culture first."*
NCF	Nebraska Community Foundation	*"Turn Up Your Dream Switch"*

The reader should keep in mind that the voices presented herein are a sampling of individuals from Ord/Valley County. While some hold specific positions or have played especially important roles, they by no means exhaust the individual stories relevant to this narrative. They simply illustrate experiences and perspectives shared by many others.

Kristina Foth, spent the past ten years in economic development, beginning as an intern under Caleb Pollard for three summers while in college. In March 2020 at the start of the pandemic shutdown she stepped into her current role as Ord Economic Development Director. She provides a context for both Ord and for the way we tell the Ord story through the personal narratives of its residents.

> "I think about community development and all the facets of it, I always find myself leaning towards the storytelling part of it, getting to know the people. *'What are their dreams? What are their goals? How can we provide the opportunities and resources to make that happen?'* We capitalize on our community's greatest asset which is our people. I focus on the culture first."[1]

The use of stories and the interwoven centrality of culture are features of the Ord story both as a reality and in understanding how their lessons can apply to other communities in practical ways that can shorten the timeframe of building community success. Whether as abundance mindset, personal conviction, institutional stewardship, distributed leadership, intentional agency (see technical brief on terminology), real neighboring (see "Neighboring, Abundance Mindset, Intentionality and Reconciliation in Ord/Valley County"), or *imaginuity*, the Ord story is about the active creation and maintenance of culture in a place through the actions of the whole. It is a story of civic virtue.

Sarah Brinkman's Story:

By way of introducing the impact of the pandemic on businesses in Ord, we start with the narrative of **Sarah Brinkman**, owner-operator of Utopia Health Spa. Utopia is a single physical enterprise that

houses numerous almost exclusively owner-operator businesses or service providers that have no additional employees. Sarah provides the building, manages its operation and is responsible for the employees that staff the common reception area shared by all the businesses. Sarah also operates her own yoga and related enterprises on site. As Sarah describes it,

> "Our industry was very affected.… We had a complete loss [for that period although] we did try to get creative and come up with alternative revenue streams. People were not going out, they were not participating in groups just because of fear of contracting the virus."[2]

But opening up meant some hard decisions for Sarah.

> "I had to decide whether I was comfortable with that or not …"[3]

Utopia had some unique advantages after reopening due to its physical layout despite some risks inherent to the services offered.

> "The way [the various businesses are physically] set up here with everything being segregated, each room is private. We're not in a group area…"[4]

And, after the shutdown ended like some other businesses in Ord, demand was robust for Utopia's services, but not without some costs.

> "The minute I came back people were wanting [my services.] … But it was definitely a stressful time and none of us here have benefits."[5]

Sarah also depicts how decisions about the targets and timing of reopening had uneven consequences for the various providers and businesses in Utopia.

> "Looking back, it seems comical to me actually the way that they … determined who could come back and when, who was more susceptible to the virus. … But, that's how they did it. [For example], the nail girls and the hair girls were allowed to come back 30 days prior to me, yet me owning the facility and paying all the expenses was a little challenging. I had to pay full staff and run the facility, but personally was not able to come back and [provide client services]. So that last 30 days [May] was actually the most stressful on me. Financially definitely, because when we were shut down at least I wasn't paying you all the utilities and things like that. Then when everyone else could come back but me, that was the challenging part, but we made it work. Thankfully all of us girls are very supportive of each other and the girls were like, 'whatever we need to do. This is obviously out of our control. but we're going to do what we have to get through it.' And, we did. We pulled through just like a family would pull through a situation, and you make it work."

Government programs intended to benefit businesses and workers also had uneven appeal and consequences.

> "I was very grateful for my local bankers who were calling me saying, *'this is an awful situation. If you can't come up with the mortgage this month, you let us know.'* Eventually, we did take advantage of the Payroll Protection Program (PPP) for the front desk girls… We used what we could. Unemployment and things that didn't really work for us, all being self-employed, … but we basically took advantage of what we could qualify for. Anyway, we made it through that."[6]

Sarah speculates that pandemic stressors exposed the latent reasons people use the services Utopia provides. In doing so, she highlights the multiple levels on which the pandemic affected peoples' lives.

> "I think there was a lot of stress on people last year, natural stress and just stress in general, maybe not seeing their loved ones and people losing people during the pandemic. … Yes, we're physical in the beauty-oriented industry, but I also feel like we get a lot of people that rely on [our services] for their mental health as well."[7]

At an even deeper level Sarah also sees a distinct shift in people's attitudes about self-care arising from the pandemic.

> "There were more people cross transferring into other areas of our practice. I feel maybe [the pandemic] just brought more awareness to like the whole self-care side of things that people were overlooking before. … We're not curing people, but [what we do] is making them more aware of what they're overlooking and shedding light on the areas of the body that they've just kind of pushed to the side where eventually they will snowball into a problem."[8]

This view parallels observations made by **Doug Smith** when he speaks about how the pandemic affected awareness and action in the Ord school system during the pandemic.

Asked about the impact of vaccines for her business Sarah responds,

> "I definitely noticed that once that clientele got their vaccines, they just felt more comfortable coming back to class. Some of those ladies and gentlemen I hadn't seen for six months. In my more physical classes with a younger clientele, it didn't make any difference."[9]

There are no surprises in this assessment regarding vaccination since it reflects patterns well documented in more rural environments across the country. That said, it leaves open reconciling the strong community-concern orientation observed in so much of the way people in Ord behave and the low level of transference to something that is inherently tied to community risk, prevention and responsibility.

Framing the causal order of health and autonomy

❖ Interests v. Positions

- ☛ Shared interests serve as the basis of social capital activating reciprocity and trust-building; recognizing and cultivating them is central to social integration.
- ☛ Positions foster boundary maintenance, polarization, exploitation, in-group/out-group attribution and zero-sum game thinking.

The pandemic has been a period of extreme polarization in communities throughout the country. Schools are often a flashpoint for issues such as masking orders and social distancing. People everywhere get necessarily concerned when they feel their children's well-being is threatened. However, key to understanding how a community deals with the issues involved rests in the how that concern is configured in a causal ordering. The fundamental question is whether there is synchrony between the way school decision makers (i.e. school boards, principals, head administrators) see children's well-being as the central organizing goal with actions and accommodations derivative of that goal versus the way individual members of the public see it. Much of the antagonism to school accommodations and administrators arises because children's well-being is conversely seen as derivative of a ***position*** – whether ideological or personal – held by individual parents. For example, if someone starts from the primacy of *autonomy (**an interest**)* to formulate a ***position*** of *"don't tread on my liberty as an American"* or *"government shouldn't intrude on individual affairs"* then *children's well-being* (an ***interest***) is constructed as best obtained by making sure that children's *rights* aren't abridged. In other words, health risks become a secondary priority. This can be seen in the way some individuals have historically inflated the known potential risks of a vaccine relative to the known risks associated with contracting a malady (e.g., polio, measles, mumps, Covid-19, etc.)

Ord has chosen a different path in this regard. As evidenced by many of our respondents during the interviews Ord managed to shift the thinking frame to one wherein the well-being of children increasingly became the source point for thought and action, used to galvanize increasing public support. This was accomplished by finding a common interest that ***bridged*** the underlying interests of polarized factions. In small town America high school sports teams are largely apolitical and nonideological points of shared positive identity for the whole community. The high school teams serve as a source of pride and the basis for ***social capital*** in the community as described by Robert Putnam in his classic article "Bowling Alone". A clear example in Ord was how they used the fortunes of the high school football team to help the community move beyond divisive responses to masking, social distancing and vaccination by messaging that such actions were necessary to ensure that the *"kids would be able to keep playing"*. In Ord this approach not only reduced aggregate community risk, it centered individual thinking on overall community well-being, reinforced binding social capital, and ultimately led the football team to its first state championship. Participants in this reordering of public thought and opinion included citizens, parents and decision-makers. Consider the following examples.

- ➢ Superintendent of the Ord School System, **Heather Nebesniak** recognized early the need for a long-term view of the pandemic response. As one of the largest employers in the area, she

knew her staff were worried about their economic well-being during the pandemic. She knew they were not just employees, but integral to the well-being of the whole community even if tasking them during the pandemic was uncertain. The school system kept everyone on the payroll as they rolled up their sleeves to address the uncertainty of the pandemic.

> "Whatever we needed to do, we would do. Masks – of course got political – but I was like, *'here's the deal, I can't quarantine 180 kids.'* … Now in complete honesty … having a championship caliber football team helped push that along, because … you don't want to be the person that messes it up for the Chanticleer football team. …[W]hen we talk about mental health for our students, we need normal activities."[10]

- **Doug Smith** Shared the picture on the right as a clear expression of how the school centered itself on interests rather than positions. His school guidance counselor "adopted the motto *'choose love'* for the year …. and wrote this theme in the snow for the kids to come outside and take the pictures around it, and my kids just love that picture." This shared interest echoed throughout the school and its inhabitants during the pandemic informing everyone's actions and giving the kids "so much mental fortitude."

- Radio host, **Johnnie Jones (JJ)** grew up in a decidedly different place from Ord.

> "I've lived all over the country. When we had the opportunity to move here, I was tired of living in … big cities. And I thought, '*you know, this might be what my kids want.'* I sure didn't want them to grow up where I grew up. … I wouldn't leave this place. I love it here. I do."[11]

JJ goes on to describe why a football game resonates with men in the community. Winning the state football championship is "…what us old guys talk about."[12] And, JJ recognizes that people hold different positions in this place he loves but he sees that the positions take a back seat to shared interests.

> "We are a small tight knit community that watches out for each other. That doesn't mean we don't have our differences with each other from time to time. That's okay, because, we do care about each other. And we're different than in other parts of the country. We just are. We are a hard-working group."

This is big part of the story people tell themselves in Ord, and because they accept it as real, it animates their actions. Sociologists would refer to this as *"definition of the situation"* and link it to the Thomas Theorem, *"what people believe is true, is true in its consequences for them."* Consider his description of the community's response to calamity.

> "We have been helping people around this Community, for a long time. Go back to the floods. … People here were buying water for places … up north that were hit really hard by the floods, worse than we were here. … We don't want each other to fail. We just don't want it to happen."[13]

Finally, JJ helps illustrate that trust is centered on the community's interests such that their view of political influence is that it erodes as distance from 'home' increases.

> "We trust our local politicians to a degree. By the time we get to Lincoln, we have less trust. And higher up from there it gets worse.[14]

He illustrates this trust with his evaluation of the current mayor.

> He's been so involved, and not just in politics. … I don't know where he finds time to do most of what he does. And that's the great thing about a lot of people here. We have people that are ready to step up and help find solutions instead of just pissing and moaning. … [Our local] politicians and other people put their pride and prejudices behind them and did what needed to be done…'"[15]

Again and again, people in Ord are able to recognize and vocalize both the importance of and the reality of putting shared interests in front of some position whether it be ideological, sectoral, parochial or simply idiosyncratic.

- Mental health provider **Riley Smith** links the Ord attitude towards the football team to a general boost in community mental health.

> "…we were like, *'okay, how do we help these kids get back into something normal? They need it. They need to be physically active. They need to have a team. The town needs to have something to look forward to.'* … [I]t not only boiled down to, *'how do we rally around them as a community,'* but also, it was really fun to watch them do it for each other."[16]

- Riley also provides insight into the way counseling during COVID-19 differed significantly from customary practice and how this centered practitioners on shared interests in a unique way.

> "In March we went all zoom with everyone, which was difficult, not only for our clients, but it was difficult for us as well. … So, part of our job shifted from 'we're working on other issues' to, *'no, we're actually in it, and we're working on active trauma reactions that people might be having.'* … Another thing a lot of people here talked about was safety. Jut that physical safety, *'we don't know what's safe. We have no idea.'* … [W]e saw very early, but we were in it with them, you know. And that's very different. Many times, we're talking about other things that we're not experiencing with our clients, but we were."[17]

In this instance the providers were moved to a place of shared interests with their clients in a way that was largely outside conscious reflection and at the same time outside their normal practice. But as things moved into the fall the providers were able to reflect a bit on what had transpired, and shift focus to individuals on a more systematic basis integrating patients' needs with their own capacities.

> "In the fall, we knew more. We were still doing the things … [we did earlier] but also kind of like, *'oh what just happened? How long is this going to take?'* So, during that time as well we were getting clients that didn't necessarily want to start the zoom but now they're realizing that they couldn't wait any longer. A lot of changes came later because I think we were in what I call *wartime mode* versus *peacetime mode*. We were gradually coming out of that and I know that some of us were starting to prioritize and what I would refer to as *triage* patients on, *'who do we need to see in person?' …* [We] just had to go person to person, case to case, '*who needs what?*'"[18]

- As we illustrated, Ord school administrators, teachers, parents and others could influence recalcitrant fans to mask up at football games although not everyone embraced this motivation to adopt recommended COVID-19 protocols in their broader life as Nancy Glaubke points out.

> Maybe, for some. I think, for others it was just, *'whatever you do, don't ever get tested'.* It was like, *'don't ask, don't tell.'* So, I think for some no, for some, yes. I think some took it very, very seriously and did everything they possibly could to keep that football team healthy, so that they could make it through the season and eventually to the State championship – which was absolutely wonderful. But, I think there were a few for whom it was, *'just don't get tested, because then the none of us have it.'*"

- Not surprisingly Mayor **Dan Petska** sat at ground zero in terms of the public response to COVID for much of Ord's infrastructure and daily life. All communities faced the same challenges posed by the pandemic, exacerbated by the lack of sound information about how the virus spreads and how to deal with it. All were forced to be creative and most brought folks together to collaborate and strategize actions. What was different or at least key for Ord was that they started from established trust between the participants rather than having to work to build it before they could act. As Dan says,

> "There were no rules on what to do. We did whatever we could think of to keep things rolling. … What we came up with was*, 'we're gonna put information out there, just flood the community with information because people have no idea what's going on.'* We created a website with information. … I went to the radio station … Each day I would bring a different person on. … I just wanted to keep people calm…"[19]

Dan's highest intention in during this process is clear in his last statement. And while his language demonstrates that he took his public role seriously and feels personally responsible for many of the ways Ord responded, it also demonstrates his awareness that he didn't do it alone and that he benefited from the preexisting trust resident in Ord's principle actors and custodians of the public well-being. Everyone easily latched onto their shared interests rather than the narrow positions they might have held about specific issues or any necessity to take individual credit. There was no *'zero-sum thinking*' here, but rather a clear consensus that, *'a rising tide raises all boats,'* or as Bob Stowell would say, *'we all do better when we all do better.'*

- Business owner Caleb Pollard sees the impact of the high school football team on several levels as a father, business owner and community member.

> "An important piece here is that it … gave us a wonderful distraction from reality. … Each week we had an opportunity to look forward to something, in a time when … many people were dying. Yep, every single day it was a headcount and that that was so grinding. … So, it gave us a nice distraction. It became something most in town could agree on. *'Argue about something else, but we have a football team.'* … [F]or us it was just one of those things that was a major bright spot. That was amazing!"[20]

- Business owner **Jeana Hackel** also sees the football team as a focal point for shared community interest. Referring to the state championship she says, "*that was exciting"*. She adds with respect to the whole fall experience,

> "… [E]veryone took some ownership. I saw a lot of people recognize that their actions affected someone else, and I like to see that consideration because the health of the team was important to play. I think that it helped us take ownership for our actions and how we affect others whether positive or negative. … Isn't that refreshing! If COVID can help us realize that it's not all about us… It's about service. It's about growth. I don't think we're happy when it's all about us."[21]

Public/private interaction supporting entrepreneurship in the community

- ❖ Collective + Individual
  - ☛ Collective sees individual interest as derivative of collective interest
  - ☛ Individual tends to see individual interest as a goal in and of itself depending only on transactional relations and *"buyer beware"* attitudes

Balancing public/private, collective/individual concerns and well-being is the essence of community building. High school sports in small communities provides a good illustration of the ability to bridge collective and individual interests. How did this work in Ord during the pandemic? Ord succeeded in marshalling a focus on collective well-being around a broad range of public functions such as education AND private functions in the entrepreneurial business sector. We highlight just three examples that show how the private sector used collective well-being focus to support entrepreneurial activity. But first we provide an extended focus on Caleb Pollard and Scratchtown Brewing Company.

We begin this section by highlighting Caleb's story and that of Scratchtown Brewery Company because it so clearly connects the dots between the collective and the individual in the context of both the entrepreneurial ecosystem and the community. As a business owner, former economic development director, family man and father, Caleb's recounting of his experience through the pandemic embodies many of the themes which we elaborate with the narratives of others in Ord throughout the balance of the paper. For example, consider the roles played by his family, partners, the Pay-it-Forward campaign, the gift certificate program, PPEs, and government support, or the challenges of business collapse, labor recruitment and layoffs, role modeling, emotional turmoil, and community leadership transition.

Scratchtown Brewery Company (SBC) experienced an instant collapse of its business when the city went into the mandated pandemic shut down in March 2020. Within two days Caleb reports that 75% of his business went to zero. The remaining 25% (on-site sales) soon followed suit. For any business this would be a financial crisis, but as Caleb describes, the result was also a severe personal crisis in psycho-emotional terms.

Caleb's Pandemic Story at Scratchtown Brewing Company

Ord did better during the pandemic than large Urban centers. Ord did better systemically, primarily due to its low population density. In fact, summer of 2020 Scratchtown had a record-setting business. Caleb believes that rural centers tended to do better than urban centers though evidence from around the country on this is mixed. Caleb identifies several phases to the pandemic, each with its own consequences for him and Scratchtown: the shutdown, the euphoric summer opening, the slow burn and the post vaccine period.

Things were different at the start of the pandemic. While Ord did overall better in the long run, businesses, including Scratchtown, ***"did not get through it unscathed."*** In March 2020 retail

businesses were shut down within days for three months. Prior to the pandemic 75% of Scratchtown sales were off-site distribution providing product to other bars and restaurants. In a matter of a couple of days this dropped from 75% to 0.

> "January 2020 to March 2020 we were having our best year of production sales in our business history. We were on pace to set a record at the brewery both in revenue and production. That was one of the key pieces that made the first three months of the shutdown and COVID difficult. One was a complete derailment of our trajectory. And two was that I had to lay off 40% of our workforce. We have still not rehired those positions."

Caleb experienced high anxiety and a kind of panic over this period. He says he experienced *"escalating anger"* because he had to lay off his two full-time employees. This caused him *"tremendous guilt"*. He also describes himself as an *"extrovert who found himself depressed by the social isolation and loss of control"*. The combination of anger, guilt, depression and loss of control created a genuine mental health issue for him. He finally sought counseling and as a result was ultimately able to reach a level of acceptance about the situation. When asked if his experience mirrored the stages of grief identified by Helen Kubler Ross in her work with death and dying, Caleb was direct in his response.

> "Yeah, I definitely got there. I had to get therapist and I read a lot. I had a lot more free-time on my hands; more than I've ever had in my adult life. I spent a part of that I'm just trying to understand my feelings and how to cope with them in the circumstances, and how to be a father to two children that had their own questions about what the hell was going on and whether grandma, grandpa and I would live through this. There was definitely an existential threat to our business and ourselves. It was very real, and I think that the grieving process was also very real. Also pertinent to the situation is that I was angry, and then depressed, and then resigned. Then at some point I realized that*, 'this is the new normal. What is incumbent upon us is to make the best out of our circumstances.'* No one asked for this. We have no control over it. We certainly can act like petulant children, like a good portion of this country chose to act and throw a fit about things. But I don't have the luxury of doing that, based off how my business is regulated. So, given what I felt, I could throw a fit and I could practice civil disobedience all I want or armed insurrection if I want, but it wasn't going to get me anywhere.
>
> I had multiple sleepless nights on how I was going to handle things. I had never laid anybody off; I've never fired anybody. I've been an employer for almost 10 years here at Scratchtown; for five years I was an executive with employees, and prior to that I was a young professional that had two employees working under me. I always hired well, and I never had to fire. The fact that I had to do that was gut wrenching, and the thing was they did nothing wrong. You had to do what you had to do to save your business. Yeah right, but there's still consequences and their names were Cole and Alex and they're not here anymore. And that disrupts a lot of things in people's lives. I never want to have to do that again. That's part of the reason why we haven't hired those positions back. I have a lot of concern about whether or not we can even meet the demands of the payroll to keep somebody on without having to go through the same damn thing again because there's a downturn in the economy or the distributor doesn't like our beer anymore. I mean that's one of the challenges that I learned."

By the summer of 2020 things improved for Ord and Scratchtown, but by fall the *"euphoric summer"* transitioned into the *"slow burn"*.

> "After the summer crowds receded we were in this, I would call it a *'slow burn'* between fall and March 2021. … We had good business, there's no denying that, but it was a very uncertain period of time. We were in this post euphoric phase of the reopening and then the summer crowds and then the pre-vaccination phase. … It was a big chunk of our purgatory … just the uncertainty of what you know. We knew that our business – or I shouldn't say knew – we felt that our business was going to survive, but under what thresholds are we going to have to operate. Like with what direct health measures in place and being fully masked on premise, etc. And masks to me is not near as big deal as some people make it. It's just it is a resource that requires investment. You have to make sure you have enough PPE on hand. It's also a bit of an inconvenience, especially in communication with people. It wasn't that big of a deal, but it was just… it was a deviation from normal."

Caleb's sentiments apply to many who have suffered personal and economic buffeting from the pandemic, yet as Caleb points out each person exercises their agency (see technical brief on terminology) in quite different ways. Caleb was able to acknowledge his vulnerability through introspection, to reach out taking advantage of his connection to family, partners and professional counsel, and to choose a course that reflected his highest intention of being responsible to others who depend on him. Caleb made intentional choices as to how he would deal with the existential crisis of COVID, and these reverberated through his business and family life ultimately leading to the acceptance characteristic of Ross's last phase of grief management.

> "I found a great deal of solace in what was an absolutely incredible feat of human ingenuity and scientific discovery in what they produced in nine months [the vaccine]. That never gets talked about; the only thing that gets talked about is the politics of the last 16 months. My oldest son, and I would have a lot of conversations about how amazing the reaction to the pandemic was and how quickly we developed methodologies to deal with it. Not just the vaccine itself, but the convalescent treatments that they figured out relatively quickly. And, by the time they were figuring those things out, we [Ord] were starting to be touched by the worst of the pandemic. … The joke's always, *'the middle part of the country is always two years behind the coast, right?*' Well, in this instance, when there's a pandemic rolling your direction that's a damn good place to be! So, from that standpoint I found solace in the fact that there was a lot of good … that came out of last 16 months, much as there was bad. I wasn't in denial [about the existence of the pandemic], because I have a science-based education. I fully believed what was happening, was happening. I believed in the science. I think they messed up a lot, but … scientific discovery is the rectification of past mistakes. So, I have a lot more flexibility when it comes to that.
>
> "I wouldn't say that I was in denial in the bargaining thing. I'm not a big bargainer with any higher powers. I'm not a big bargainer with anybody, period. I either will resist or accept and there's very little gray area in between that. So, the only bargaining I might have done was more with myself on taking better care of myself, because I do not believe that bankruptcy is fatal. I've been through two farm sales as a kid, and I saw what that did to my family. I saw that my parents survived it. They survived the 1980s farm crisis as farmers, and then they survived a major family fallout to farm sales. I had the belief … that if my business did fail, I would be able

> to pick up the pieces and make sense of what the future brings. I do believe that. And the other thing is that I have assets and I don't have a lot of debt. So, if things did go south, I knew that I would be able to parlay them into at least break even and walk away from things knowing I gave them my best shot in a once in a lifetime business situation. There's no shame in that. Maybe that's the acceptance phase that I got to that allowed me now to operate a lot more effectively without a lot of concern. My concerns now are very few compared to what they used to be."

Ecosystem Supports:

Somewhere during the shutdown period two local customers initiated a **"Pay it Forward" (PIF) campaign** [bonding social capital], ordering beer to be delivered to homes. They ordered a box of 32-ounce cans of beer called *Silos* and had it delivered anonymously to someone's home with the sentiment *"somebody loves you"*. The campaign took off as the community rallied around the business and Scratchtown was now delivering significant amounts of beer to private residences, sometimes as much as 400 32-ounce cans to a single residence. They moved 2,500 32-ounce cans in five weeks, equivalent of one pallet of beer. *"Do the math and that is a significant cash flow."* By mid-June Scratchtown reopened with patrons providing support from *"across the country"***.** Caleb says the Pay it Forward campaign got them *"through the pandemic both financially and more importantly emotionally."* Here is a good example of how existing social capital is responsible for motivating human agency to provide support for both a business and a human soul.

Bob Stowell talked about the **gift certificate program** in Ord (see Bob's interview) as a way the local community was encouraged to support local businesses during the pandemic as a success during the pandemic. Bob saw this as an important support for local entrepreneurs. However, Caleb has a more parsed assessment on the subject.

One the one hand,

> "…there are a number of businesses in town that would tell us the local support they had during the pandemic was transformational for their business. The hardware store would have been one of them. Our local meat locker probably had their best year and grocery stores definitely had the best year they'd ever had. I think that they felt … that because people weren't going to travel to Grand Island to buy groceries or other things, there was a much stronger focus on spending dollars close to home to keep the outside away."

On the other hand, Caleb reasons that while it provides cash flow on the front end it isn't really moving product in a timely fashion. He sees the PIF approach as better since it provides both cash flow and product production and distribution. It has a bigger influence on maintaining capacity.

> "It's not that we didn't see that the program was effective. It's that we had experience on what that lag [between sale of gift certificates and their redemption for merchandise] would look like after you got through your rush of cash sales, and we had to deal with the glut of beer that had a shelf life that we had to move."

In other words, Caleb's lack of wholehearted endorsement of the gift certificate initiative was rooted in the particulars of his product and existing situation rather than a philosophical disinclination or opposition for the community as a whole.

Caleb reports that the retail beer side of the business is now fully staffed, but they have still not rehired the two full-time employees for the production side of the business. Caleb says that Scratchtown is a better business after COVID-19. He describes himself as happier and more secure in the long-term viability of the business. He also says there were positive outcomes from the pandemic with respect to his **personal life**. He had much more **family time** (bonding social capital) and was able to spend more time enjoying the outdoors. These were the very reasons that he moved his family to Ord in the first place, **lifestyle** and **quality of life** priorities.

> "This place [Ord] is important to me considering the uprooted childhood that I had. I moved around four times between the ages of 10 and 18. I felt like I didn't really have a home. Now I've lived in Ord longer than I've lived anywhere else. I don't want to use the words *"desperately seeking"*, but I was badly wanting a place to call home and to raise my children and feel rooted. Obviously, that's very much the case now."

He also believes that he had to step up as a role model in his family, his business and the community. If he didn't, the business would not have survived.

> "I think I've taught in the last year that vulnerability is not a bad thing for a male, … that my sons can be vulnerable and be authentic and still be good leaders. Leadership Is not predicated only on the typical chauvinistic kind of mentality. Instead that you can be a caring loving husband and doting father and still be an effective leader. I fancy myself as those things. I also think that it's hard. The last year my son saw me get up every single day and go to work, even if I didn't want to, and not sit and wallow in my own misery. I actually did something about it. So, there was action orientation towards that, and that you could still be a leader just by getting up and going out and doing the same thing, every day, even if you didn't want to do it.
>
> The first three months of shut down walking into the brewery felt like was walking to a funeral every single day. That has an impact: when you go to the graveyard of your hopes and dreams every day and hope that it's going to make it through. It assaults your senses. There were days, where I didn't want to go to work, but I knew I needed to because that was what was going to keep me from losing my head. Also, I've said to my sons, *'it's okay to change your mind. Circumstances present themselves, and it's okay to change your mind. It's okay to be flexible.'* For some reason we want this resoluteness and leadership in this country where leaders never change their mind. Confronted with facts that create a sense of discovery, they don't say, *'oh wow maybe I was wrong. Maybe I need to reassess where I'm at from a from a moral standpoint, or from a political standpoint and take a different trajectory.'* I think that's completely okay."

The **school system** stayed open year-round during the pandemic with appropriate masking and social distancing. Caleb describes this as key to the overall success of the community. He expressed pride and admiration for the school officials who made the decision to stay open and follow medical advice despite opposition from segments of the community. He estimates that 60% of the community wore masks as a result and attributes the collective behavioral modification to the actions of the school system providing both leadership and motivation for the public. A big part of this was the desire not to undermine the potential for a successful high school football season by Ord. Caleb illustrates how this impacted his own family where one son played on the team and both boys ran track. The boys developed strenuous self-driven workout regimens over the summer with

one of them logging 300 miles running. As the **football team** experienced repeated success over the fall, the community galvanized around protecting them from falling victim to the pandemic by donning masks and social distancing in ever greater numbers. Nobody *"wanted to risk not playing football."* Keep in mind that Ord is a community of about 2100 souls and in small communities like Ord across the nation high school teams – especially football and basketball – are a key source of community pride and identity. People in Ord realized that they *"would have to rely on each other to survive"*.

The Ord football team won the state title in the middle of the pandemic and Caleb says it is hard to appreciate just how important that was for Ord and its success as an entrepreneurial ecosystem and a community of mutual concern. It clearly became a catalyst for strengthening community binding social capital.

Caleb does not believe there is any specific thing Ord did during the pandemic that led to its ultimate successful recovery. He describes it rather as *"random things"* (idiosyncratic actions and serendipitous events) that brought about survival and success. Caleb does acknowledge that economic *"assistance from state and federal sources"* (i.e., economic capital born of bridging social capital) was important, but he feels that the state assistance was timelier and more important. He refers to business grants and economic development funds as *"helpful even if not strictly needed"***.** As evidence for the overall success in Ord he states that he is *"not aware of any business failures during the year and a half of the pandemic"*.

Most of all Caleb emphasizes that he couldn't have made it through without his **partners and family** (i.e., his bonding social capital). They were instrumental in his personal (i.e., socio-emotional and skills human capital) and business (i.e., economic capital) success.

> "My family and my partners were central to me getting healthy and getting better. We were on the rocks that I needed to get through this. … My two partners, who I operate with day in, day out, were very supportive, even though they had to do some things they were fairly unhappy with and that included wearing a mask on the production floor 24/7. That was pretty much mandated by me, as a result of listening to my wife, *'what happens if one of you get sick and then the whole place gets shut down? We're f***ed.* Not only were we trying to navigate a global pandemic, where the hospitality industry – not just our tap room – but a major part of our customer base was completely shut down or destroyed or and we could not reopen, but then we had to be the arbiters of the public health. And, we had to enforce public health requirements in our tap room that were incredibly unpopular, especially in red state America. And the fact that [my partners and family] supported me through that unequivocally was very healing. And they also said*, 'whatever needs to be done, we will step up and do it,'* and that's been unwavering since day one, but especially with Mike and Shay. And their efforts here have been critical to keeping things going."

Caleb underscores the importance of the role played by his partners by comparing the outcome for Scratchtown to Misko's Sporting Goods which underwent a change of ownership during the pandemic. Influential members of Ord had high hopes for Thomas and Megan Hermann the owners of Misko's Sporting Goods. This young couple had benefitted from many of the ecosystem supports in Ord (e.g., mentoring, creative financing, the low interest sales tax loan program, etc.). Thomas had been elected to the City Council prior to the pandemic and was headed toward being a major

player in the generational transition of community leadership. But their response to the pandemic was quite different from that of Caleb.

> Both businesses took a huge financial hit to their revenue stream with the pandemic. Scratchtown lost 75% of its business with the collapse of off-site distribution. Misko's was both a storefront for retail sports equipment and an on-line screen-printing service for sports teams. When the schools in the region mostly closed during the pandemic, Misko's Sporting Goods lost about 75% of its revenue from screen printing. However, the brewery still had a loyal customer base that started the PIF campaign which kept them afloat. On the other hand, Misko's retail sporting goods sales didn't benefit from a similar level of "grass-roots" support despite the local push for residents to buy gift certificates and spend them at local businesses. Moreover, Caleb had supportive partners and connections to the school system while Thomas and Megan became increasingly isolated and anxious given the social distancing. Several knowledgeable residents including Caleb describe the Herman's response as panic which culminated in the sale of the screen-printing business to new owners from Hastings who have made efforts to *"become part of the community"*. (This is described in greater detail in the interview with Bob Stowell.)

Outcomes:

Today Caleb feels he has a better business with more focused objectives. As an example, He talks about their ability to invest federal funds into packaging upgrades that were overdue but wouldn't have happened without the capital infusion from the stimulus and federal relief packages. The federal Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and small business recovery grant program have for Scratchtown played much the same role that the local low interest sales tax program has played for many businesses in the Ord *nanopolitan* entrepreneurial ecosystem: flexibility and enhanced resilience.

Caleb says that Scratchtown has shifted its priorities to primarily servicing the local community that has supported them. On site sales have increased 30% compared to pre-pandemic sales. They have reduced their emphasis on statewide business. They still market in the larger region, but they are less aggressive about searching out new market opportunities and expanding regional sales. They have also continued to deliver beer to local customers. Thus, they have tightened the ecosystem while reducing their dependence on outside forces beyond their control at the state, regional and federal levels. As Caleb says,

> "I'm very transparent about this, because it's all public record. … If my math is right, as long as you use PPP correctly that's forgivable, so essentially that's six different grants to a for-profit business that we had never had before, hitting in a year's time period. It's going to make us a much better business. In terms of propping up and keeping businesses open in America, especially in and at-risk places like rural communities, it was to me a wise investment strategy by our government."

Caleb says, "*I'm no longer a YOLO* [you only live once] *man. I'm more of a team player. He says that while it's strange to say, Covid-19 was a blessing in some ways."* It forced him to accept and adapt to loss of control and this allowed him to refocus on his higher priorities of family time and enjoying the outdoor activities that first drew him and his family to Ord.

In earlier interviews Caleb said he was not ready to take on the mantle of local leadership in a more formal way at this time since his boys were at the age where it was important for him to serve as a role model by *"being there"*. At the time we suggested that community leadership was another way to combine role modeling with "being there" for his boys. The pandemic seems to have provided Caleb the opportunity to reflect more deeply on this issue of leadership. He now already sees himself as a community leader, just not in the formal political structure. But he also acknowledges the possibility of a formal leadership role and has been approached to run for mayor.

> "All those years before, my concern was with formal leadership that I was getting a tremendous amount of pressure to get into. My statement just to end the conversation was, *'not until my kids are out of the house,'* and that's still the promise that I've made to my wife and partners and my kids. But, in terms of being a leader and stepping up, reaching out, and connecting, I think I do that more now than ever. I want to do more of that more than ever, precisely with those willing to walk along with me. I don't necessarily see it as leading them but creating a collaborative atmosphere where we as a community walk along together. I don't like being talked about as the pointed end of the spear. There's a lot of me that doesn't like that anymore, as much as I like building awesome teams, watching them go out and be successful and being the kind of **leader** that gives them the resources and the skill set to go out and be successful. I stay out of the way. There's some value in that leadership too, and I guess it's up to me to figure out where I want to be in the next five to ten years.
>
> I still want to get out, and I still want to lead. I enjoy leadership; I really do. I enjoy making choices with my business partners that are oftentimes contrary to the wavelength. Some of the decisions that we made as a business during the pandemic were very unpopular, but they were the right things to do. I still get [crap] for it today, more jokingly than ever – like masks. Yeah, we were … the first place in town … in the hospitality sector to adopt a mass requirement for employees. No one else in the area did. No one else [required] masks through the worst of the pandemic. We lost patrons for that. We got made fun of when we put a solar power plant on the top of our brewery two years ago. I had a number of people tell me that it was a boondoggle, a waste of money. And when I showed them the mathematics of it afterward, especially during a pandemic, they were sure different. It was the same people that said our business wasn't going to be successful in the first place. I've had critics since day one, since I moved … here. I guess, one of the things I've learned as a leader is that critics and criticism is oftentimes completely over inflated. And oftentimes it's very loosely based in reality. So, you have to go out, stick to your convictions, and do what you think is right."

Looking Ahead

The last area of inquiry centered on the employment future of Ord and Valley County. Caleb is aware of the dichotomous needs the community has, demographically and structurally. Ord has thus far been quite successful attracting young entrepreneurial human capital by bringing in *"people like themselves"* who have grown up in Ord and moved away or have grown up in places like Ord and want to return to a more *gemeinschaft* life. On the other hand, there is already an increasing demand for "help" configured at the lower levels of the job market, e.g., laborers, service sector employees, retail, assembly, etc. Demographically this poses a significant longer-term issue for Ord

since these individuals are much less likely to *'look like them'* with respect to certain characteristics such as race or ethnicity. Caleb recognizes this as a real challenge on the horizon for Ord, and while questions whether Ord is prepared to handle this at present, he does not see it as an insurmountable challenge.

> "These are obviously difficult waters in which to tread, but I think that, by and large, most families in America all want the same things, regardless of background, race, creed, etc. Overall, I think human beings are relatively uniform in needs and interests. I think that Ord has that characteristic in in spades. With respect to family life whether someone is an entrepreneur or labor at the packing plant, I think they would find it enjoyable living here. I think that, overall, the environment itself is very rich for families here. The concerns I have with respect to our community's preparedness, is that we … have had the same needs for almost 20 years from a workforce standpoint and … I believe that we've essentially relied upon immigration to solve the [problem]. … By and large that's exactly what's happened, yet we, as a town are very uncomfortable with the idea of immigrant groups coming to town in large numbers. I think that there are some very real cultural barriers that exist here that would make it difficult for people moving here, but I do not believe that would be impossible."

Apprehensions aside and given his earlier work in economic development, Caleb offers ideas on how Ord can meet its need for labor.

> "We do not have a good economic development campaign in place to go out and find candidates that would meet a number of our labor needs within the marketplace from people that *'look like us'*." [It is important to note here that Caleb is referring not to race or ethnicity but to things like being family-oriented or having an appreciation for the natural amenities.] "That includes, for example that in certain markets you need to be [fluent in] Spanish to be able to communicate effectively with groups of people. There's, not a single person I think in our economic development regime that even has Spanish as a second language. … So, there's some concerns there.
>
> "With respect to … our cultural aversion to being spendthrifts there is a disinterest in investing in certain things that would make us more competitive, because it [is seen as] an *exorbitant* … expenditure. I think that's a cultural issue as well, and … that can be limiting. For example, maybe one of the barriers to people moving here is relocation costs. So as a hypothetical, we have the ability to use sales tax monies or to create other additional funds to help with that. We only do that for doctors and some nurses. Those are the only two professions for which we provide relocation and down payment assistance that is not income related. We have provided relocation dollars that were forgivable to doctors if they stay here a certain amount of time and, to a degree, certain higher educated nurses. Why wouldn't we do that for an LPN. If the need is in housekeeping, why would we not offer a $5,000 stimulus package to relocate a housekeeper.
>
> "The last thing is that … certain people in town don't recognize that we have a labor shortage. They don't realize who we're competing with. I think they're worried about Broken Bow, and they need to be worried about Lincoln, Omaha, Denver, and Chicago. We need to be building a community that is resilient and can compete in its own way against larger urban centers. You don't do it the same way as them. You present yourself as Ord and capitalize on that. Some leadership in town doesn't acknowledge that."

Caleb's final comment helps us see how even in the face of strong community consciousness, the intergenerational hand-off of leadership is challenging and not without conflicting perceptions of what is and is not happening.

> "I don't mean this to denigrate all the great work that has been done here in the last 21 years, but there is a major reluctance of the legacy leadership in this Community to let go. It's real and it is a real barrier to our community's future. Some of it I understand and some of it I don't. I understand that when you've been involved for so long and have had a hand in making a very dramatic course correction and changes that did affect the Community positively, it's hard to let go. But … leaders speak at public events … about the need to bring in young people and transition leadership but … it doesn't happen. Sometimes they're still pulling the strings behind the scenes, so they're not really letting go. I don't think that's unique to Ord either. So, I think Ord has figure out how to navigate that like a lot of other places. My concern is that we're not thinking about some of these things that are imperative to our community's future. I'm excited about bringing some immigrant communities to live in Ord if they could live here in relative peace and contribute and we don't have to worry about racism and white supremacy."

Examples of the ecosystem dance between individuals and the community

We look at several examples from the Ord experience that demonstrate the various ways individuals and the community have blended together to create a resilient ecosystem allowing the whole community to thrive despite the pandemic. Neither Pollyannaish fantasy nor dystopian recipes for survival, the examples simply illustrate how small individual actions combined with collaboration, mutual concern and steadfast resolve produced robust outcomes.

Example 1: How did Caleb, SBC and the community ecosystem respond to the pandemic, and what were the consequences?

There are important lessons in Caleb's pandemic story concerning the layering and intersections of social capital, economic capital and human capital. In terms of intersections the layering of economic capital does expand revenue streams and potentially increase resilience. This was the case for both Scratchtown and Misko's Sporting Goods. However, such layering can also introduce dissonance and dysfunction to social capital and human networks while at the same time exceeding affective components of human capital such as mental health and priority management. Again, both Scratchtown and Misko's Sporting Goods provide an illustration. Caleb was able to gain stabilizing support from both his partners and the school system vis a vis his children's involvement, and this encouraged him to both seek mental health support and refocus his priorities bringing his economic capital needs into line with his social and human capital capacities. Thomas on the other hand, was unable to make a similar adjustment and sold the enterprise. Nonetheless, the community at large did not suffer the loss of the business since the wider social capital network aggressively worked to find a solution using the already in place ecosystem supports. (See Bob Stowell comments.) A further example of the interplay of various capitals is seen in the story of **Melanie Bowden** who was able to rely primarily on her human capital to weather the pandemic and subsequently benefited from the broader community social capital once the town started opening up. As Melanie says, she is *"crazy busy now".*

There is also a significant connection between concepts across various disciplines wherein small rural towns, village periurban environments, and micropolitan centers are all applicable to places like Ord. Each of these concepts carries the strengths and baggage of a particular perspective even though they refer to the same essential phenomenon. Clearly, places like Ord are *"rural"* in the sense that they have agriculture as their basic economic underpinning and evidence orientations historically associated with things *"rural"*. Because the larger region is low population and the entire state of Nebraska is below the 2 million mark, a small community like Ord has an outsized role with its county and subregion. Therefore, places like Ord also verge on being micropolitan (census bureau definition) since they play above their weight class in regional impact. But census definitions for *"rural"* are primarily a demographic convenience in their measurement and represent a default category since by definition they are *"that which is not urban."* Furthermore, rural places are encumbered by stereotypical views of the activities, people and culture resident in the place. In other words, *"place matters"* but the question remains *"just what is nature of the place?"*

Periurban itself has conceptually too often been restrictively defined such that it is largely inapplicable in developed country contexts and reduced to a singular category such that it poorly reflects the range of place phenomena attributed to it. Drawn primarily from work in developing countries the concept is built on the fundamental recognition that places exhibit characteristics of both urban and rural at quite varied population sizes. In other words, periurban removes the restrictions of binary thinking and simple demographic convenience, instead characterizing places within a context of a lumpy continuum. In our work we have specified five types of periurban as the "lumps" in this continuum. We use the term *Village Periurban* here to describe Ord based on the typology developed by Iaquinta and Drescher (2001). *Village periurban* is still an imperfect attribution to Ord but it comes much closer to addressing the limitations of the other two definitions. The strength of this attribution is that it is not grounded in simple population size, it acknowledges the simultaneous impact of both urban and rural attributes, allows the inclusion of the full capitals approach, and importantly specifically focuses on the institutional context (i.e., ecosystem/community) of the place. There is rich ground here for both theoretical and applied exploration. As we elaborate elsewhere in this work, we favor the term *nanopolitan* to describe places like Ord

Example 2: Misko's Sporting Goods

A second example in Ord where the private sector used an emphasis on collective well-being to support entrepreneurial activity involves Misko's Sporting Goods. Misko's like SCB is an anchoring business on the town square and a visibly important component of local entrepreneurship. Like SCB, it's on-site retail trade also comprised only about 25% of its business, the other 75% coming from off-site sales of team uniforms throughout the region. Also, like SCB the mandated closure of public activity in March sent 75% of their business to zero and within days the remainder of their business collapsed. The responses at all levels in this instance were quite different from SBC, personally and in terms of the surrounding ecosystem.

- When screen-printing for sports teams collapsed, Misko's Sporting Goods used their capacity to create t-shirts for local businesses. In this way combined with the Chamber gift certificate

program they both supported and benefited from the larger ecosystem. As **Melanie Bowden** explains:

> "Misko's next door did something really creative. They did T-shirt designs for as many businesses as wanted to participate. And then, you could order the T-shirts to support your fellow businesses."[22]

However, the owners eventually gave up on the Misko's Sporting Goods enterprise and wanted out. Explanations for this change of heart vary. Consider the views of various Ord entrepreneurs and business owners.

- **Gaylord Boilesen** filters explanation through the lens of mentor and financial backer. He describes how Thomas

  > "…got very negative. *You know, 'the sky was falling.'* He was just tired of it. He was determined that everything was just going to pot. We struggled with him."

- **Melanie Bowden** whose business, Jubilee Catering, is next door to Misko's Sporting Goods sees it through the eyes of neighbor and friend of the Hermans. Melanie observes,

  > "…with Megan and Thomas they had a mismatch with their expectations of what a retail business would be. I think they were pushing forward long after they weren't feeling it anymore…"[23]

- **Caleb Pollard** sees it as a more nuanced mixture of these two views.

  > "It was in part personality and in part that Thomas had already made up his mind that he was planning on leaving."[24]

The issue for the ecosystem, however, rests on the continued operation and success of the business and not necessarily perpetuation of current ownership. In this instance the investor group stepped in much as they did in earlier situations with Shopko, the ethanol plant and Misko's Sporting Goods itself. These events are descried in detail in earlier stories covering events prior to the pandemic.

- **Bob Stowell** sets up the current Misko's transition story for us.

  > "This is classic for the community. This was a business that has been a foundation on our square. The [Loop Valley] Investment Club guys pretty much just let us do what we needed to do, and we kind of told them afterwards. … But I think it is something we can all learn from, the importance of being really flexible and agile when we meet something we don't expect. I think the ones who felt the worst are probably Gaylord Boilesen and Bruce Slammers, the accountant, because they had mentored these kids [the owners] more than anybody. … I think the Misko story has a lot of value."[25]

- **Gaylord** describes how the entrepreneurial ecosystem responded by brokering and financing the Misko's transition.

  > [Thomas] *"w*anted to close the retail part of [the store] … and we said, 'no'. You know, that was why we were involved in it, to keep the retail part open. We were fortunate to

> find somebody [to take over the store]. … It just became a matter of sitting down to figure, *'how do we do it.'* Well, we had to be a little creative to get it financed, … to get it to change hands again. We ended up buying Thomas out 100%, and then we carried all the debt to get the [new owners] … to buy it.[26]

- Gaylord describes the ecosystem role and the mentoring support for the original owners and how things played out such that the owners' decision to leave did not lead to closing the business itself.

> "We offered… *'do you want to get some stress counseling? Set you up to talk to somebody. We'll pay for it.' 'No', he says, 'it's just time for a change.'* We knew at that point he had made up his mind. We didn't want it to close. So, fortunately we found somebody that would agree to keep it open if we did certain things for [the new owner]."[27]

- Gaylord also provides insight into just how deeply community welfare is embedded in Ord's entrepreneurial thinking by defining things in terms of "his failure" as a mentor in the Misko's story.

> "You know I did a poor job, and I blame myself and Bruce for this because we thought we had done a better job of teaching him the financials."[28]

- **Bob Stowell** adds an important postscript to the story showing how the involvement of the larger community didn't end when the ink dried on the purchase agreement.

> "[The new owners] … said, *"my gosh, the roof leaks and it's going to cost us $20,000 or so to fix it."* The investment club came back in and said, *"hey, tell you what'* – because they were making monthly payments with nothing down on the building – *'we'll pay half of the roof repair up to $10,000.'* … So, everyone was well vested in making sure that these people were treated right."[29]

Clearly, for these actors the dividing line between public and private functions and individual versus collective interest is a very grey area. Their motivation was to keep an important legacy store on the square in operation (a very public motivation) and while they were protecting their economic investment, they were doing so at substantial personal cost and potential risk beyond a simple business transaction. This is highly creative economic development deriving from a substantial public interest motivated by collective concern.

Example 3: The Chamber Gift Certificate Program and local businesses

A third example with quite different circumstances starts at CinTrese Boutique, where **Trese Lange** speaks to the importance of the Chamber gift certificate program. Originally opened as a partnership, the business came under sole ownership when Teresa Lange bought out her business partner. The timing of the transfer could not have been worse, one month before the mandated shutdown.

- As Trese Lange, proprietor explains,

> "It's been very very difficult. I bought my business partner out two weeks before [the pandemic shutdown.] … We signed the papers February 14th."

This is a business that depends entirely on walk-in trade and deals in fundamentally non-essential goods. As such, it was slammed hard financially. Making matters worse it was a sole-proprietorship with no employees and therefore, unqualified for any of the PPE loans.

> "The paperwork was filed as a sole proprietor, so the federal government determined that I had just opened the business. I said, *'well, I've had the store for over six years.'* And they said, *'but you just became a sole proprietor.'* And I took on all the debt and paid her [former partner] an obscene amount of money. And the government gentleman I spoke to in Oklahoma said, *'well, that's just unfortunate timing on your part, mam.'* … It was just a pretty grueling day."

Today, CinTrese is still operating on the square as an anchor business, but how? Again, the answer lies heavily in the ecosystem response to the pandemic. The answer lies with the creative use of a community wide gift certificate program for local businesses. As Trese says, "…that did help. It did."[30]

- **Gaylord Boilesen** elaborates on how the gift certificate program worked and its impact on Ord businesses.

> "… [T]he one thing that we did notice, we probably had more people consciously shopping Ord. … So, people did come out and buy a lot of gift certificates. And that helped people become more conscious about shopping in Ord."[31]

- **Bob Stowell** echoes Gaylord's description of the gift certificate program and how it motivated individual action.

> "I know my wife went around town and bought a bunch of gift certificates and then the [Economic Development] Board kicked in the extra money so that was a way that Ord helped business people."[32]

- **Sarah Brinkman** operator of Utopia Spa sees the impact of the program not just for herself but for a variety of independent operators who share space in the facility with her.

> "We did use [the gift certificate program] during the shutdown which was super helpful because I could have clients [via zoom] and they would just Venmo me."[33]

- **JJ (Johnnie James)** indicates how the radio station supported the effort.

> "We opened up some stuff here at the radio station and talked about some businesses that we normally – you know unless they're buying advertising – we wouldn't. Yeah, so we opened things here at the radio system and said, *'hey, get down here and shop, these are the people that are covering your back.'*"

- **Melanie Bowden**, owner-operator of Jubilee Catering gives us a different and instructive take on how the gift certificate affected her business decisions.

> "I chose not to enter into that pool [i.e., accepting gift certificates]. I had something else I could fall back on [nursing]. So, I didn't want to be in competition with any of that because I knew people were working very hard at surviving. So, I didn't. Melanie recognized that the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem would be healthier if she declined public support for personal gain."

Other Examples:

- There were many other things going on as well during the pandemic to keep the community "alive," socially and economically.
  - Above, Melanie Bowden described how the Hermans at Misko's Sporting Goods attempted to rally support for business with their screen-printing business. She went on to say,

> "[T]he brewery did home delivery of their products. There was a lot of creativity, and people were reaching out to each other. The brewery was doing a Friday night zoom meeting where you would have a virtual little gathering on line. So, people were being very creative, and I thought that was very neat."

  - **Sarah Brinkman** adds,

> "…another amazing local thing was [Misko's] … provided local support by producing graphic T-shirts with your business logo. There were some other good local things that helped during the shutdown with utilities and things like that. So, we could at least have some revenue coming in with those [forms of local assistance]."

Finally, on a larger level public support came to individuals and businesses in the private sector through various state and especially federal programs. This was addressed in positive terms by several entrepreneurs in the Ord interviews.

- **Sarah Brinkman**, owner operator of Utopia Spa, said it most succinctly, "*that was huge for us."* Yet, not all entrepreneurs benefitted equally as was apparent in the story of Trese Lang above. Utopia underscores the catch 22 that sole owner-operators faced. Because of the unique nature of Utopia, owner-operators share a roof and centralized reception facility, but they have no employees. As Sarah points out,

> "…everybody in [Utopia] is self-employed, so not everyone qualified. You know they kind of had to meet specific criteria. I did qualify I think one of the other girls did too."[34]

Nonetheless, there were costs because of the pandemic for many in both the private and public arenas. For business it was any number of things from loss of the business, to declining revenues, to letting employees go and so forth. These business impacts were readably visible to the community for the most part and they were the often the impetus for recognizing the problems being faced and the motivation for taken individual action to support the entrepreneurial ecosystem and ultimately the whole community.

Summing up

The relationship between the community and the individual is ultimately reflected in the relationship between the public and private sectors which we elaborate in the next section. Both are complex and multifaceted, and both require a delicate balancing act at multiple levels. Perhaps this relationship is best summed up in the experience of one resident who disclosed that*, "I'm probably the only democrat in this very red place … but I love this place."* The ability to be different and yet to be accepted and to be *'one of us'*: here is the essence of social integration of the individual and internalization of the community such that the individual is motivated to balance the two as habit. This habit supersedes the sometimes-divisive categorizations of status, view-point, and ideology by placing membership in community ahead of those things without necessitating eschewing them. It directs our intentional agency, our other-directed care, and our highest intentions. We can be different and still care. We can be different and still not *'be voted off the island'*. We can be different and still be respected and cared about. We are part of a river complete with cross-currents and obstructions, but still one river.

- As **Caleb Pollard** put it in terms of his experience with the pandemic:

  > "I am extremely grateful that we lived here when the last year and a half happened. … I also feel very fortunate that by living here I got to have what I felt was a pretty full 18 months with some difficult months. … I find it barbaric that people can't understand that loss of life, and that something like that would make someone feel Political like it was last year. But, for me I felt like I had a very rich life. I'll be just very different."[35]

  And when Caleb refers to *"feeling Political,"* he is really talking about the loss of community that occurs when *'small p'* political becomes *'big P'* Political and difference becomes an ideological and irreconcilable divide.

Responses in the public sector underlying community success

- ❖ Public + Private
  - ☛ Public tends to view entrepreneurship as exploitative and transactional
  - ☛ Private tends to view government (public agency) as intrusive and restrictive

Generally, the public sector and its actions are seen in distinct contrast to the entrepreneurial sector and its actions. Yet, as we dug into what was happening in Ord we found a key determinant of community success was the role played by the community ethos that had been constructed in past challenges. This was despite the lack of conscious intent to connect the two. But, as **Kristina Foth** points out, it is not an accident.

> "I think when you ask, *'why our community is where it is?'* it's because we have – particularly in some individuals – the willingness to support and mentor and help grow the community even if it's not directly impacting their own business or bottom line. … If you dig deeper into why that is the case, it goes back to culture. One thing for our community specifically, is the collaboration and partnerships. The strength of those connections and maintaining those connections is key because it takes a village to grow a community. … So, those collaborations and partnerships are key. … Part of the work of an economic development director is how we create those interactions during the work that we're doing so that we're just naturally create that next generation of leaders or give them the tools to put in their toolbelts to support them when they embark on their own community journey. … It goes back to creating an ecosystem on a larger basis and not just in the community."[36]

What issues did the pandemic expose to a greater degree:

Housing and day care shortage

- ☛ Dan Petska simply says, "I think day care and housing are two of our biggest issues right now, and I really think I think there's gotta be something that can be done."
- ☛ **Gaylord Boilesen** sees the problem from the vantage point of both an entrepreneur with several local businesses and as a member of the Economic Development Board in Ord.

> "I keep saying, *'we've got to continue to work on housing because to bring people to town, we don't have houses for them. We've got people who want to come to this area, because they like the area. But we've got to get some affordable housing for these people.* ... So, that's one of the areas that we're really struggling and trying to work on at the [Economic Development Board] right now, housing and workforce development."[37]
>
> "You can't build a three-bedroom house and keep the cost under under $160,000. The problem is people can't afford the payments. So, they need to address that. They need to address the requirements for what's low to moderate income. That was our biggest battle. We could get those houses here, but people had to be in such a narrow range. They had to

> be right at the top of pay range, and they couldn't have any other debt or they couldn't get a loan.

And, Gaylord goes on to identify the direct link between a community need and its role in workforce development needed to sustain entrepreneurial activities and community vitality.

> "The other thing is childcare. It's a big issue in Ord. If we want these young couples – both of them are having to work – we've got to figure out how to get more child care. There's some here but there's just not enough. So, there's a pretty active committee working on that right now."

- Mayor **Dan Petska** zeros in on the intimate link between public and private activity and demonstrates the level of insight that directs thinking in Ord.

> "If we can get 25 new people to move to town, that's better than bringing a new company to town."

What was happening in the larger community in terms of public sector responses?

The elementary school

- **Doug Smith** shared several granular solutions and changes they made in the elementary school to address the pandemic challenge. Many involved seemingly small procedural changes or team building interventions, yet produced significant collateral, largely unrecognized community benefits. Examples, included redesigning parental pickup of students after school, reorganizing the way "walkers" and distance bus riders were handled to maximize safety, making sure that either the school counsellor or the principal was in front of the school every morning welcoming each car to the school for student drop off, instituting hallway lanes to maintain social distance needs; significantly reorganizing the lunch period, and more. Each of these changes addressed an immediate concern while having unexpected consequences that reduced problems elsewhere in the community. As Doug says,

> "…we had so many other procedural type changes – they trusted us. They [the students] knew they were safe and felt comfortable even amidst the middle of a pandemic while they were here."

Consider two changes that Doug highlighted for us.

> "This year we set up an outdoor lunch room … while we were doing that we began to understand that we can cycle three lunches through our indoor facility. … We stayed with one cohort eating at a time. … So, those kinds of things will continue because we had to get smarter. So, Covid made us think outside of the box and it wasn't rocket science, but, *'yeah it's always been done that way.'*

> "[A]t Ord dismissal is unique in the fact that we don't like our kids walking across L street, that's the main highway … When the last bus comes by out here, they start walking, and we have teachers that walk them to L street. … We could have been doing that instead of cramming so many kids on buses. We're gonna keep doing that."[38]

Many of these changes were things that Doug admits should have been addressed earlier but went unaddressed remaining background irritations not rising to the level of defined problems yet adding to the constant low-level background stress of institutional life for staff, students and parents. [Doug Smith's description harkens back to the observations Sarah Brinkman made concerning the way the pandemic exposed people to their own dissatisfactions in the health and beauty arenas such that the dissatisfactions rose to the level of necessitating "taking action." In Sarah's case this meant taking better care of themselves. In Doug's case it means taking better care of the people animating his institution. In both instances it means an incremental improvement in the health of the community at large.] The pandemic contextualized these irritations as community problems, i.e., they were elevated to **defined problem status** needing attention and solution. Doug candidly admits his own leadership lapse in this regard.

> "I tell you, it was those two examples here [lunch hour reorganization and separating *"walkers"* from bus riders] that I'm disappointed I wasn't smart enough to do that 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5 years ago."

This attitude of personal accountability has shown up repeatedly in our interviews with community leaders. Further, it is matched by a general disinclination to take personal credit for community success in which they have played a principle role. Instead they repeatedly give credit to others.

We suggested to Doug that collectively these changes go beyond the students themselves, also serving as a slow-drip bromide or stress reliever for the community. Due to their daily and distributed impact on families, they are a constant reminder that the community is nourishing families as a kind of drip irrigation system of shared interest. In fact, the educational system is functioning as a driver for socio-emotional learning throughout the community. It's displacing peoples' focus from ***"me"*** to ***"us"*** (the community), whether they are conscious of it or not. The interventions by the school help remove a deficit that would otherwise be there in the community. When asked about this characterization, Doug responded:

> "You know, I think there's a lot of truth in that. We pray that's the way it works. It's definitely a role that we embrace and love to be a part of. And, I don't think that it's a mistake. I think that it's because we are a reflection of our Community, and I think schools should be a reflection of their communities to some extent. There're still the things that have to happen, but I think… it's hard to put that into words."

In truth it is our observation that the Ord schools are more than just a reflection of the community, they are also fostering the very sense and definition of community.

The school system

- ☛ Ord superintendent, **Heather Nebesniak** provides insight into the links between the professionals who execute their formal roles in the school system and the links to the community at large.

> "Our staff is very, very friendly. Our staff is compassionate. They're kind. They're honest, and they were just as scared as the community members. But by gosh, we're going to love our kids through it."[39]

Speaking about **Doug Smith**, Heather continues,

> "…my building principal at the elementary is wonderful…. Anytime we're faced with a challenging situation involving a family that's coming to us – transient, whatever reason they may have that they have a need – he responds with *'we'll Ord 'em up. They'll be fine.'* And '*you can do that, the Ord way. We'll show them the Ord way.'*

It is important to note here that Heather's praise not isolated to Doug Smith. As she says,

> "…we work as a team and I don't want to overlook the amazing accomplishments of the high school principal, Aaron Snyder. Without my whole team, I am very limited."

Heather is acutely aware of the different resources they have available to them and how the schools and community work together to fill a gap when capacity is lacking.

> "…that is another thing that I think is unique about our Community. … We don't have as many formalized resources as what an urban area does. But our informal resources are amazing. The call goes out, and the help is there."[40]

Heather carries her message of *community* to those holding the purse strings to clarify the link between public and private necessary to a well-functioning entrepreneurial ecosystem.

> "Where else in our community are we tasked with having 700 people every day? 600 students and 100 staff report to our building every day. We need to keep them safe. … [The school system] is one of one of the beating hearts of our Community. … When looking at that economic development – you've probably heard it when there's talk about consolidation – *'if the school goes, the town goes!'*"[41]

The Hospital

- **Nancy Glaubke**, CEO of Valley Heath Care System, describes how she and her team worked as a collective to sort through the confusion surrounding COVID-19 and the recommendations for how to deal with it. Her approach to management and decision-making echoes the basic approach taken throughout Ord in the way it addresses problems and challenges

> "I think that's probably why we did so well. It was because we had so many people that were looking at so many different sources and truly trying to [distinguish] the facts from the fiction and from the emotion. And then, we were small enough that we made decisions together, based on the information that we had, the best information that we thought we had. And, if we needed to reverse that the next day, we did. I think that's probably why we were so successful."[42]

Here is collaboration fueled by a common interest not a personal position. It was public agency exercised by individuals in community aimed at the general welfare of the community and ecosystem. Consider also the care with which Nancy centers her evaluation of individuals in

town who refused to follow the pandemic protocols such as masking. She doesn't make them adversaries. Instead she appeals to the fact that their actions are putting her people at risk.

> We had the whole gamut. We had some that were isolating themselves in their houses and didn't go anywhere … especially if they were in a vulnerable demographic. Then there were some that threw all caution to the wind. … What I tried to tell them was, *'but then you're exposing and putting my employees at risk and jeopardizing their lives and their families.'* That was hard because they didn't think they were being selfish. But they really were being selfish, because if they did get sick, it was going to impact, a lot of coworkers and anybody else that they were exposed to. Yes, that that was frustrating. But you know what, we're human and we get to make our own decisions, whether they're good or bad. So, I have to respect that." … What we tried to do for people who were more free-spirited than the rest was we just tried to educate them as best we could."[43]

Mental health

- **Riley Smith** is a mental health practitioner and she provides insight into the systemic impacts Covid had on institutional agents, this time health providers and how important community support was for them.

> "There are some professions and some professionals that are still in it, and sometimes it's hard for them to see that they need the help too. … [W]e're going to see a lot of those professionals that are going to need help, and I hope they can get it. I mean [people are] just being overwhelmed and exhausted all the time, and people are not getting enough sleep. Yes, they're doing great work and they're doing what they need to do, but at some point, they don't have anything left to give."[44]

The city

- Installing plexiglass screens in front of reception desks is not particularly innovative. Certainly, the pandemic has made this a staple response in offices serving the public. While the Mayor has a private office, the clerical staff in Ord City Hall are positioned inside a separate room with a very large (15'x 5') service counter separating them from the entry way vestibule and a few feet from building entrance. Important in **Mayor Dan Petska's** following reflection is how he sees the collateral benefits of this simple adaptation in the context of his own experience and seizes on them for the long-term.

> "We put the plexiglass window there and it was temporary at first. One day we had a meeting and I told the staff, 'you know what, why don't we make this permanent?' I used to be a Postmaster here and people would come up to the window and cough and hack through flu season. I looked back and wished we would've had **[that separator]** twenty years ago there. That's probably a good thing. Michelle sits up front and says, 'that's so nice; people come in and I don't get that blast of cold air.' It probably saves energy too."

Another example of how the pandemic reinforced thinking in larger terms about the collective is an experience shared by both public employers and private businesses alike. On the one hand the pandemic meant a reduction in hours for many employees. For many it meant loss of jobs

entirely. For managers and owners alike one solution was straightforward, *'let the help go, lay them off, downsize.'* Caleb Pollard described his anguish at having to let his employees go at Scratchtown Brewery Company. On the other hand, these employees are also neighbors, customers, clients, relatives, friends, long-time community members and there are community impacts of 'letting them go.' To the degree the community consequences are recognized, decision-makers are incentivized to find more creative solutions, make hard decisions, and take risks like that described by **Nancy Glaubke**.

> "Our numbers went way down here at the hospital we didn't lay anyone off we kept everyone employed full time and adjusted their schedules. But we were seeing only two or three patients a day at that point and I was getting a little nervous. It was like, '*I don't know how long we can we can support this.*'"

On his part **Dan Petska** describes how they addressed the staffing challenge at the new city pool.

> "I told the city clerk, this is what we're going to do. We're going to pretend it's going to be open. We're going to train our life guards. We're going to find something for them to do even if we can't open the pool. Those kids, they need to get out there … We even had some of them work in the park outside."[45]

And as Dan points out, this fungible approach to staffing didn't stop with the pool and applies to situations other than the pandemic.

> Actually, we do that in the city with our departments. We do that quite a bit now. The golf course was overwhelmed, and we sent some of our other people there. … You just do what you gotta do."

There are risks in putting community interests up front since Nancy was squeezing her budget and Dan was bending the official allocations of personnel. But in terms of the community well-being, their administrative creativity, human sensitivity, and willingness to put themselves professionally at risk, their actions were well placed. They clearly put their thinking and action on the community side of the scale. For his part Caleb had no real alternative and absorbed the personal emotional cost of having to let his people go even thought they all did well in the aftermath.

- Recall how **JJ** spoke about Mayor Petska and how his involvement went well beyond the official role and how *"I don't know where he finds time to do most of what he does."* JJ concluded by expanding his endorsement to the community at large with this bluntly worded assessment.

> "And that's the great thing about a lot of people here. We have people that are ready to step up and help find solutions instead of just pissing and moaning."

- **Jeana Hackel** takes very basic approach to answering how the public supported the private interests.

> "I really appreciated the City Council opening the pool. … I appreciated those types of things to let the summer go on as normal as possible … [T]he Superintendent had the kids all wear masks. The schools never shut down one day. They allowed kids to be in school because

> they saw that kids not being in school was not a good thing. They did what they needed to in order keep it moving without shutting down. I really appreciated their common sense."[46]

Persisting fallout from the pandemic

The impacts in the public sectors of education and health care reverberate in multiple ways through the community affecting individuals and businesses alike. Especially significant are the high personal costs for practitioners in these areas and how they can be amplified by impacts in the private sector.

- **Nancy Glaubke**, CEO of Ord Hospital describes such fallout.

> "The fallout from all of this is that, even though we weathered that storm and even though the pandemic is still very real – the numbers have decreased significantly here in our community and we're really glad – but the burnout and the anxiety is still there. I've seen some people that have had a serious reaction to a circumstance that … was the buildup of everything that had happened over the last 12 to 18 months. This was just like the final straw. It's like they just can't take it anymore. … [I]t's been quite a roller coaster. I think we've weathered the storm overall pretty good, but we're still watching our employees and their mental fitness, their mental health, and trying to be aware of subtle changes that we might see. To offer our EP program or offer additional time off if they need it. Just to be aware of that *'you might just need to take a step back'* from time and come back healthier and happier."[47]

Just as Riley Smith pointed out for mental health workers, the impacts for health care workers generally and people in education have been continuous and cumulative such that their own mental health is jeopardized. These are costs and the consequences that they engender often go overlooked in the face of the more directly visible signs of the pandemic. More to our main point here is that the repercussions for the ecosystem and community become reduced to concerns about job turnover, labor supply and problem employees. Such misattribution of causality does not serve the general welfare. What Ord shows is that an abundance community avoids such misattribution and by focusing on the well-being of individuals and thereby the entire ecosystem.

Summing Up

Ord is a place where the balancing of individual and community interests has knitted the private and public sectors together into a single abundance community. In both sectors we see individuals acting for the general welfare of others and the community. We see them taking action that enhances the entrepreneurial ecosystem that subsumes both sectors without having to claim credit and without concern that others beyond the intended target of their action will benefit. Rather they understand that when actions have broader positive outcomes their own interests are served, whether in the private or public sector because they are all part of the same ecosystem living in community. It is a generosity of concern. It is a sober intention to make things better for their charges as whole human beings. It is a fixed focus on their highest intentions. It is an integrity of purpose aimed at making the community whole. It is the heart and soul of an abundance community. As **Bob Stowell** says often, *'we all do better when we all do better.'* And this is not just an aphorism. It is a life lesson learned by the selfless actions

of others taught to him half a century ago in a very different environment half a world away. For him this truth is eternal. It is a beacon for action. It is his highest intention.

Larger Frameworks for Understanding Ord and Communities Like Ord: Periurban Places and Sustainable Livelihoods Approach

- In the larger sphere of international research on development there are two important analytical frameworks that can provide further insight into places like Ord, i.e., places with small populations that exhibit both rural and urban characteristics:
  - Rural to Village Periurban to *Nanotropolis*
  - Sustainable Livelihoods Assets or Capital Classes

What kind of Place is Ord: rural, urban, periurban?

While *urban* and *rural* are seemingly well accepted terms for most people they are in fact both ambiguous and insufficient for understanding a place like Ord for reasons we will discuss. One possibility for Ord is to think about it as *periurban*, a term long used in international scientific and applied literature to reference places that share both urban and rural characteristics. For reasons we will also discuss it too is insufficient for our purposes. We have chosen to use a new term, *nanopolitan* or *nanotropolis,* to describe our phenomenon of interest, Ord/Valley County.

The Census

The American classification of built-up places like Ord is not particularly useful for understanding how and why they work. Such classifications fail on several fronts. First, Ord itself is a small built-environment with just over 2000 residents. As such, it does not meet the requirements for even the most minimal Census classification of *micropolitan* (a minimum population of 10,000). It is incorporated but this gives no indication of its integration and reach over a much larger geographic region. Geographers have long used the concept of *central place* in the theoretical tradition by the same name to underscore the relationship between built up places and their surrounding rural region, one that has generally been assumed to be largely predatory. However, operationalizing the concept has been left to the Census Bureau wherein population size (e.g., 2,500, 10,000 or 50,000 residents), population density, and geographic boundary (e.g., county lines) are the chief determinants for assuming the dominance or integration of a built-up place with its surrounding region.

Much closer to our needs here are census definitions such as urbanized areas (UAs) or urban clusters (UCs). Yet as their definitions below demonstrate, they too fall short of our needs.

> "The Census Bureau's urban-rural classification is fundamentally a delineation of geographical areas, identifying both individual urban areas and the rural areas of the nation. The Census Bureau's urban areas represent densely developed territory, and encompass residential, commercial, and other non-residential urban land uses.
>
> For the 2010 Census, an urban area will comprise a densely settled core of census tracts and/or census blocks that meet minimum population density requirements, along with adjacent territory

> containing non-residential urban land uses as well as territory with low population density included to link outlying densely settled territory with the densely settled core. To qualify as an urban area, the territory identified according to criteria must encompass at least 2,500 people, at least 1,500 of which reside outside institutional group quarters. The Census Bureau identifies two types of urban areas:
>
> - Urbanized Areas (UAs) of 50,000 or more people;
> - Urban Clusters (UCs) of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people.
>
> *'Rural'* encompasses all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area." (https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/urban-rural/2010-urban-rural.html)

Thus, rural is a residual category based on whatever is not defined as urban. Further, it varies by country and within countries over time. (E.g., see the proposed changes for the 2020 U.S. Census at https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/02/19/2021-03412/urban-areas-for-the-2020-census-proposed-criteria.) Always looking to improve its classification system the U.S. census Bureau again proposing the reclassification of all built up places greater than 2,500 as Urban Areas. Under the proposed 2020 criteria for urban areas they will,

> "Cease Distinguishing Different Types of Urban Areas. Any area that meets the new requirements would fall under a single definition of "urban area". Census-defined urban areas are currently either considered "urban places" with populations between 2,500 and 50,000 or "urbanized areas" with populations greater than 50,000."(https://centralina.org/the-latest/census-bureau-proposed-criteria-for-urban-areas(https://centralina.org/the-latest/census-bureau-proposed-criteria-for-urban-areas/)

While useful classifications of place for many purposes, especially aggregate planning and policy making, they are woefully inadequate to capturing the realities of small places such as Ord that don't meet the official classification thresholds. This isn't just a problem of naming*, per se*. First, these classifications disguise the dynamic nature of life in places like Ord. Second, as we have argued elsewhere, naming a phenomenon both denotes the parameters of the phenomenon and connotes valuative assessments that invoke stereotypes and previous subjective characterizations about the place. This is an axiomatic principle of labelling theory for which much evidence exists (e.g., see "Neighboring, Abundance Mindset, Intentionality and Reconciliation in Ord/Valley County").

Thus, labeling Ord *rural* has both potentially negative public relations consequences in terms of development and perceived vitality and simultaneously potentially undermines local attitudes about their own possibilities or effective individual and community agency. The label prefigures thought and can thereby circumscribe motivation and action. On one hand *rural* invokes bucolic images, friendly neighbors, and a slower pace of life, but on the other hand *rural* invokes a backward, closed-minded consciousness, lack of amenities and services and a stagnant even stifling culture. While the positive image might appeal as a lifestyle choice for some, the negative image is an impediment to attracting growth from an entrepreneurship perspective. Importantly, Ord has capitalized on its self-image by emphasizing the former and eschewing the latter. This has not come easily. It has taken patience, commitment and agency over an extended period. It has required face-to-face communication and allocation of resources by several individuals. The point here is that Ord sees itself as embracing the

positive connotations of *rural* in terms of lifestyle but the dynamic connotations of *urban*. Thus, Ord falls into the realm of *periurban*, but there are still problems.

Periurban

As stated above, periurban identifies places that share both urban and rural characteristics, and is a concept widely used in international development literature. Unfortunately, as we have written elsewhere (see Iaquinta and Drescher, 1999) periurban is also an ambiguous term that does an inadequate job of defining rural-like built-up regional trade centers.

- First, it is a double residual category based ultimately on whatever urban definition is used (i.e., *rural* is whatever is NOT defined as urban and periurban is whatever is NOT either exclusively urban or rural.)
- Second, periurban is often assumed to be a kind of place only at the fringe of a large urban area which has been shown to be far too limited a definition.
- Third, periurban is not a singular "thing" it is rather something akin to a lumpy continuum where different types of periurban exist in a rural geographic matrix. (Mathematicians would call it a locally dense continuum, but we prefer the metaphor *lumpy oatmeal*).
- Finally, even when the periurban space is divided typologically into five types of periurban that do a good job of describing the characteristics of divergent periurban places in developing countries, it doesn't fit well when applied to places like contemporary Ord.

Nanopolitan

Using the periurban typology developed by Iaquinta and Drescher (1999) at the United Nations, we would classify the Ord of 30 years ago as a *village periurban* place. However, today Ord has transformed its culture and identity such that while still small in population, it is something rather different, much more dynamic, open to change, solution-directed, cohesive and open to meeting needs by embracing diversification. It has defined its highest interests beyond the scope of its geographic boundary in mutually beneficial ways. We embrace the terms ***nanopolitan*** and ***nanotropolis*** to capture this emergent form. Ord serves as an important hub in several ways for a considerably larger region expanding even beyond Valley County (e.g., consider the role of the Valley County Health Care System which extends beyond both Ord and Valley County) even though it's population is well below the threshold for micropolitan or urban area status according to the U.S. Census Bureau. We also favor the term *nanopolitan* due to the impact of electronic communication and improved transportation that have significantly reduced the downside of geographic distance in terms of commerce and labor supply while increasing the upside of lifestyle choice due to geographic distance from large urban centers and proximity to environmental amenities. Further as a concept, *nanopolitan* is far more consistent with central tenet of both core-based census designations and older central place theory: the city and the outlying region are intertwined economically, socially and culturally. The city of Ord is an important regional trade center for the Valley County region not just the city. This characteristic and linkage are not just an accident or a predatory relationship. In Ord as it was in Tupelo, it has been the result of intentional and strategic cooperative action.

One additional point needs highlighting regarding the term *nanopolitan*. The term first entered the "soft" literature in 2014 in a conference working paper by Liesl Eathington at the Iowa State University, wherein she classified:

- *nanopolitan* as a Core-based area containing a city of 5,000 to 9,999 residents,
- *picopolitan* as areas containing a city of 2,500 to 4,999 residents, and
- *non-core* as areas below 2,500, or as she said "even smaller areas" (presumably some variation of rural).

While the introduction of *nanopolitan* as a concept is important, it is unfortunate that Eathington's thresholds perpetuate the problem of under-acknowledging the important role of regional trade centers like Ord. More recently, *nanopolitan* has entered the blogosphere. The only one germane to our needs is the editorial think piece by Becky McCray (May 2021), publisher of *Small Biz Survival.* Here she suggests thresholds of 1,000 to 10,000 for *nanopolitan* and less than 1,000 for *picopolitan*.

We find McCray's suggested lower threshold to be a far better basis for designating *nanopolitan* areas since it supports our own observations for the economic vitality we witness in Ord. Clearly, there is a need for the concept *nanopolitan* even though the population threshold for such a designation remains an open question. Equally clear is the recognition that small places like Ord are far more than *non-core* and that being *nanopolitan* has much more to do with the vitality of the regional trade center than simple population level. What Ord teaches us is that definitions applied from the 30,000-foot level by the Census Bureau and geographers may be useful for large scale planning, but they often obscure the reality experienced on the ground by residents of small places who define their circumstances in quite different and human terms yet have significant economic consequences for them. There is a strong social-psychological aspect of community self-definition involved in the opportunities presented by such a definition. As W.I. Thomas has said, *"If men* (sic) *define situations as real, they are real in their consequences"* (Thomas and Thomas, 1928). Therefore, we subscribe the lower threshold of 1,000 residents as one component basis for defining *nanopolitan* when it is accompanied by significant economic, social and cultural links to the surrounding low-density region.

Thus, the focus of this current work rests on identifying three phenomena of interest:

1. Ord (the built-up incorporated place),
2. Valley County (a legally delineated space within Nebraska), and
3. The larger multi-county region area within which Ord is a significant influencer.

When speaking about this entire region of influence, we will use either the ***Ord Nanopolitan Area*** or ***Ord Nanotropolis***.

Summing Up

The importance of this naming of place – beyond the esoteric considerations of professional geographers and demographers – is that it helps us understand the institutional consequences involved. For example, village periurban places are strongly controlled by community elders who are tradition-oriented and generally resistant to change. Herein, we would find strong divides between *"old-timers"* and *"new-comers"*, slow if any adaptation to changing conditions and needs, and outmigration of the

young and vital segments of the population often due to lack of services and amenities (all of which are well-documented in the research literature across the world). Clearly, this is a description that fits many of the small rural places beset by population loss, shrinking personal income and an aging population. These are exactly the trends or circumstances that Ord has bucked over the past 30 years as it has held on to its population, increased its personal income profile, attracted young residents and families and aggressively pursued the development of a vital entrepreneurial ecosystem. This has happened because of a shift in the community that has continuously become more embracive of change, looking outside itself for novel solutions and assistance. More importantly they have continuously increased their collective motivation to do the hard work of integrating new ideas and ways of being to create a stronger, more vibrant, and cooperative ecosystem integrating principled entrepreneurship with community well-being and sustainability.

As was well identified in the experience of Tupelo, success depended on breaking down the rigid mindset separating *urban* and *rural* in northeastern Mississippi. The same has been true in Ord. Just as in Tupelo, civic leaders recognized that their *urban* success required buy-in from their country cousins which in turn required genuine reciprocity of benefits. This has been a hallmark in both communities and ultimately produced marked gains for all. In Ord it rested on both the process of and the achievement of passage of the county-wide 1% sales tax that has fueled the low interest loan program. A program that has capitalized what previously would have been thought of as an impossible degree of entrepreneurial activity and community development. It is the lynchpin of both their integrated entrepreneurial ecosystem and their commitment to the well-being of an expanded community in terms of shared interests. Thus, Ord is not just a built place that shares both urban and rural characteristics potentially exploiting a hinterland, although this trope is the conventional assertion for such places. It is that *nanopolitan* Ord has recast its identity as an expansive region with obligations to embrace all segments in the geographic ecosystem as both participants and beneficiaries of entrepreneurship, development and well-being. We think the new terms *nanopolitan and nanotropolis* best help us to shed the tropes, stereotypes and baggage of previous thinking and approach understanding Ord and places like Ord with eyes more attuned to the reality as it is and as they self-define.

What role do individual actions play in Ord and what role does the community play as a context for individual actions.

In order to apply the second framework, Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA), we have to clarify the role of individuals and the concept of *agency* that we use throughout our work. In the simplest of terms, it is the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices. This intuitive definition mirrors most people's sense of individual *free will* and is politically enfranchised in America by the Bill of Rights. Consequently, the intuitive definition is mostly internalized as a unidirectional, exploitative political directive to "do what you want" based only on immediate personal considerations and interests. But people act and make choices in the context of structures which serve as factors of influence (such as social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, ability, customs, family, peers, community, etc.) These structures or influencers determine or limit an agent and their decisions. In a consumer culture driven by advertising centered on creating needs rather than fulfilling them, free will encourages deficit spending of personal resources and human capital. It relegates social capital to a need obtained through product purchasing rather than acts of reciprocal sharing, obligation and benefit

among people. Thus, *agency* defined exclusively in the *free will* sense is insufficient for our purposes since we mean something considerably more than simple *free will*.

We understand *agency* as *relational agency*, as individual free will operating within an understanding of the individual's relationship to community. Our conceptualization has been addressed by the sociologist Anthony Giddens who resolves the structure-agency dialectic through the role of ***reflexivity*** or the ability of the individual to see themselves within the context of their life in such a way that they are both recipient of the broader social structure and a determining element in constructing those structures. In other words, the ontology works equally in both directions. For this reason. we use the term in the sense of *relational agency*, requiring an intimate reciprocal interaction with the surrounding ecosystem and community and implying action in accord with one's highest and long-term intensions/interests. Thus, *reflexivity* is the mediating mindset that links the individual to the community wherein community interest is seen as an essential component of self-interest and the entrepreneurial ecosystem is an essential component of individual entrepreneurism. It is inherently relational. It is inherently expansive in scale in terms of time and collectivity. For Ord *"punching above their weight class"* is not just an outcome, it is a mindset internalized increasingly across the population of agents that comprise the community. We provide many examples of *agency* in the following discussion of SLA and capital classes.

Applying the sustainable livelihood approach (SLA) to the Ord experience.

SLA is a method of analyzing and changing the lives of disadvantaged people. It is a **participatory approach** based on the recognition that all people and communities have abilities and assets that can be **developed** to help them improve their lives. This approach identifies various **livelihood assets** as the resource base of different households and by extension the community. These can be classified into various categories of capital. The various capitals help us identify important linkages for known capacities, but they also provide a framework for investigating potential unknown capacities. (Note that some of the examples for each asset class or ***Capital*** below are more appropriate to individuals and some to communities. Additionally, there are additional capitals in the literature, most notably built capital.)

a. ***Economic Capital:*** This is the easiest to understand. It includes wealth, income, real assets, revenue streams, business profile, tax base, etc.

b. ***Physical Capital:*** This refers to the built environment including such things as buildings, utilities infrastructure, diversity of enterprises, population, etc.

c. ***Natural Capital:*** This refers to the environmental amenities other than the built such as rivers, lakes, soil productivity, recreational resources, parks, wilderness, site value, etc.

d. ***Human***: This includes things such as:

- *Knowledge* –education, technical skills & training, problem-solving capability, and the like.
- *Emotional* – communication skills, people management ability, mental and emotional well-being, capacity to adapt, etc.
- *Physical* – health, nutrition, ability to work

e. ***Social Capital:*** Resources that can lead to the development and accumulation of human capital. At the community level, social capital can be defined as any feature of a social relationship that enhances sustainability. Fundamental to this is trust

- ***Bonding or Cultural Social Capital*** – Horizontal social capital among equals based on *thick trust* and tending to be more *closed* and *cognitive* (shared norms, values, attitudes and beliefs) in basis (see Aldredge, Halpern, et al, 2002). This tends to be among people with low geographic or social distance, high shared identity.

  For example, in rural Nebraska we might cite rugged individualism; strong work ethic; bedrock sense of fairness. In general, it includes those things creating an identity that instills pride of membership in the community hence uniting residents as a singularity at some personally relevant level.

- ***Bridging Social Capital*** – Vertical social capital, across communities, tending to be more open and structural (roles, networks, rules, procedures and precedents).

  This tends to be between people with greater social distance and particularly between physically distinct communities and more removed organizations.

  Examples include such things as public-private partnerships, multi-jurisdiction service providers, intergovernmental panels and boards, trans-professional organizations, intercommunity networks and entities, intra-community civic organizations, etc. Consider also nested government linkages between community, state, region and national levels like those embodying in various Covid-19 assistance programs.

f. ***Spiritual Capital:***

- Spiritual capital is the dialectic between the individual and the community. Humans are a gregarious species and the unique human self is only formed in the context of others. Yet, the human individual is wired for survival and the rewards of society so ordered that self-interest (or species survival interest) is potentially pitted against community interest and connection. Spiritual capital is the wealth embodied in balancing these potentially competing directives/needs. The wealth is contained in the ability to manage the tension to enable the other forms of capital to manifest. The wealth is in any ideological or motivating structure which animates this balancing act or dialectic in the individual and the community at the aggregate level.

  Spiritual capital is also the enlightenment from which springs hope and belief in the fundamental worth of life and shared experience. It is the ability to balance a narrow, short-term and self-centered focus with a broad, long-term, and other-directed focus. It seems to us that the significance of all forms of capital – indeed, of human experience itself – rests on the ultimate capacity to hope and to trust in both the importance of the individual and the benefits of collective endeavor. In the absence of such capital, what will sate the appetite of the individual or the community? With spiritual capital in place, the value of the process itself is meaningful even if the outcomes are not guaranteed. The process is the platform for future success, whatever the outcome of the present exercise.

As we have written elsewhere the capital assets approach is not a magic formula for creating a successful community. Instead, it is a practical and analytical framework for allowing a community to find entry points into a ***community-wide discussion*** aimed at sustainable development. Stakeholders in the community emphasize different values and capital strengths. These differences have to be ***bridged***. Often, civic groups are the cross-cutting community organizations and can ***identify underlying interests*** and counter rigid positions. Principled negotiation, like that advocated by Fisher and Ury in *Getting to Yes* (1981), is useful because it focuses on finding shared interests as opposed to being locked into rigid positions. It also means being willing to surrender sacred cows, stereotypes and all the cherished mythologies undergirding social advantage and disadvantage to benefit everyone. It means listening to one another and respecting the legitimacy of everyone's interests.

Community action requires harnessing entrepreneurial spirit. What is needed is a balance between the motivating power of self-interest and the sustainability of collective benefit. Sustainability rests on characteristics such as diversity, flexibility, redundancy and feedback. Communities are more successful when the various capitals are in a dynamic equilibrium with enough interdependency that they continue to have influence – even if not always equal. In the end, the interest of the individual is linked to the interest of the community, which is linked to the interest of the larger urban and regional hierarchy.

The assessment process can't be left solely to experts, outsiders and elites (i.e., elected politicians, the wealthy and politically influential). It **requires broad community participation**, with all stakeholders, including relevant experts and elites and ultimately incorporating appropriate state, regional and national policy support – either existing or sought. Participation is a measure of existing social capital and a mechanism for building it. Participation is one of the central components of capital – assets that each community uses to enhance its vitality and sustainability (Iaquinta 2009).

Ord has managed to harness its spiritual capital to create an ever-expanding circle of binding social capital in the community and bridging social capital with groups both within and beyond the community such as Nebraska Community Foundation and other communities. This has enhanced the development and deployment of human capital in the community, attracted vital young entrepreneurs, served to reverse the arc of the community from one of decline and fatalism to one of solutions-driven optimism, and success. As the examples below illustrate, both individuals and the community at large used various assets to address needs, goals and crisis.

Human capital

- ☛ When the pandemic hit, **Melanie Bowden**, owner/operator of Jubilee Catering, was able to pivot and rely on her preexisting human capital having been trained as a nurse.

  > " I very much had the luxury of hunkering down and going a different direction. I never quit business, but no one was gathering. It was a non-issue. … The way I dealt with that was I'm a registered nurse as well, so I went back to work in an occupation that I was fairly familiar with."[48]

- Mental health professional **Riley Smith** provides another perspective on the way underlying belief structures can serve as a basis of human capital, but also be destructive to individual well-being when not balanced against a pragmatic understanding of personal limitations in the face of something like the pandemic with its rapidly progressing impact. When asked about Midwesterners sense of rugged individualism and John-Wayne-like self-characterization of stoic determination in the face of adversity, Riley observes,

  > "…it depends, to be honest. Because … that can add resiliency and strength. Sometimes it doesn't. Just like with everything there's a scale to it all; and if you can balance that scale, you'll be okay. If you can't, you won't."

  Riley goes on to agree that these beliefs were a part of the third wave of clients that emerged later in the pandemic. These were the folks that were initially determined to handle circumstances themselves, but who eventually felt overwhelmed enough to seek mental health assistance. But she has more to add to the story.

  > "I would also add that. The sense of, *'we can do it.'* … I think that it had an effect early and then like you said we're seeing a different [impact in] the second and third wave where it's like, *'okay, now we're in. We're halfway through the year and my kids are… we're just trying to keep them in school.'* We were very lucky here."[49]

  This is a sobering assessment of the interaction between inherent human capital rooted in internalized cultural values and the binding social capital of family which can either be concordant or discordant with the larger institutional culture in the form of the schools.

  Riley adds one more personal touch to the role human capital played in her own COVID-19 experience when she describes the way she sustained herself by making use of her human capital (i.e., professional knowledge) to both draw on and bolster binding social capital with professional colleagues and her family.

  > "[H]onestly, we continued our own therapy work and … some of those things to reduce trauma. So, not only did I do my own therapy work, we also have a supervisor that I can meet with if something is extra difficult. We have a staff of peers, that we can bounce ideas off of."[50]

- Recall the elementary school solutions detailed by **Doug Smith** in a previous section. They made changes in lunch room scheduling and organization, school drop-offs and pick-ups, how busing was reorganized to separate riders and walkers, changes in foot traffic flows in school corridors, and more. Their inventive solutions to problems arose from the ingenuity (human capital) and collaboration (social capital) of various participants including the school counselor, teachers, and Doug himself. Things that had been irritations were now dealt with as problems due to the pandemic and the participants combining their human and social capital to address them one by one.

Economic capital

Both Gaylord Boilesen and Sarah Brinkman were able to use their diversified income streams as fungible economic capital in order to weather the worst of the pandemic. In Sarah's case she reinforced her economic capital with her binding social capital.

- **Gaylord Boilesen** has a variety of business ventures including several NAPA stores, a pellet cubing plant, a trucking company associated with the ethanol plant, and the Cobblestone Hotel and Event Center. All of these enterprises were affected by the pandemic shutdown and aftermath, but in quite different ways.

> Our businesses came through in good shape. We're actually struggling more now, just getting inventory. NAPA's really struggling with inventory right now. Our trucking and our cubing business … had the biggest year ever because the weather was dry down south. So, we shipped a lot of product into Texas and Oklahoma which kept our trucks busy. The biggest problem there was the labor. Finding people was just terrible. … Of course, we used the first round of the PPP Program from the federal government and the state in our NAPA stores. We were able to not lay anybody off.

- **Sarah Brinkman:** Sarah's story also embodies the role of diversified income streams as sources of capital that she could rely on to balance the positive and negative economic impacts of the pandemic.

> Personally, had I not had my horses and ranch on the side it would have been difficult. My great grandpa started our ranch in the forties. We've been around for a long time. He was always big on, *'you gotta always have both horses and cattle. … You need to have that diversification.'* And, I'm the same way. … I felt like the ranch deal went well during the pandemic. [W]hen you're a business owner … and you have those multiple streams."[51]

Importantly, Sarah is also telling us that economic capital is often intertwined with binding social capital and spiritual capital. In this case her family heritage. And these connections contextualize decision-making about how to allocate time and juggle revenue streams. For Sarah the family ranch is tied to heritage both symbolically and as an expression of trust shared with family and community that she feels obligated to fulfill.

> "For me, I have a big family ranch. That's going to be my whole life. … In our area there are a lot of businesses that rely on our traffic. I feel like I have a moral duty to continue that. Here [at Utopia] I can still come in, see my patients, and maybe take on more patients if I don't own the property. You have to weigh those things with your long-term goals and see where it all fits in."

Yet, that same diversification strategy has posed a new challenge for her.

> "Now actually a whole new situation has arisen from this because I have actually listed this building for potential investment because I am too busy to allocate time to that [Utopia] and the ranch. What's happening now is time is my most limiting factor. … That could definitely be outsourced. I've had to make personal adjustments based on my available time and where I want to put my time. I had to choose to let a few things go. … I've decided skin and

> yoga are my specialties. I've let a few other licenses go because I don't have the time to even accommodate those patients."[52]

Sarah echoes Caleb Pollard's point that federal support dollars (economic capital deriving from bridging social capital) she received helped her improve the business in ways that were needed but would not have happened as expeditiously without that support.

> "I used that money to fix the front of the building because we had a bad storm and it was old and just out of shape. I had intentions honestly doing that that spring and then we got shut down so just financially I couldn't put that money into it because we were shut down. So, it was nice to qualify for that."

Many of the businesses in town benefitted from the sales tax loan waiver during the shutdown. Others like CinTrese and Jubilee Catering were offered waivers by local banks. **Gaylord** explains, *"the sales tax loans that we had out we waved the interest on those for 90 days or 6 months.* I'd have to check whether it was 90 days or 6 months that we waved their payments for them."

Perhaps the most provocative manifestation of economic capital we found was that described by Caleb Pollard when describing the *Pay it Forward* campaign that arose in Ord to support Scratchtown. Described in his focus story in an earlier section, we note here that as an autonomously and anonymously generated *program* it was self-perpetuating, highly successful and lifesaving for both Caleb and Scratchtown. It was a clear form of unexpected economic capital that arose from existing binding social capital (and socio-emotional human capital).

Social capital

As indicated Social capital can be broken down into both binding and bridging. We need to make two points about the components of this category of capital and the category itself. First, regarding the components, the division is ambiguous since it depends upon how we define the group of interest. Consider the example of a business wherein there are a variety of large departments, say finance, marketing, production, etc. If we consider the business as a whole the group of interest, then binding social capital refers to creating a kind of unity of identity across all employees and bridging social capital might refer to building network connections of support with other enterprises in the same sector. On the other hand, if we are considering a unit within the company (e.g., production) as the group of interest, then binding social capital refers to connections linking members of that department and members of other departments and bridging social capital would focus on the network of mutual support and reciprocal obligation. In the case of a geographic place the issue might seem straightforward since a place like Ord has a legal definition. However, as we have explained Ord can be defined legally or it can be seen in the context of its *nanopolitan* definition wherein the entity of concern is the larger interacting region. Additionally, as we will demonstrate with the narratives in this section, it can also refer to the social capital that binds the public and private sectors within Ord. There is no simple solution to the ambiguity. We simply must recognize that the boundary between binding and bridging social capital is a fluid one depending on our definition of the focus group.

- **Sarah Brinkman** helps us see this issue as she describes the role of a mentor in her personal journey and how let led to her career focus.

> "I had a really great teacher. She was sort of a physical therapist-yogi. That was her style and with my spinal injury that's how I got into yoga. I gravitated toward that side, the rehabilitation side. She told me, *'Everyone in this room is in here for a different reason. So, you don't want to project your reason for being here.'"*[53]

Her teacher was an impactful part of her social network that has not only persisted into her present personal philosophy but impacted the way she approaches her own teaching. This mentoring relationship is now part of her human capital and yet born of her social capital and it helps her bridge the gap between practitioner and client.

Our second point concerns the connection of social capital to the entrepreneurial ecosystem. While human capital and economic capital are fundamental to the business ecosystem, it is social capital that transforms our understanding of the business ecosystem into the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Fundamental here is the shift from a focus primarily on competition to one that balances that with a focus on cooperation. We can think of it analogous to the concept of sportsmanship as opposed to simply *"winning the game"* (i.e., the competition). A last consideration to keep in mind is that spiritual capital is an animating motivation for developing social capital as well as part of differentiating the entrepreneurial ecosystem from the more narrowly and conventionally defined business ecosystem.

- **Jeana Hackel** provides a window on social capital involving the engagement with the Valley County Community Foundation and how it affects outcomes on far more than just the economic level, engaging the fuller dimensions of entrepreneurship as both a binding and bridging source.

> "I'm a member of the VCCF and they're like a pulse on the community. When [the pandemic] happened, they sought to encourage nurses and people that are care givers. They created thank you baskets. They did things to say, *'hey, we see you. We see what you're doing and the hours you're working, and we appreciate you beyond what words can say.'* … I noticed that was huge."[54]

This is an important piece of social capital since community foundations are widespread across many communities. More importantly, they not only provide meaningful backstopping for the local community, they are linked to larger umbrella groups such as the Nebraska Community Foundation that can bridge resources, informational and financial, across much broader regions. It is in fact NCF that played a central role at the start of Ord's contemporary journey and continues to serve as a resource collaborator today. It is important to reiterate that the local foundation does much more than simply provide dollars by serving as Jeana puts it as 'a kind of *"pulse on the community."*

Binding Social capital

- **Caleb Pollard's** story told earlier is riddled with examples of binding social capital and how important it is to his continued success both as a business and personally. His family, his partners, his patrons and the larger community are the layers of social capital that wrap him in interwoven networks of support and obligation. Furthermore, he is conscious of how such connections are forged as he makes clear when he draws a parallel between what happened for him in Ord during the pandemic and Sebastian Younger's description of WWII London.

"[Both situations] … created a stronger sense of community and togetherness, because people were going through a shared experience and shared hardship. … It really created a sense of camaraderie that we were one. … Then, as we started moving into the new reality, I think a lot of people jumped off that ship and they were in it for themselves. That did not happen here."[55]

- **Melanie Bowden**, proprietor of Jubilee Catering, provides a window on the countervailing strain and support for interpersonal relationships in the community during the pandemic.

"From a community standpoint I observed some relationships that were concerning. People who had been very close now had something that was causing some conflict between them, interpersonally. That was sad. But then people were also very creative in how they were keeping connected with one another. What I observed was the best and the worst. People were in my opinion very unnecessarily separated, but then others - and sometimes some of the same people – were also very creatively choosing to be connected as well. So, it was kind of surreal, the whole thing."

- The Gift certificate program was an initiative of the Ord Chamber that served to bind the community in support local businesses during the start up after the 90-day shut down.

  - **Gaylord Boilesen** describes both how the gift certificate program worked and its impact on shopping in Ord and the furtherance of social bonding in the community.

"We took some 840 money and basically allowed them to sell some gift certificates. And we matched those gift certificates to the tune of 50 cents for every dollar they put out. What people bought gave the store another 50 cents. And that kind of helped the … nonessential uptown businesses. … We were looking for the smaller businesses that didn't do too well. … So, people did come out and buy a lot of gift certificates. And that helped people become more conscious about shopping in Ord."[56]

  - And as noted earlier **Trese Lange** of CinTrese succinctly said, *"it did help."*

  - However, as noted by **Caleb Pollard** this initiative wasn't a one size fits all intervention, particularly in his case due to the specific limitations imposed by the shelf life of his product and the glut of inventory on hand with the collapse of distribution sales.

"It's not that we didn't see that the program was effective. It's that we had experience on what that lag [between sale of gift certificates and their redemption for merchandise] would look like after you got through your rush of cash sales. We also had to deal with the glut of beer that we had to move because it had a shelf life."

- **Sarah Brinkman** speaks to the role of mentoring and financial backing from the community in her experience starting Utopia Health Spa and then weathering the pandemic.

"I was pretty fortunate. My bankers, my accountant they are pretty experienced and have been great throughout all of it*, 'whatever you need. You just let us know if you need a bigger operating note to get you through. We know you've got a good business model.*

> *You've got the financial capability of making this money.'* So, they were never, *'Oh sorry, you're going to have to shut down because you can't make the mortgage for two months.'"*

- **Doug Smith**, Principle - Ord Elementary School, described their solution to the challenges posed when parents pickup their kids after school. The pandemic with its safety protocols magnified the problems inherent to this chaotic period for everyone. While the solution seems simple, it had a much broader community impact. Doug describes the process.

  > "We painted numbers outside one through ten. [Staff have] every vehicle memorized … and, they stand down there on the far corner with their walkie talkies and [assign each arriving family to a number]. The kids can hear the teachers' walkie talkies and they're outside on family stars. So, there's a family group waiting, and then they just go to that number. And we are done with dismissal ten minutes faster every day, even on the coldest, windiest, rainiest days than we ever were last year.
  >
  > Doug goes on to report the impact was huge because now they're standing outside on family stars…. So, their families had to be together and we could see them. Instead of them standing in a group talking to their same-age friends when their mom pulls up and has to get her kids at two or three different times because [the kids are thinking], *'I'm in the middle of a good story and can't leave my peers.'* I tell you… I'm disappointed I wasn't smart enough to do that 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5 years ago."

  This example shows an enlightened response to Covid challenges, but more importantly it demonstrates how the embedded community-oriented thinking reverberates through the broader community reinforcing overall binding social capital. Doug saw his *"solution"* from the perspective of the school, but if we shift the perspective to that of the parents and families we see a different facet of the impact. Siblings coming together in the confines of the family car often involve stressful interactions borne out of a combination of existing sibling dynamics, contextualizing events from the children's day, and the irritations of having to wait for one another. Often it is simply a battle for seating position. This means a daily dose of low-level stress for the parent as well. What the new pick-up plan does is create a waystation where the students are uncoupled from their peer groups and reannealed to their sibling groups before they get in the car, thus reducing or removing some of the sources of stress. The stars emphasize realignment to existing sibling dynamics and the family cohesion before physical confinement and potential conflict over scarce resources (seats, parental attention, etc.) Clearly, the school didn't consciously intend on this outcome, but nonetheless it has a real community impact in the form of reducing aggregate low-level stress and in enhancing a sense of partnership between parents and the school system as community (binding social capital). This recurring micro intervention at the interaction level combines with the structural commitment to communication transparency and community as an educational pillar (cited by School Superintendent Nebesniak) to provide both strategic and tactical reinforcement for binding the community and fostering social capital through trust.

- **Riley Smith** describes how social capital is central to the role of mental health providers and thereby the community at large.

> "One of the shifts in leadership on the social emotional side was, *'how are you doing? How's your family?'* Just to take some of the pressure off of employees. Just to take some of the pressure off peers even. I think that that if you were able to do that and connect, that was helpful because of the human connection. But also, just not being alone in trauma. You can survive so much if you don't feel alone. So, I think that that's one of the things that has been helpful for those people who have reached out for mental health services. For a mentor or a caregiver, we're talking about a population that has the skills to do that. There're others out there that don't. They have struggled, and domestic violence rates are increasing. … I think that one of the things that was helpful was just communicating with other providers as well."[57]

- **Nancy Glaubke**, hospital CEO, provides two examples of how binding social capital works in Ord, the first regarding her staff at the hospital and the second regarding her role as citizen and her awareness of Ord as a *nanopolitan* area.

> "I'm genuinely interested because they live in our Community and they're part of our sports teams and they're just part of the people that we take care of. So yes, in turn, they take care of me. It's by sharing that information with me, by trusting me enough to share those stories, to me that's them taking care of me. That shows that they trust me, and I so appreciate that. I really, really appreciate that.
>
> Family and community have been the core values, the core success of the whole community here. The sense of family and the family relationships, the family dynamics, the overall trust that we have, and the desire to take care of our families is key. That's why the Community voted for a new hospital and passed the bond issue in 2008 to build the new hospital. That's why just right on the heels of that, they voted for another bond issue to renovate the school. That's huge.
>
> "**[T]**he farmers and the families, they support us, and so we try to in turn support them. On a personal note, I am here to take care of my employee family, and by taking care of my employee family they're taking care of my family, my biological family. .., I think it's really, really important that we all take care of each other, and I think that's why we are so successful in the Midwest, I mean truly. And I think in Ord it has just been a real key part [of our success]. Don't get me wrong, we have our challenges, and we have our disagreements. But it's nice to see that we've weathered so many of those and we've become stronger because of all that."[58]

Here is the essence of what we have referred to as **real neighboring** (see "Neighboring, Abundance Mindset, Intentionality and Reconciliation in Ord/Valley County") as opposed to being "just neighbors." (See also Larry Lyons The Community in Urban Society.)

- We heard **JJ** from the radio station speak several times about the way Ord both creates and manifests binding social capital, whether it be in sharing stories of football glory, taking pride in the boys' state championship, caring for each other and not wanting them to fail, promoting buy local on behalf of businesses struggling with the pandemic and more. From his vantage point as a local radio personality he is both outside the formal channels of expectation and yet central to the flow of information on community behavior. Here he gives us the unique personal perspective on his experience with the Ord educational system.

> "They're hands on with these kids. I had three kids graduate from here. … They're caring. They don't want to see kids fail."[59]

Bridging Social Capital

- **Caleb Pollard** helps identify one aspect of formal bridging capital when he talks about the government response to COVID with stimulus and business support dollars. He both acknowledges the trust that was built during this period, but also how it strengthened entrepreneurial ecosystems by supporting small business owners.

> "I think for us it instilled a belief that government can work sometimes, and government does work, sometimes. I think government works, especially well when there are crises. … I also think it put a lot of trust in small operators like Scratchtown to spend those monies wisely. … 97% of the user base in my mind went out and used those funds exactly like they were supposed to do. They kept storefronts open. They kept people on payroll. They invested in things that made those businesses more resilient. … In terms of propping up and keeping businesses open in America, especially in at-risk places like rural communities, it was to me a wise investment strategy by our government."[60]

- In an earlier section Gaylord Boilesen and Bob Stowell described the Misko's transition story, and both emphasized the role of a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem before, during and following the ownership transition. They provide a graphic and detailed description of how social capital works in a community and how the lines between public and private domains of action blur when people balance personal and community interests to promote a healthy and sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem.

- Illustrating the bridging social capital extant between public response to individual private business needs during the pandemic, **Mayor Dan Petska** describes,

> "…something else we did as mayor and the economic development board … we deferred the payments on those loans for three months, basically we just added it onto the end of their loan because a lot of businesses lost money through COVID. … That was one thing we could do for them. I don't know what else the city could have done for the businesses."[61]

Why did the public sector feel they "needed" to do anything for a private business? Isn't that the risk an entrepreneur takes when they open their enterprise? Obviously, these civic leaders are responding to recognized social capital wherein the public well-being would be damaged by business failure due to circumstances beyond the entrepreneur's control. The relatively low-cost support provided by the public sector is borne out of and reinforces binding social capital.

- And, **Melanie Bowden** makes clear that this assistance mattered, and her comfort was bolstered by this binding social capital. She relates,

> "I do have two major loans, one is with the bank and one is with the Nebraska Enterprise Fund. NEF was very proactive in saying … early on – and this made a lot of difference to me too – *'we are going to just take three months and just put them on the end of your loan; don't even worry about those.'* That was just as I was thinking, *'maybe I need to do*

something different.' So, if they had not done that, it would have been more uncomfortable than it was. That was a good gap filled early on. It was exactly when I needed it. I needed to have some income."

- **Sarah Brinkman** speaks hopefully to the bridging social capital inherent to leadership transition in a community.

> "I feel like we have a good group of leaders within the community even in my age group. We're maybe not as involved in some of the programs and things, but that's not to say that once we slow down in our respective areas that those things wouldn't increase. I feel like we have some good entrepreneurial minds in our community that will assume some of that role as that time comes. That's just the ebb and flow of life. Some will go out and some will come in. [The timing] is always the challenge. A little communication, coming up with a plan always helps."

Sarah is also aware that bridging social capital will be needed in Ord to deal with the inevitable demographic change due to meeting labor needs.

> "I feel like in Ord we are very progressive minded. My business is very progressive minded. I feel like for our area we're maybe a little bit different, … but I'm also a well-established ranching family. … [W]e're going to have to bridge some of those gaps because we are going to get more different people, more different types of people. I don't feel like that's a bad thing, and if that's where our job pool is going, that's where I'm going to pull from."[62]

Sarah is hopeful in this regard referring to the way schools operate in Ord.

> "I feel like we are pretty fortunate here. I feel like our school is pretty open. We get a lot of foreigners that come work for us at the ranch. … [W]hen they come here and they have kids, I say, *'go to Ord.'* … I don't send them to other towns in the area. … I felt that Ord would be very receptive."[63]

- And **JJ** shared the community response to the devastating floods outside the *nanopolitan* area.

> "People here were buying water for places in Springview and up north that were hit really hard by the floods, worse than we were here."

This horizontal bridging across communities serves not just to provide aid to another community, but to expand the experience of engaging social capital for the benefit of the collective.

- **Heather Nebesniak**, Ord School Superintendent, provides insight into the way bridging social capital (geographic and institutional) in the form of trust for health care authorities helped the Ord school system weather the pandemic. She also illustrates another long-term characteristic of Ord, the willingness to look outside for help and then use it.

> "For the most part, there was faith in our public health department. Just a little bit south to us in the central health department there wasn't a lot of faith. And, that was creating some conflicts and misinformation, and it wasn't very nice. … But it was also almost like the canary in the coal mine. *'If it happens there, it can happen here. So, what are we going to*

> *do?'* … [T]hat's part of the story process. If you can't learn from what happened in other places, how are you going to reflect on what's best practice for you and your community?"[64]

Spiritual Capital

- For **Sarah Brinkman** this capital manifests in an overtly positive view of the future backed by her indomitable will to succeed.

> "In my mind I was thinking there are advantages to being a small town, there are also disadvantages to *'everybody knows your situation; there's no point in trying to hide anything cause everybody's going to know. … Everybody knows we are shut down.'* Are we going to come back and just be like, *'oh we're dying out? No. We're going to come back and have double* [the business] *every year that we did in 2019.'* … That was a goal of mine."[65]

Some might argue that this is simply a personality factor, but it is more than that. It derives from Sarah's ecosystem: her grandfather's ranch legacy, her commitment to the women who trusted her to develop Utopia as a place for them to thrive practicing the crafts they love, and the community of Ord with its embrace of support for individuals and entrepreneurs.

- **Doug Smith**, Ord Elementary School Principle, speaks openly about the role of love in their school philosophy. He sees it in an expansive and holistic sense, applying it to all facets of his students' well-being and the school itself. Consider how it guided the school response to the pandemic and his use of inclusive pronouns ('*my'* and '*our'*) when referring to the students and parents.

> "[K]ids can handle the truth very well and know when you're trying to buffalo them a little bit. So, I think just honesty and love and trust. And the kids in our Community trusted us which I think, made it easier for our parents to trust us. I've been here 10 years. I've got a pretty good relationship with most all of my parents, and I feel like they know that their child will be treated as if he or she is my child and [that we are] going to make the best decisions that we can based on love and not fear. … [S]afety had to trump everything else as we were trying to make decisions … So, it's a lot of safety and a lot of love because kids and adults still need to know that they're safe and they need to know that they're loved before they can learn before we can teach."[66]

When asked about whether he had concerns about the students' academic progress given their decision to focus on engagement for the year rather than academics, per se, Doug circles back to the core needs of the students' spiritual capital and mental health.

> "And so, I'm so proud of my teachers and my kids … for just making it through a tough school year; it was a mental grind for all of us. I'm proud of their academic gains, but I'd rather just spotlight their mental fortitude and know that the scoreboard will take care of itself. If we have the fundamentals, safety and love, the academic scoreboard will take care of itself, much like a basketball game will. If you have team relationships, have the fundamentals down, know the processes and procedures, then the [score] board speak for itself."

Taking credit is not a feature of the Ord community. Time and again we have heard individuals assign success to others even when their own role is undeniable. Think back to earlier quotes where **Bob Stowell**, Mayor **Dan Petska**, **Heather Nebesniak** and others gave the credit for success to others when they clearly had a major hand in the situation and the response. As Colin Powell has said, *"There is no end to the good you can do if you don't care who gets the credit."* Consider how Doug speaks about a member of his staff and gives him the credit for success in the school.

> "I tell you the things that he does for our kids – especially this last year – just helps give them so much mental fortitude. His motto for this year was, *'choose love'….* He wrote this theme in the snow for the kids to come outside and take the pictures around it, and my kids just love that picture. … That's some of the stuff this guy does, and we did as a school system through his leadership to just reinforce how important it was for kids to know they were loved, to know they were safe. And not just for the first two weeks of school to set the stage – *'okay now put that on the shelf and start learning'* – but throughout the whole year. It was a good year for that. I tell you, our kids just buy it, to his approach. He's a great young man."

- **Heather Nebesniak** neatly sums up the way spiritual capital in the form of concern for the community is woven into the formal socialization process of the Ord school system.

> "Our mission right up there [on the wall] is '*character, academics, and community'*; we [the schools] tie everything to that, but, I also feel our Community does that. And, that is … so intertwined that it would be hard to find the process of where one starts one ends, when you talk about our community."

So, when the pandemic hit their response was driven by their bedrock spiritual capital.

> "By gosh, we're going to love our kids through it. We did it because we loved our kids."

From the oldest to the youngest in this special place, community well-being is a core motivational force that animates the entire ecosystem. What's more they trust each other to act on it every day.

Riley Smith provides insight into the way that spiritual capital and hopefulness links to both community-based binding social capital and formal bridging social capital in the form of outside support from larger social institutions and their actions. Referring to the way the community embraced wearing masks and social distancing – albeit sometimes grudgingly – to ensure the success of the high school football team, she says:

> "Yeah. There was hope. There was kind of a light at the end of the tunnel, and it gave people choices. … [W]e have a lot of flexibility here, most of the time. … When that freedom was taken away, people felt robbed. So, I think that, being able to move into*, 'there's a vaccine or lessening restrictions. Yes, you can go see your family in nursing homes. You can go see your elderly grandparents. You can go do that and know you'll be a little bit safer.'* That was very helpful. … I would say that it's still just that human connection."[67]

The feelings that Riley describes as *"being robbed"* and *"just that human connection"* are on the one hand clear expressions of the loss and on the other hand the avenue for restoration of spiritual capital. And for Riley the centrality of this spiritual capital to the Ord ecosystem and community is expressed in her final comment during the interview.

> "I think the two words that come to mind mostly – just to summarize – are willingness and curiosity. I say that because every day you got to have the courage and the willingness to show up. You notice, if someone is doing something that may look a little bit better than how you're doing it, but you have to have curiosity and you have to have the courage to go say, *'hey, what's she doing? Can you teach me how to do that?'* … [W]hen it comes to mental health, it's having the courage to step up and do it. And not being fearful to do it. I think that's integrated in a way that we don't even realize. We use it in our school. We use it with our elementary students. We use with our high school students. We use it in our academics. We use it in drama and swing choir, and we use it in volleyball and basketball and track. It's just all about people. People!"[68]

- Individuals age and as they do leadership often ages out in a community, especially when it has been vested in a limited pool of individuals. The question for a community is whether they have developed and are developing the next generation of leaders necessary to community success. **Nancy Glaubke** speaks to this long-term focus on leadership in the hospital and community and central it is to maintaining spiritual capital in the form of hopefulness and consequently community durability.

> "I do see it. My senior management team is young. I'm the oldest. I'm by far the oldest. They've got great ideas. They get the job done every single day. I never have to worry about them. I know that truly if I am gone in an hour, this place will continue to hum. It will. They are good. We have a good strong board. We have young people on our board. We have a good mix on our board, so this hospital's in great shape for years to come.
>
> At a community level, I see people that are involved in the Valley County Community Foundation, and I see the young energy there. I see young people on boards, and I see a mix. It's not just young. It's not just old. It's a mix, a mixture of age, experience and background. I think that we have done [a good job]. … That to me is the reason this place will continue to succeed. It goes to diversity. ... If you can do the job and you're successful and work well together, being a team player is just key. The more that we understand one another and accept one another and value their contributions that's how we are successful."[69]

Nancy isn't speaking in abstract generalities. She is able to be specific naming a dozen individuals from across community institutions and sectors including entrepreneurs, hospital board members, public servants, community college personnel, and foundation leaders. Importantly, this list includes many influential and effective women. This speaks to Ord's ability and willingness to increasingly embrace women in leadership roles over twenty years.

> "I think we just come together and do the best we can. We have a stake in it because it's our family, it's our community, and we have to succeed. Because we don't want to be here just for ourselves and the immediate future. We want to be here for 20 years from now, 40

> years now. We want to make sure that this community lives on and is vibrant for years. Whatever challenges we face – whether it's a pandemic, whether it's the drought or the locusts, or whatever our ancestors faced – there will always be some challenges. I think we've got the resiliency to weather those storms and just become stronger and stronger."

It is impossible to miss the long-term perspective that Nancy takes reaching both into the past and the future in order to solidify her commitment to the community. She is them and they are her. They are her family, her neighbors her fellow travelers on life's journey and their pasts and futures are intertwined with her own.

- Caleb Pollard waxed quite philosophical about how the pandemic has changed him, sharpened his outlook on life, family and community, and brought him greater equanimity and peace. We see his and Nancy's comments as embodying the essence of spiritual capital, the motivational certainty that our intentional actions matter and that they are honorable and have meaning when our own interests are tempered by their impacts on behalf of others.

> "If you want to look at it cosmically, it probably is true is that, *'nothing matters and we're all gonna die.'* … There are circumstances that may still explode or implode or destroy all of your dreams, all of your hopes, all the things that you hold dear. But, you should still do it anyways. There is something righteous about the work. There is something righteous about the Karma that you put out into the universe. It's just a greater acceptance of '*not being in control and thinking that I have things figured out.'* I've come to the realization as most people do that, '*the older they get the less they know.'* And the older I get the less in control I am.
>
> But, '*what am I?'* I would say that I am someone that will have a great story to tell his grandchildren someday, I hope. And, that the hard work is important, even if you lose it all because you're never going to have any regret over building something like we built here. … You're expecting that it may not work, but you still do it anyways. That's kind of how I feel it now, especially about the last 18 months. There is righteousness in what we do. There is value in what we do, even if it doesn't work long term. I would much rather try to row upstream then go with the flow because I went with the flow and I was super unhappy. There is happiness to be found in struggle, and I think that's another lesson that I learned very acutely this last year. There is happiness in struggle."[70]

We asked Caleb if he was suggesting that, *'the struggle and building on small successes is more than just a vehicle for changing the community trajectory from hopelessness to hope, it becomes its own reward. It generates its own continued likelihood of success. It continues to fuel an orientation of hope (spiritual capital) rather than hopelessness.'* His answer was an unequivocal,

> "Correct! And, it's important to project to people that it is important to work against futile-ism because it accomplishes nothing. We can all sit and bellyache about the nature of the world and accept it as it is, or we can put our boots on and go to work and try and make our little slice of the universe, a little bit better."

Summing Up

Ord is a different kind of place than Census classifications would have us believe. It is a place importantly connected to its environs, Valley County and the region. And, this interconnection is something more than geographic accident. It is the result of intentional agency, bridge-building, reconciliation and the meticulous management of shared interests. Yet, Ord too has to address the forces of newcomer-oldtimer conflict, rural-urban sentiments, conventional-unconventional entrepreneurial ventures and all the disconnects that more typically derail or smother small communities in the rural fabric. We have chosen to express this challenge by citing elements of Ord/Valley County that remain lodged on the one hand in the rural and village periurban past and on the other in the emergent *nanopolitan* present. Conventional geographic discourse would sum this up in terms of urban-rural conflict, but this would be hyperbole and completely miss the opportunities that exist for such small places because of the chasm that exists between those stereotypes. The fact is that Ord sits on a razor's edge of hopelessness and opportunity separated by matters of degree rather than an insurmountable chasm of impossible dreams.

What Ord has accomplished and continues to accomplish is borne out of their willingness to introspect honestly about their past, to identify untapped capacities, to dream into existence practical solutions and novel enterprises through intentional agency, nurtured social capital, and their courage to confront each other and the unknown focused on their highest intentions for the place and the community. They have become an abundance community by eschewing conventional labels, building networks of support and harnessing the full range of their capital assets to build an ecosystem where entrepreneurship is as much a social and collective function of their lives as a business engine for productivity, jobs and self-expression. They have not just rolled up their sleeves and gone to work, they have rolled up the expected dark trajectory of their decline and actively projected it forward toward the light of self-redefinition and a bright future. And, they have approached this without accepting their work as finished. It is a continuing journey and a process of becoming that joins the young and old in a common endeavor.

The Pandemic as a Social and Entrepreneurial Good: What Ord learned about Itself:

It is frequently said that the Chinese Hanzi for *crisis* is composed of two characters meaning *dangerous* and *opportunity*. While it is true that the first character does mean *dangerous* or *precarious*, the second character means something much more akin to *change point*. This distinction is important for two reasons.

❖ Catastrophe v. Change Point

First, the inappropriate attribution of meaning points to the erroneous reduction of *attitude* (and shared attitude or *community ethos/civic virtue*) to the simplistic trope of optimism/pessimism and subsequent dismissal as not serious or foundational. In fact, attitude, ethos and virtue are the core of spiritual capital.

- ☛ Crisis as catastrophe – *"the glass half empty"*
- ☛ Crisis as change point – *"the glass half full"*

❖ Pivot v. Reset

Second, it underscores that any opportunity inherent to a crisis is not detached from the current state of affairs. It is not just a free-floating option waiting to be plucked from thin air whole and operative. Rather it implies the need for a new direction or new starting point that must be reckoned with in terms of the current situation whether by pivot or reset. While both options have costs and risks, they often have quite different consequences for spiritual capital within the ecosystem.

- ☛ Pivot – Strike out in a new direction from current conditions and location
- ☛ Reset – Return to an earlier or new set point and restart; to reinitialize

As discussed throughout our analysis Ord has at its core developed a capacity for, commitment to and practice of defining itself in terms of *"we can do it"*, not as simplistic wishful thinking but as a complete action package of seizing control over the arc of its development. Ord and Valley County have consistently done the hard work of accepting reality on its own terms but by defining their response in terms of desired goals and trusting in the civic virtue of its people. As demonstrated in our many curated stories this has been an infectious orientation that has metastasized throughout the community. It is now an almost unconscious directive that animates individual entrepreneurs and citizens as they go about their daily lives. It is ironic that the latest crisis facing Ord has been a true pandemic, pitting their infectious spirit against a potentially lethal viral infection. Let's see how some various individuals turned this crisis into a learning tool for self-, business-, and community-development. In other words, how it has strengthened the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

- **Sarah Brinkman** sees the pandemic in a positive way once the shutdown was passed and describes it as having a,

> "…ripple effect. I felt like we were getting more clients here because other places we're still shut down. And, women are going to go wherever they can because they are not going to have three-inch roots and janky nails. They will drive all the way to Ord, Nebraska if we're the only ones open. … There were some positive things I think about us being more rural versus more city because a lot of the city's spas and spots really struggled. … The lake traffic we had during the pandemic was just insane. People just wanted to come up here and go camping because they wanted to get out of the cities. So, those clients stop here. They stop in town. … It felt like we had a ripple effect from that, it definitely … brought in some new clients from outside our demographic, which was nice."[71]

More specifically Sarah identifies her ***"virtual footprint"*** as the biggest gain from the pandemic and one that will have legs. The pandemic pushed her to increase her human capital and consequently now generates additional revenue.

> "I had to learn how to live-stream and teach virtually. I did whole virtual platforms. Now if I teach a yoga class, I can offer it nationwide. … That's increased our revenue stream. … I had to get over my attachment or fear of teaching to a larger, broader audience."[72]

Learning to teach in this manner was challenging.

> "I'm a real hands-on teacher. I had to get to where I used more verbal cues because I couldn't touch people. I felt like it probably did change somewhat the way yoga was being taught. But, it's better than nothing. We just had to do what we had to do. And now, maybe we have a larger audience and maybe we've reach people we couldn't have reached before."[73]

Reflecting holistically about the Ord experience through the pandemic, Sarah sums it up with,

> I feel like we might have gotten little scarred for a little bit. But, we've come through it. We survived, and it will probably end up affecting us positively."

Are there enduring outcomes?

> Maybe in some businesses, but for us I think it just brought more people to our doors. I think it changed people's thinking a bit; maybe there's more fear of being unhealthy. Maybe it forced some of us to get out of our comfort box a bit, but that's okay.

- **Melanie Bowden** frames it in terms of becoming a better business woman.

> "From the opportunity standpoint I often would muse that when I started catering, *'I took a pay cut to do what I loved to do.'* That year gave me some perspective like, *'that's probably not necessary. Let's run this as a business not a hobby.'* So, there were a lot of things that were rethought. As the world has opened back up our approach is different to many of the things that we do. So, I'm hoping to not muse in that way anymore."

On a personal level Melanie describes the enhanced relationship with her children.

> "I know that this thing has been a struggle for so many. I just feel so fortunate that I could just push a pause button, step aside for a while and then step back in. It was scary during it because there was so much unknown. Yet, there was unprecedented *untime* or *nonncommitted* time that I just got to hang out with my children. That was valuable. We didn't have anything else to do. The kids grow up so fast. It was the first time ever that summer was long enough. … We spent a lot of time together and that was valuable."

Melanie could have reopened Jubilee in June 2020 following the mandatory shutdown but explains her rationale for keeping it shuttered until summer 2021.

> "There were a lot of things going on. People were being creative. The saloon and Rosie's place were doing take out stuff. I'm not open to the public generally. Once and a while we will do a special event when we are open to the public. I chose not to enter into that pool. I had something else I could fall back on [nursing]. So, I didn't want to be in competition with any of that because I knew people were working very hard at surviving. So, I didn't."

Finally, Melanie postulates how general attitudes shifted when things opened up.

> "I would say previous to the world going wackadoodle, people took large gatherings [e.g., weddings] for granted. And I think there has been a renewed sense of people savoring their connections and relationships and not taking those things for granted at all. I think people are very enthusiastically reconnecting."

- **Caleb Pollard** talks about it on multiple levels: personal (psycho-emotional) development, commitment to make changes that were needed, and redirected business philosophy. In terms of straightforward business decisions Caleb did,

> "…two things. We did specials on packages of to go or for delivery. We also did a keg sale for something like six weeks. We sold more retail kegs and that six-week period than I can ever remember. And we moved a … ton of beer. I mean it. We got very creative. Within the confines of our legal abilities, we went out and sold a bunch of beer. It comes back to shelf life, and I think it is one of the things that's different about us than other Community members."

Here Caleb is hinting at one of his reasons for skepticism about the gift certificate program as opposed to the autonomously generated *Pay it Forward* campaign. Gift certificates may not be redeemed for some time, and that only works if your product doesn't have a short shelf life like his. Letting two of his five full-time employees go was another decision, but one which Caleb has described as personally wrenching.

On a larger level the pandemic also produced a major pivot for Scratchtown that still directs their business plan today.

> "We had a separation from a distributor [resulting in our] buying back a bunch of product that had gone out to distribution nodes across the state for PR on St. Patty's day. I had all of these distributors that were heavy on beer and nowhere to sell it, and [there was] tremendous … pressure on us to buy back our products. So, not only did I have product

> here on premise that I had to move, I had a glut of product coming back from distributors that wanted no part in our draft beer being out in the market."

Due to their creativity in keg sales and the *Pay it Forward* campaign they were able to weather the 3 months of shutdown from March to June. In the aftermath they refocused their sales on the tap room ending production for distribution. Today Caleb proudly says, *"we only sell what we make on the premises and we brew for our local community."* Here is a statement refocused on nurturing social capital born of repaying those who stood and supported the business in its darkest days. (The beer is awfully good as well.)

- **Jeana Hackel** expresses a deeper understanding of herself and a renewed commitment to team building and shared concern for one another.

> "In the summer it was kind of shell shock, but we said, *'we want to just keep going.'* And, we kept going back *to 'what do we want to see?'* We were just honest with our team. … We said, *'we want to focus on culture. …* So, it was culture, and it was projects and it was profit, in that order, and *'where do we need to be? …* That mindset is so important because it affects the whole ecosystem when you have someone that is discouraged or down. It really affects the culture of our team, so we're really boosting that. Our mindset will be positive. It will be solutions. It will be *'what do we want to see?'"*[74]

Jeana is painstakingly meticulous in her self-analysis regarding her own agency and this was already apparent in our conversations prior to COVID-19. This has been greatly influenced by her and Tanner's involvement with SVLA (Synovation Valley Leadership Academy). The pandemic simply shifted the process into high gear and to greater depths of self-exploration. For that reason, she is able to see aspects of Helen Kubler Ross's stages of grieving – particularly denial and anger – while simultaneously seeing the pandemic as a good thing in her life.

> "COVID was a good thing. It was a hard thing, but it was a good thing. Unless we are challenged or unless things are taken away, we don't appreciate what we have first of all, and then we don't realize where we're falling short. Basically, anger is fear. At the root of it, it's fear, and I was fearful. As a leader I was simply trying to keep my head above water, *'everything's fine. We're moving forward. We're doing this. We're doing that.'* But then I had to deal with the waves underneath, and when I was at home by myself, '*who was I?'* ... It was a self-reflection time, a time to face fear and a time to just look at myself and say*, 'I am so thankful for this opportunity to grow and be free.'* When you face your fear instead of walking around it, you gain a confidence that you didn't have before. So, in that way it was a good thing. And I think my anger was just that fear coming out. … I love the gratefulness and consideration, but I think COVID taught me compassion. … This year it helped me face fear; it helped me start dreaming bigger. I'm not who I was before this."[75]

- In the section on collective v. individual **Doug Smith** shared how the pandemic forced the redefinition of existing irritations as real problems in need of solution. These daily stressors simply stayed below the threshold of defined problems. Having addressed the irritations, staff and students now feel a reduction in ambient stress. Yet, even Doug was not fully aware that this stress reduction rippled into households throughout the community. Still there are many lessons that have produced enduring changes because Doug and the schools chose to take a

glass half full view of situations and pivot even though the outcomes were uncertain. There is a genuine courage involved in this social entrepreneurship as well as the wisdom to learn from its consequences.

> "There are some of these things that we're going to hang on to. And I think that if you ask people in our community, there are things that we've learned from this pandemic that they're going to hang on to also. And so, I think we hang on to some of those, embrace those changes as the norm. Get rid of some of it and say, *'thank you for getting us through it, but we're going to go back to this* [the way we did things before the pandemic] *because it was best for our kids.'* So, I see more positive that we've learned as a school system coming out of this than negative."

- **Gaylord Boilesen** reflected on his role as a mentor taking responsibility for another entrepreneur's failure. In doing so he strengthens his understanding of the role obligations inherent to mentoring and commits to doing better in the future.

> "We struggled with him. You know I did a poor job, and I blame myself and Bruce for this because we thought we had done a better job of teaching him the financials."

Considering just how Gaylord mentored this young entrepreneur when explaining the importance of maintaining inventory, it's hard objectively to accept his role as a failure.

> *'Think about your inventory as a savings account. You take all that money out of that savings account and you pay all these bills, and you put no money back in that savings account, pretty soon you're done.'*

- **Nancy Glaubke** identifies a laundry list of changes made at the hospital that will remain in place even after the pandemic recedes. Many of these had been in the background or low priority prior to the pandemic, or they were responses to previously unrecognized needs somewhat like the low-level stressors that Doug Smith talked about in elementary school. Nancy recounts:

> "The safety of my places is really paramount. I always want to keep them safe, regardless of whether it's COVID or physical violence or some other some other disease. So, we did make some changes. … So yes, those things will continue to remain in place, and I think those are good changes."[76]

- **Riley Smith** talks about her deeper understanding of the way crisis produced phases of response in the mental health needs of the community, thus giving her a greater understanding of how to be proactive in the future.

> "I graduated from high school here…. We moved back here. We love the area … the recreation and just a small-town feel, the community, and all of that. It's the same for us, **the safety within that Community**."[77]

The families were experiencing fear and the providers were facing restrictions.

> "When treating children, one of the things that we did was we made up packets – small play therapy kits with some sensory stuff – and we sent them out to our families. That was one

> of the things that I think made them feel seen, but also, it helped them to stay connected as human beings.
>
> [By fall] we were starting to get the healthcare workers [as clients] and … the trauma that we were experiencing, we're still seeing it now. So, we got through that first wave of *'how are we going to survive this'* by focusing on scheduling. We focused on connecting with others, with family meals, games, telling stories making music, and using all of those things to maintain our creativity to maintain our curiosity. As described earlier the third wave of patients were those who had put off seeking help and now found themselves unable to put it off any longer."[78]

But as Riley indicates the second wave was comprised of health care workers themselves and this posed unique issues for the providers themselves. Things changed again coming out of January 2021. As Riley explains,

> "… [W]e started to build resiliency and build on the strengths we had developed. *'Now you've gotten through this. Now we're going to focus on this new year. Let's build resiliency. Let's build on our strengths that we've created' …* I think that that's where we were at, where we are at now. We can get back to the real stuff."[79]

Now as the reality of recurring COVID-mutation viral outbreaks occur, it remains to be seen if the resilience and strength are sufficient to weather what the future brings. Riley is able to identify some of the "winners" and "losers" during the pandemic.

> "I would say restaurants and restaurant owners **[were winners]**. … **[O]**ur grocery stores were winners. … [S]ome of the services that people would normally go out of town for were winners. … I would say that the parents that had to continue to work and had small children at home struggled if they didn't have help. … I think the families that probably really struggled were ones that had either domestic violence or alcoholism or something that was maybe hidden by social interactions and some of those things. Those are struggles. And the change that she now sees because of using zoom is that many clients are huge winners. When it comes to access and privacy … now I can do a zoom session with … remote clients in Lincoln or wherever. … It can be not only effective, but also, I don't have people sitting in my waiting room. That's helpful for those people who want that extra sense of confidentiality that, *no one is going to see me walk into your office."*

Finally, Riley describes the source of the "glass half full" attitude in Ord attributing it to the leadership and mentoring of a core group of older residents.

> "I think one of the things that hit Ord right away was we were so used to [thinking in terms of the community as a whole.] … Honestly that really comes from the fact that we have leaders that are older than me that have done a really good job at teaching and helping and being willing to change. … I feel like as a coaching staff at the high school, we do a really good job of respecting each other and making sure that we're showing up for each other"[80]

Here is bridging social capital between generations, binding social capital among team members and coaches, the ability for individuals and the community to see opportunity in the face of

adversity, the focus on community interest over narrow self-interest, and the wherewithal and determination to make the pivot for the benefit of the whole community.

- **Mayor Dan Petska** succinctly addressed Ord's chief practical problems. *"I think day care and housing are two of our biggest issues right now."* Yet, when presented with alternative solutions used around the world to address these issues, he was open to seeing them beyond the conventional private versus public narrative. Nonetheless, addressing them seems to him to be squarely in the province of motivated developers and providers, *"…but there's got to be someone out there that wants to start a day care."* Whatever the case the pandemic heightened awareness of these unmet needs.

  Dan has also empowered himself during the pandemic by taking risks with unexpected benefits that may matriculate forward into new ways of thinking about community development in less conventional areas such as public art.

  > "We have a restroom in the park, a white building. One day the librarian called me to say her daughter could not graduate college because she had to have this last art project done, but the college was shut down. [Her daughter] wanted to paint this art on that bathroom – I think they call it abstract art – and it was what she sees Ord as through her eyes. … I never heard one bad word about it, and it created a sense of something going on and something that people could see."[81]

  Reflecting on the take-aways from the pandemic for Ord, Dan sums it up this way.

  > "I think one of the things that really came out of COVID was people – even us in here in the office – used to take things for granted. … [P]eople learned something about … taking better care of their health. On the negative side COVID hurt a couple of businesses, and getting these businesses back started was a tough thing. Something else good that came out of it is I think people got back more to the basics of family than they have ever been. It kind of woke you up and made you realize, *'maybe we better pay attention to what we've got.'"*[82]

- In reflection **Kristina Foth** sums it up saying,

  > When I look back on those 18 months [starting March 2020], I'm really proud of our community for how resilient we are and how adaptable we are. That's at every level from our community's planning efforts to our business's planning efforts and how they have had to shift in terms of our individuals and our families and the mental health side of things. There's a lot of pride there about our community. A lot of learning of course. We all have a choice when we look at situations. We can maintain a positive mindset as much as we can, but there are always underlying fears, worries or doubts. Looking at our business community over this time some looked at it as an opportunity to reset or pivot and through this process … discover that it makes more sense for their business to reset or pivot and do things differently than before. They don't really plan on returning to the types of pre-COVID strategies, systems or inventories they had before. There has been some shifting that has led to new growth and opportunities. For some COVID was just a breaking point and they chose to step aside or just do something different, and that's okay too. Like individuals, businesses have lifecycles."

Summing Up:

All these individual responses speak to the pandemic as an entrepreneurial and social good despite its obvious tragic downside impacts. In each case individuals defined the crisis not as tragedy but as adversity that made them better. It even gave them a chance to laugh a bit about themselves. It's not just that adversity creates innovation, it creates the awareness of and then need for action and change. Experience has reinforced the habit of acting intentionally, both proactively and reactively. Collectively, these stories show how the underlying community ethos, their civic virtue, their spiritual capital has permeated the attitudes of individuals such that their subsequent actions and narratives reify and solidify that very ethos across the community. As **Doug Smith** might say, ***"they've been Ord-ed up!"***

The collective story they are telling themselves is the reality they become; the positive arc of their *destiny* is strengthened. In their response to the COVID-19 pandemic we see the process through which Ord has succeeded in the past. Ord's awareness of, experience with, and intentional agency in the face of crisis and adversity when harnessed to existing social capital and undergirded by varying individual combinations of economic, social and human capital reifies the entrepreneurial ecosystem, innovation and expanding community well-being. The arc of their success is strengthened, hope becomes increasingly customary and their horizon of community well-being is lengthened.

Ord has become a truly proactive community. It has a clear handle not just on its capacities, but on how to continue recognizing others. It has a clear understanding that capacities require strategic development of the mechanisms necessary to capitalize on them. They have developed an ecosystem that does this well in advance of any specific need or action. Ord has achieved this level of development not as an after-thought, but as second nature or habit, as a product of their culture. Peter Drucker has said, *"culture eats strategy for breakfast"*. In the case of Ord, culture doesn't even wait for breakfast! It lives in the dreams that transition to their waking lives.

What the stories from the pandemic show us is that Ord is a place where individuals have internalized the culture to the point of habit. Their actions and thinking, whether on an everyday level or in response to crisis, are both intentional and proactive, yet they arise in many at an almost preconscious level. They are intentional about solving problems, but they do so in holistic fashion such that whatever the problem, the response addresses the issue while reflecting and enhancing the culture of shared community interest. All of this leads to a robust and self-sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem. It is an enviable record and status that provides rich lessons that can advantage other communities who are willing to do the challenging work of building their future. Ord isn't a road map to instant success, but it is a treasure trove of examples of how committed individuals can shorten the pathway to a dynamic self-sustaining culture within which individuals, entrepreneurship, and community can all thrive.

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ENDNOTES – Expanded Quotes

Here you can drill down into the much richer narratives of the participants gaining greater insight into their experiences and the full Story of Ord.

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[1] **"I think about community development and all the facets of it, I always find myself leaning towards the storytelling part of it, getting to know the people.** *'What are their dreams? What are their goals? How can we provide the opportunities and resources to make that happen?'* We capitalize on our community's greatest asset which is our people. In my opinion it's not necessarily anything physically you see when you look at our town. It's the people that fill the spaces and the homes and the storefronts**. I focus on the culture first.** For me that is synonymous with the people and what they want to achieve. Then you are going to find the profits or revenue streams and wealth creation in terms of property tax and income tax and things like that."

[2] "…we're a tribe. I'm going to start with how it impacted us specifically. **Our industry was very affected.** A lot of industries were, but we were mandated to shut down. It wasn't just that clients weren't coming in the door because they were nervous about COVID or whatever, we were state mandated and could not even open the doors … for 90 days. … **We had a complete loss [for that period although] we did try to get creative and come up with alternative revenue streams.** I worked at our family ranch more, and thankfully COVID probably helped in our ranch situation because people could work with their horses and not have to worry about the virus. So it was nice to have that diversification as far as just income wise for me personally. … We tried to do a drop ship program, and I would do zoom face consultations with patients to look at different issues they were having. A lot of them were having issues from being masked all the time, so that was actually good from a skin care perspective. I was able to combine product drop shipping with a teleconference much like doctors went to during COVID. No, it's probably not as optimal as a face-to-face interaction … but it helped get through the time when we couldn't see those patients. … Meantime, it also helped keep us relevant. I did little live streams and posts on our social media channels, and we have our app and our software that links us with the clients. So, I feel like all of those things helped. I used one-on-one zoom, Instagram stories, things like that. When they did the group class restrictions, most all the class workouts and yoga studios were shut down. Fortunately, here we were probably shut down the least amount for the group classes compared to a lot of areas of country, but it definitely hurt our numbers. **People were not going out, they were not participating in groups just because of fear of contracting the virus.**"

[3] "The minute [the mandated shutdown] was lifted [June 1, 2020] I realized that in my profession I was probably going to be exposed to the virus. I'm in close contact, face-to-face, touching people. So, **I had to decide whether I was comfortable with that** or not, and I made the choice that I was. I did eventually get COVID from a patient and got through it fine, thankfully. No terrible story there or anything, but I had to make that choice and there were of restless nights because at the time I didn't know how bad it was going to be. … *'Is this safe? Do I want to do this for my family?*"

[4] "Our clients have to remove their mask while we work on their face and [my nurse practitioner and I] were the only ones that actually got COVID. **The way [the various businesses are physically] set up here with everything being segregated, each room is private. We're not in a group area**, so even though one of us potentially was exposed from a patient, it was easy to segregate and determine who's exposed. That was one thing I liked about our particular physical layout compared to a typical salon or spa where … it's just chairs in a large room. So, I felt like that was less risk and good for us. With the yoga studio we are fortunate to have a very big space, so there was no instance with anyone contracting through class. We could be very distant, and they could wear their mask and take their mask off and on as needed … [if they were having breathing issues]."

[5] **"The minute I came back people were wanting [my services].** On the spa side I didn't feel like our numbers really were super affected by the pandemic [once we reopened]. Actually, I felt like people needed that connection; they wanted one on one contact. They just wanted physical touch, and I felt like there was kind of a void there even though it wasn't maybe for that long of a time period in our area compared to some areas. I … had people texting me the whole time [we were shut down*], 'I would love to come in the minute you can come back.'*

So, thankfully that didn't affect us horribly once we were able to come back. And like I said, we did what we could during the shutdown. I had some money invested at the time, so I could survive the three months of being shut down thankfully. **But it was definitely a stressful time and none of us here have benefits."** All of us are women working solely on a cash basis. We can only pretty much bring in what we are doing with the time that we have with our clients. So, it definitely was challenging for the women here."

[6] We did not [take advantage of any loans] … in a small town word it gets around fast. I do all of my financial stuff locally and **I was very grateful for my local bankers** who were calling me saying, *'this is an awful situation. If you can't come up with the mortgage this month, you let us know.'* So, they were in contact the minute that the mandates were going into effect because they knew our situation. It's no secret in a small town. They know that we're face to face, and they were calling me. That was helpful at least not to have to pay the mortgage, but we still had utilities and just day-to-day functions of paying front desk and such things. **Eventually, we did take advantage of the Payroll Protection Program (PPP) for the front desk girls** because I do pay all them on an employee basis. So, that helped with them. I was able to do a couple rounds of PPP which wasn't a lot [of money], but it helped us … get through that time. **We used what we could. Unemployment and things that didn't really work for us, all being self-employed, … but we basically took advantage of what we could qualify for. Anyway, we made it through that.** What's been interesting to me actually now is seeing the kind of ripple effect with COVID. I recently saw an article in the New York Times which called opening up the *"beauty boom."* Right now, it's mid-June and I'm booked up until the 4th week of September, not even a 15-minute opening."

[7] **"I think there was a lot of stress on people last year, natural stress and just stress in general, maybe not seeing their loved ones and people losing people during the pandemic.** … Yes, we're physical in the beauty-oriented industry, **but I also feel like we get a lot of people that rely on [our services] for their mental health as well.** We've never been booked out this far, and it's not just me. I've got multiple providers in here, and we're all booked out super far just because everybody wants in. All these people who maybe started to see the stress from last year showing up in their face or their body or whatever or just their mental health. They're like, *'I need to go get a massage; I need to go to yoga; I need to get my face fixed;'* or whatever their issue."

[8] **There were more people cross transferring into other areas of our practice.** [For example], if they maybe came to me for skin, now all of a sudden, they were going to my nurse practitioner for Botox. There was a kind of ripple effect that, *'maybe I need to take more care of myself in other areas that I haven't explored before.'* It worked well for us because we get all that cross transfer and more people were realizing they weren't taking care of themselves, maybe whole body. So, now they want to try other things, maybe fix these other issues that they're dealing with. People who maybe had never been to the spa, never had a facial, never had massage in their life, all the sudden were like, *'wow, I have been neglecting my self-care. It is time for me to start taking better care of myself.'* So, now we have this influx of new clients coming in who traditionally have not even been doing things. **I feel maybe [the pandemic] just brought more awareness to like the whole self-care side of things that people were overlooking before**. They want to take more preventative care. They're like, *'I need to maybe stay up on or do a health assessment, see where my vitamin levels are, see where these things might be causing potential issues with my immunity or whatever that might be making more me more susceptible to things like this. Maybe they put on a bunch of weight and now, 'I have this heart issue that I need to address.'* These things are just good daily self-care. **We're not curing people, but [what we do] is making them more aware of what they're overlooking and shedding light on the areas of the body that they've just kind of pushed to the side where eventually they will snowball into a problem."**

[9] "I would say we didn't see a lot of difference with or without the vaccines in our [practice]. It wasn't pushed super hard here, like some areas. I didn't notice any difference in the spa one-on-one side. The only place that I did notice a difference was with the group fitness classes. I do a yoga class specifically for people over 50 on mobility and joint issues and things like that. **I definitely noticed that once that clientele got their vaccines, they just felt more comfortable coming back to class.** Some of those ladies and gentlemen I hadn't seen for six months. **In my more physical classes with a younger clientele, it didn't make any difference."**

[10] **"Whatever we needed to do, we would do.** Masks – of course got political – but I was like, *'here's the deal, I can't quarantine 180 kids. And the DHM* [Directed Health Measure] *says you're going to quarantine if you don't have a mask on.'* So, we weren't mask-required until we had positive cases in the building. Once we had positive

case in the building we were mask-required. And, that was just the reality of it all because no one person could dictate the instructional programming of another. … Now in complete honesty I am no dummy and **having a championship caliber football team helped push that along,** because when teams started dropping out and having to give up games and the playoffs, nothing makes you mask up in a community faster than the thought that **you don't want to be the person that messes it up for the Chanticleer football team.**

Our weight rooms were closed, and our coaching staff said, *'you need to stay healthy and you need to get up.*' And there were videos of kids lifting bikes, tires, and all these things. But I will tell you, when you talk about the community and the social change that came about, you know. There's always going to be a political side of it and there's always going to be the *'I want'* and the *'me.'* Never ever more than this past year was my administration team, and my behavior in the spotlight: our actions; our words. So, wherever I went – well after I was vaccinated – my mask was on. Because if I'm expecting it here, I'm going to do it here. But, at some of those early games where [fans were] like, *'why do we have to be masked? Why do we have to be outside? …* And, *'how are they going to handle it when people don't abide by what we need them to do?'* When we got to the playoffs, it was easy. Because the NSAA said, *'this will happen.'* But prior to that…

And there was just one individual – not quite a heckler – but one individual, and I knew people were watching?' And, it was basically, *'I need you to put your mask on or you need to remove yourself from the premises. These kids are worth it. … Would you like to come out with me right now and go to Coach Wells and this team and tell them that they're not worth it?'* And he put his mask on. And he had his mask on every time from there on, and I thanked him every time. And I said, *'thank you for letting our kids know that they're worth it.'* Because these kids had enough taken from them, that they did not need to lose any more. And when we look at mental health capacity, unless you go home to a home that's not a functional place unless you go home to a home that does not have a good environment for kids, you don't get it.

[11] **"I've lived all over the country. When we had the opportunity to move here, I was tired of living in … big cities.** And I thought, '*you know, this might be what my kids want.'* I sure didn't want them to grow up where I grew up. … Most of us weren't troubled kids. it's just the way it was back there. I wanted them to be safer. … I had one … business owner here tell me, *'it will take 10 years before people will accept you here.'* Yet now JJ says, **I wouldn't leave this place. I love it here. I do."**

[12] **"It's … [winning the state football championship] …what us old guys talk about.** That was a big deal that was a big deal for everybody. It's a pride that we not only have in those kids, but we get to relive our glory days. You know how we get better as we get older."

[13] **"We have been helping people around this Community, for a long time. Go back to the floods.** We had an idea from some listeners that *'maybe we've got to help some of these areas with* [drinking] *water.'* We had so much water donated we couldn't give it all away**. People here were buying water for places … up north that were hit really hard by the floods, worse than we were here.** This was difficult for us. I was going home cleaning out my house and running back here and trying to keep up with what was going on, because we were flooded too. But, it's that sense of… *'you're a pride community'*, again. **We don't want each other to fail.** We just don't want it to happen."

[14] "I was on the Chamber Board for a while. I'm not there anymore**. We trust our local politicians to a degree. By the time we get to Lincoln, we have less trust. And higher up from there it gets worse.**

[15] With Dan that doesn't surprise me. **He's been so involved, and not just in politics.** He led the post office for a long time here, and he's involved in other things just constantly. … **I don't know where he finds time to do most of what he does. And that's the great thing about a lot of people here. We have people that are ready to step up and help find solutions** instead of just pissing and moaning. Speaking specifically about the political response to the pandemic, JJ explains, **our [local] politicians and other people put their pride and prejudices behind them and did what needed to be done,** because we knew we couldn't we couldn't wait for the Federal Government to come in and do whatever it is federal government was going to do. Because, quite frankly, we don't see the benefits here."

[16] "I'm also the head volleyball coach – full disclosure. There was [an impact], honestly, I think there was. So as a team of coaches, in the summer – last year was my first year as head volleyball coach – we got together, and I

promise you, … we were in a heated conversation over getting those kids into the weight room. *'How are we going to do it? Do we spread them out?' S*o, there was such a dedication with that. Coach Wells knew that he had something special going into this year. I think that that was one of the things where **we were like, *'okay, how do we help these kids get back into something normal? They need it. They need to be physically active. They need to have a team. The town needs to have something to look forward to.'*** So, when we went into the fall, we were hard-nosed and, *'masks, you stay put.'* It was … [a mental health boost for the community] …, yes. So, I think that the Community rallying around those boys – and honestly all the sports – the whole year, it was always very much *'we have to make sure that this is what we're doing so that we can have this success because it's the only chance the seniors have.'* I don't know how many seniors they had [on the team] … but they had a lot of seniors. **So, it not only boiled down to, *'how do we rally around them as a community,'* but also, it was really fun to watch them do it for each other."**

[17] "But one of the concerns was after we get this all set up and we continue to work through it – we didn't know what's safe what's not safe, so – we ended up going all online, at the beginning. We just didn't know. Right? **In March we went all zoom with everyone, which was difficult, not only for our clients, but it was difficult for us as well.** The teachers talked about it too. *'We can't get to our kids. We can't see them. We can't make sure they're okay.'* When we're looking at trauma, we talk about things being unpredictable. So, **part of our job shifted from 'we're working on other issues' to, *'no, we're actually in it, and we're working on active trauma reactions that people might be having.'*** So, we're looking at things like unpredictability, people were immobilized. With Covid … [people were] missing connections with others, and that's huge as well.

Another thing a lot of people here talked about was safety. Jut that physical safety, *'we don't know what's safe. We have no idea.'* We know we can keep ourselves safe if we do these other things, but then we're working on other things like immobilization and other things like that. The other thing that a lot of people really didn't think about was that in trauma, we talk about not being able to maintain that sense of time. So, that was another issue for that we saw very early, but we were in it with them, you know. And that's very different. **Many times, we're talking about other things that we're not experiencing with our clients, but we were.** And so, by maintaining the connection, I think, was one of the ways that we helped to establish safety. And that was very early on. Like I said, we didn't know what was going on, but we had zoom, and I think that's just how I saw that it affected people here. I would say that it was very early, and I don't know that that people realized what was happening at the time."

[18] **"In the fall, we knew more. We were still doing the things … [we did earlier] … but also kind of like, *'oh what just happened? How long is this going to take?'* So, during that time as well we were getting clients that didn't necessarily want to start the zoom but now they're realizing that they couldn't wait any longer. A lot of changes came later because I think we were in what I call like *wartime mode* versus like *peacetime mode*. We were gradually coming out of that and I know that some of us were starting to prioritize and what I would refer to as like *triage* patients on, *'who do we need to see in person?'*** They have the options now. So, *'do we mask up? Clorox? Lysol? Do we do all of that? But, we still have to stay engaged.'* So, with the clients that were in person, we did a lot of screenings. We just basically tried to mimic the hospitals. We were seen as first responders so … we didn't have to stay home. We could still work, and so **we kind of just had to go person to person, case to case, '*who needs what?*'"**

[19] "…[O]f course nobody knew anything, and everybody thought, *'oh I'm going to die'* or whatever and of course there was no book. **There were no rules on what to do. We did whatever we could think of to keep things rolling.** We put together a group, and this is where some of the trust comes in. Dan elaborates providing a laundry list of things, large and small that they initiated, adapted or dispensed with.

We brought together the hospital administrator, the economic development director, the president of the chamber of commerce, the superintendent of the high school, and others and we all sat down – most of the time on zoom – trying to figure it out together. **What we came up with was*, 'we're gonna put information out there, just flood the community with information because people have no idea what's going on.'* We created a website with information.** People could go there and talk about what kind of resources were available for help like groceries, pharmacies, churches. *'How do you get to those things?'* That was one thing that went pretty good. I worked pretty close with the school Superintendent because we had a lot of stuff going on then. Then I thought,

'I'm gonna go to the radio station.' So, **I went to the radio station,** talked to Johnnie James over there and said, *'hey, can I come on the radio, not every morning, but every other day or so?'*

Each day I would bring a different person on. A banker on one day so businesses could talk about finances and what to do if you couldn't make your payments and talk to the accountants. … We had one of the deputy sheriffs come on who talked about what to do if your license plate has expired. *'Don't worry about it. You've got time. We're not going to, ticket people.'* … We brought the guy from the food pantry on to talk about what to do if you needed food because you lost their job or whatever. They were there to help. We brought doctors on, the doctor and the head of the clinic up here … to talk about general stuff. We had the utility superintendent talk about utilities and payments, and *'we aren't going to shut anybody off. You aren't going to lose electricity.'* The librarian came on one day to talk about kids and books. *'How you get the books checked out?' How do you bring them back?'* That sort of thing. It was all good. I'd ask questions, … and Johnnie … would chime in with some questions every now and then. We did that for a long time, trying through this process to create information**. I just wanted to keep people calm** and we did that. We did a lot of that."

[20] **"An important piece here is that it … gave us a wonderful distraction from reality.** That's what's wonderful about sports. It's a microcosm of society, and that gives us a distraction, but it also imparts a wonderful connection to self-improvement. To be a championship caliber football team, you have to go through a tremendous amount of self-transformation. I got to witness that with my children, specifically my oldest. He went through what I would call a personal transformation. The other thing for me is that I coached many of these boys growing up, and I got to watch some of these young men grow up over the course the last 13 years. For me to see close personal friends and their children and mine go through this bonding experience, that brought people together, and be sharpened on that anvil of self-improvement, that was a wonderful, wonderful experience for the community in terms of healing, in terms of togetherness, and in terms of our community having six months of doing the right thing, where we didn't have casualties because of COVID because people were adhering to sensible solutions when we were having mass gatherings … even if they were outside. It gave a lot of people that felt hopeless, something to look forward to each week. We had a really good football team that was going to go play some good football.

Each week we had an opportunity to look forward to something, in a time when if you paid attention to local, state, or national media every day was about how **many people were dying. Yep, every single day it was a headcount and that that was so grinding.** I mean it. It reminds me of head count when we were hearing about Baghdad and Afghanistan, or after 911. With glee the media talked about how many Taliban fighters we killed that day. It harkens back to Vietnam, and it's just disgusting. **So, it gave us a nice distraction. It became something most in town could agree on*. 'Argue about something else, but we have a football team.'*** We had a kicker that kicked a 58-yard field goal, set the state record. If you knew the kid that did that, you'd be nothing but proud of that kid because he exudes nothing but gentle kindness, professionalism and respect that a well-raised kid should project and not someone that has squandered their opportunity. So, **for us it was just one of those things that was a major bright spot. That was amazing!"**

[21] "I wonder if **everyone took some ownership. I saw a lot of people recognize that their actions affected someone else, and I like to see that consideration because the health of the team was important to play. I think that it helped us take ownership for our actions and how we affect others whether positive or negative.** I think people were so grateful just to be able to play. In March [2020] they didn't even get to do track. So, I think there was an element of gratefulness, and then consideration. Those are excellent qualities that help a community, and I saw that in those kids. That was fun. Isn't that refreshing! If COVID can help us realize that it's not all about us… It's about service. It's about growth. I don't think we're happy when it's all about us."

[22] "Misko's next door did something really creative. **They did T-shirt designs for as many businesses as wanted to participate. And then, you could order the T-shirts to support your fellow businesses.** And, how it worked, the T-shirts were 20 bucks and 10 bucks went to whichever business it was. That was a very creative thing that Thomas and Megan did to kind of you know rally support within the community."

[23] **"…with Megan and Thomas they had a mismatch with their expectations of what a retail business would be. I think they were pushing forward long after they weren't feeling it anymore,** and for the sake of their relationship they needed to do something different. … Much earlier Megan had shared with me they had decided to go

anyway. They had decided between the two of them that they were going to work very hard at the business being strong, so they could sell it. Their intent was to go. … I think it was more of a mismatch for her than it was for him. … So, they made a huge change. They moved to Colorado. Thomas is an insurance salesman now, totally different. And then for a period of time the plan was for Megan to stay home. Completely different than what they were doing here, and they felt very good about the decision."

[24] **"It was in part personality and in part that Thomas had already made up his mind that he was planning on leaving.** When he came to talk to me about his decision to move it wasn't a conversation or seeking advice on whether or not he should. It was him coming to me and telling me he was moving. A year or two before Covid hit he wanted to run for city council because our mayor was looking for some good leaders to come out and do that. I'll never forget this, he asked Dan [the mayor] the question – and I thought it was just a random conversation point at the time – *'if I'm not able to serve my full term would that be a problem?'* Dan said, *'no, I would appoint somebody in your stead if you weren't there.'* I think that by that time Thomas had made up his mind."

[25] "This is classic for the community**. This was a business that has been a foundation on our square. The [Loop Valley] Investment Club guys pretty much just let us do what we needed to do, and we kind of told them afterwards.** When I needed something signed, they came in and signed it. **But I think it is something we can all learn from, the importance of being really flexible and agile when we meet something we don't expect. I think the ones who felt the worst are probably Gaylord Boilesen and Bruce Slammers, the accountant, because they had mentored these kids [the owners] more than anybody.** And when Thomas kind of went off, I didn't ever see that coming. I mean, I love those kids. I encouraged him to come to our leadership session, just a little bit of a fee to attend the business blitz. I sent them over and they went. And so anyway, it was an emotional thing for us. I was apprehensive about selling to someone from out of town, but after I met these people [the new owners], they were all in. They want to be a part of this community. It was so fun when I called him and said, *'hey, I just bought a table for this Josh Hoyer concert at the end of our Nebraska Grown Arts festival,'* and they were so excited about that and brought their employees and they all sat together. **I think the Misko story has a lot of value."**

[26] [Thomas] ***"w*anted to close the retail part of** [the store] **… and we said, 'no'. You know, that was why we were involved in it, to keep the retail part open. We were fortunate to find somebody** [to take over the store]. The people that bought it were doing a lot of screen printing for us and were interested because we had … some product lines they wanted to use in their printing business. So that was the connection to tie the two together. **It just became a matter of sitting down to figure, *'how do we do it.'* Well, we had to be a little creative to get it financed, … to get it to change hands again. We ended up buying Thomas out 100%, and then we carried all the debt to get the** [new owners] **… to buy it.** We ended up financing the building to the new owners and basically restructured everything to get them started again."

[27] "That was the issue that started the whole thing. Because we said, *'no, we're not going to agree that you shut the retail down. You've got to put inventory back in there.*' [Thomas] was just kind of burned out I think. Let himself get to thinking that the pandemic was just going to last forever. … That's just kind of what happened. We knew he was unhappy when Bruce and I met with him**. We offered…** ***'do you want to get some stress counseling? Set you up to talk to somebody. We'll pay for it.' 'No', he says, 'it's just time for a change.'*** **We knew at that point he had made up his mind. We didn't want it to close. So, fortunately we found somebody that would agree to keep it open if we did certain things for [the new owner]."**

[28] **"You know I did a poor job, and I blame myself and Bruce for this because we thought we had done a better job of teaching him the financials.** Because all of a sudden, he's saying, *'you know, I'm making more money without retailing.'* And I said, *'well how are you making more money'.* Because he said, *'I paid you off … and I paid the investment club off.'* And I said, *'yeah, but you still had inventory to do it. You'll have nothing left to do it. You're not making any money.'* And he could never just get that through his head that when you reduce the inventory $100,000 and you don't put it back in there, pretty soon you just lock the door and you're done. You're not making money."

[29] "Joe took over from Gaylord as the investment club president, and both were key in the deal. Bruce Lamers, the accountant, was also very important in the whole thing. Joe stepped up. After the new owners bought in, **they said, *"my gosh, the roof leaks and it's going to cost us $20,000 or so to fix it."* The investment club came back in and said, *"hey, tell you what'* – because they were making monthly payments with nothing down on the building**

– *'we'll pay half of the roof repair up to $10,000.'* Then, the hot water heater didn't work, so Joe [HVAC specialist in addition to president of the investment club] personally put in $400-$500 and installed a hot water system to replace that heating system**. So, everyone was well vested in making sure that these people were treated right."**

[30] **"…that did help. It did.** And it kind of pushed a couple guys who were thinking about purchasing a ring. It gave them that extra incentive. I also ran an in-store special on jewelry on it. It kind of pushed them over the edge. They got an extra 10% off. They were not huge, but they were nice rings. One young man pacing with indecision and queried by his buddy, said he liked the ring and it wasn't the money, it was the word '*forever'*. [Ever the consummate proprietor Trese responded to him,] *'Every single gentleman that comes in here, that forever word is a big scary thing. Once you buy the ring it's all okay.'*

[31] "You know, **the one thing that we did notice, we probably had more people consciously shopping Ord.** And we did a lot of that through letting people go out and sell gift certificates. The stores all had some kind of promotion that if you buy a gift certificate, maybe you get a 10% discount. You know maybe if you buy a $100 you get a $100 worth of gift certificates. And then we give them 50 cents on the dollar on top of that. So, **people did come out and buy a lot of gift certificates. And that helped people become more conscious about shopping in Ord I think."**

[32] "Kristina Foth and the Economic Development Board … dedicated $25,000 that. … They would match on a one-to-two basis if people would buy gift certificates during the pandemic. So, **I know my wife went around town and bought a bunch of gift certificates and then the ED board kicked in the extra money so that was a way that Ord helped business people."**

[33] **"We did use** [the gift certificate program] **during the shutdown which was super helpful because I could have clients [via zoom] and they would just Venmo me.** Then we could turn that into the Chamber office and they would use the gift card program. We're still doing some of those services [paid for with gift certificates] and that's the critique of it because we probably needed the income more at that time. On the other hand, we do a lot of gift card business here normally, so we're pretty used to that kind of *'on account'* situation and we actually let clients have accounts here. I know in the city maybe they wouldn't do that, but here we have clients on a full care program. They might have $2000 on their account just waiting for whatever they want to do for the year. So, we do kind of offer that anyway and we're pretty used to that set up."

[34] **"…everybody in [Utopia] is self-employed, so not everyone qualified. You know they kind of had to meet specific criteria. I did qualify I think one of the other girls did too.** … Initially we would not have qualified because it required so many employees but then they changed that partway through. I have the employees the front desk girls – I think at the time maybe had three to five of them up there I can't remember how many for sure, but I had enough of them that I qualified for it."

[35] **"I am extremely grateful that we lived here when the last year and a half happened.** I have to fully admit that I did not lose any family members or any close personal friends to COVID-19, so I feel very fortunate in that regard. **I also feel very fortunate that by living here I got to have what I felt was a pretty full 18 months with some difficult months.** I listened to some people talk about how they experienced the last year and a half, and I just grieve for them. I understand, for some people, how losing a loved one is very much Political. I get that 100%. **… I find it barbaric that people can't understand that loss of life, and that something like that would make someone feel Political like it was last year. But, for me I felt like I had a very rich life. I'll be just very different."**

[36] **"I think when you ask, *'why our community is where it is?'* it's because we have – particularly in some individuals – the willingness to support and mentor and help grow the community even if it's not directly impacting their own business or bottom line. … If you dig deeper into why that is the case, it goes back to culture. One thing for our community specifically, is the collaboration and partnerships. The strength of those connections and maintaining those connections is key because it takes a village to grow a community.** One person, or one staff, or one economic development board is not going to accomplish everything that needs to be done to assure our community is sustainable. **So, those collaborations and partnerships are key.** … It goes back to as we engage people to be a part of this work – in whatever capacity they serve whether its paid staff, or city staff, or county supervisors, or volunteers – ensuring that we are acknowledging and allowing them to use their strengths, because that creates ownership. If we can continue to do that with the next generation, I see that as a piece of sustainability.

The transition in leadership is something that keeps me up at night. We have such great community leaders that have such a creative way of thinking, have established rapport and influence, and have wisdom because of their experience. I just want to bottle all that up and be able to share it with the next generation. … **Part of the work of an economic development director is how we create those interactions during the work that we're doing so that we're just naturally create that next generation of leaders or give them the tools to put in their toolbelts to support them when they embark on their own community journey.** I have found a lot of value in taking what you learn from one community and applying it to another. I think there are a number of great systems on a statewide basis and even beyond that. **It goes back to creating an ecosystem on a larger basis on not just in the community."**

[37] **"I keep saying*, 'we've got to continue to work on housing because to bring people to town, we don't have houses for them. We've got people who want to come to this area, because they like the area. But we've got to get some affordable housing for these people.*** *We've got to get some people that can pay the five or six hundred dollars a month rent. We got to figure out how to do this: how we get the housing, how we get the apartments, duplexes or something. Something so that we can get people to come to do the work.'* ... So, **that's one of the areas that we're really struggling and trying to work on at the [Economic Development Board] right now, housing and workforce development."**

[38] "We've always had two lunches where kids' trays would be touching, sitting beside one another eating while we were getting them in there. **This year we set up an outdoor lunch room** where we're able to seat third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade. But **while we were doing that we began to understand that we can cycle three lunches through our indoor facility.** The older kids a tic faster than the younger kids, but it's doable without them sitting on top of each other. **We stayed with one cohort eating at a time.** Then they leave, we clean the tables and bring the next cohort in as opposed to maybe fifth, sixth, and first – or whatever – eating at the same time**. So, those kinds of things will continue because we had to get smarter. So, Covid made us think outside of the box and it wasn't rocket science, but, *'yeah it's always been done that way.'***

"Here at Ord **for dismissal it's unique in the fact that we don't like our kids walking across L street, that's the main highway.** And so, we had to have seven buses come up here and we would literally have the buses packed three to a seat to transport kids across L street, even if they just lived in town because we didn't want them walking. We changed that by having our walkers leave early: they dismiss from the classroom at 3:00, line up [with two] teachers on each side of the building. **When the last bus comes by out here, they start walking, and we have teachers that walk them to L street** – six or seven blocks away. And even on the coldest of the cold days, was a slug of kids that would still walk home and there were teachers wanting to walk with the kids. **We could have been doing that instead of cramming so many kids on buses. We're gonna keep doing that."**

[39] **"Our staff is very, very friendly. Our staff is compassionate. They're kind. They're honest, and they were just as scared as the community members. But by gosh, we're going to love our kids through it.** We were going to have a drive by parade where we had signs for our kids, and get our families out driving around. It was freezing cold that day, but we did it because we loved our kids…. And that stems from the leadership of my two principals, Mr Smith and Mr Snyder. They're very student oriented, cultural type leaders."

[40] I heard that from many parents: *'My kids have everything that they need, so they're going to be fine. I see him struggling, but we're going for bike rides, we're getting up, we're having family talks. Paychecks are still coming in. We're okay. But it's hard.'* But what about these kids who aren't? And **that is another thing that I think is unique about our Community. … We don't have as many formalized resources as what an urban area does. But our informal resources are amazing. The call goes out, and the help is there.** "And so, when I had families coming to me saying, *'we don't need the free lunch.'* [I would say], *'please take the lunch, the reimbursement rate is wonderful, and it allows us to help out and continue growing these programs. And so, you in turn are helping us help others.'*

[41] **Where else in our community are we tasked with having 700 people every day? 600 students and 100 staff report to our building every day. We need to keep them safe.** We need to ensure their education, which is our sole purpose of being here. We need to protect their mental health and provide services. … Schools forty years ago did not even have a role in that, and, that's probably one of our

greatest roles now. [The school system**] is one of one of the beating hearts of our Community;** we have multiple. But I do feel that way about schools. … And by and large, the community of Ord is what was able to make the school successful because of the way that [the community] trusted the school. And, we were very transparent too. … **When looking at that economic development – you've probably heard it when there's talk about consolidation – *'if the school goes, the town goes!'"***

[42] "I would go to the paper every day. I would go online and listen to the morning shows but so would my providers, and so would in my staff. They would say, *'Did you hear about this?* or *'Did you see this?'*, or *'What do you do about that?'.* One of my nurses is a nurse educator as well. She gave a presentation to some of the kids at the high school a couple years ago – this was pre-Covid – and she talked about the importance of filtering information and getting information from reliable sources. And I think it was about vaping. *'How do you know about vaping?' Go to CDC, the Centers for Disease Control, and don't just Google something because you can find you can find whatever answer you're looking for. But that doesn't mean it's a reliable source. So, look at who's saying that. Look at who is promoting the information and then ask, are they a reliable source and what facts do they have to back that up.'* **I think that's probably why we did so well. It was because we had so many people that were looking at so many different sources and truly trying to [distinguish] the facts from the fiction and from the emotion. And then, we were small enough that we made decisions together, based on the information that we had, the best information that we thought we had. And, if we needed to reverse that the next day, we did. I think that's probably why we were so successful.**

[43] **We had the whole gamut. We had some that were isolating themselves in their houses and didn't go anywhere**, and they had they had someone get their groceries for them, **especially if they were in a vulnerable demographic. Then there were some that threw all caution to the wind.** They were at the restaurant. They were having coffee with their friends. No masks, no physical distancing whatsoever and they couldn't have cared less. Their attitude was, '*what happens, happens, and if I get it* [COVID-19]*, that's my choice.'* **What I tried to tell them was, *'but then you're exposing and putting my employees at risk and jeopardizing their lives and their families.'* That was hard because they didn't think they were being selfish. But they really were being selfish, because if they did get sick, it was going to impact, a lot of coworkers and anybody else that they were exposed to. Yes, that that was frustrating. But you know what, we're human and we get to make our own decisions, whether they're good or bad. So, I have to respect that.** I don't like mandates, any more than anyone else does. **What we tried to do for people who were more free-spirited than the rest was we just tried to educate them as best we could."**

[44] **"There are some professions and some professionals that are still in it,** and many times with any sort of trauma what we'll see is they go into – your brain goes into – survival mode, no matter what. As long as they're … in it, then **sometimes it's hard for them to see that they need the help too.** Once they step back out of the scene and out of the situation, then we're seeing, *'Oh, my goodness, what I just went through was the definition of trauma. What we just went through that's the definition… you're in it'.* You're experiencing it. Some of the senators and the legislators and stuff like that … I think they're going to have issues. I think they're going to have problems as well. We've had some recent suicides; people have died by suicide recently that are in the legislature. And so, **we're going to see a lot of those professionals that are going to need help, and I hope they can get it. I mean [people are] just being overwhelmed and exhausted all the time, and people are not getting enough sleep. Yes, they're doing great work and they're doing what they need to do, but at some point, they don't have anything left to give."**

[45] **"I told the city clerk, this is what we're going to do. We're going to pretend it's going to be open. We're going to train our life guards. We're going to find something for them to do even if we can't open the pool. Those kids, they need to get out there.** I was … close with the school superintendent and they had cancelled a summer lunch program because some elderly volunteers didn't want to be exposed to COVID. The high school set up this brown bag lunch and I told them, *'you can use our lifeguards to package those lunches and hand them out until – if – we get to open the pool.'* So, we did that, and the lifeguards were happy. **We even had some of them work in the park outside.** And as Dan points out, this fungible approach to staffing didn't stop with the pool and applies to situations other than the pandemic. You just got to keep that in mind if you come up with something or something happens, and you have some extra people. *'Let's send them over here.'*

[46] **"I really appreciated the City Council opening the pool.** I know there was a discussion that they weren't going to. I appreciated that they took a common-sense approach, and it wasn't at full capacity. **I appreciated those types of things to let the summer go on as normal as possible.** And I know the school board – whether people agreed with it or not – **the Superintendent had the kids all wear masks. The schools never shut down one day. They allowed kids to be in school because they saw that kids not being in school was not a good thing. They did what they needed to in order keep it moving without shutting down. I really appreciated their common sense.** Jeana adds with a touch of humor, I liked a lot of things about the pandemic; public restrooms were so much nicer to use."

[47] **"The fallout from all of this is that, even though we weathered that storm and even though the pandemic is still very real – the numbers have decreased significantly here in our community and we're really glad – but the burnout and the anxiety is still there. I've seen some people that have had a serious reaction to a circumstance that** I would say, *'well wow, where did where did that come from?'* And it wasn't that particular circumstance. It **was the buildup of everything that had happened over the last 12 to 18 months. This was just like the final straw. It's like they just can't take it anymore.**

We received a letter from our dietary consultant company. They requested termination of their services to us. In just the last couple of weeks, they had so many resignations from their staff to take jobs in non-healthcare related industries that they can no longer provide the service to us. [Many] of these dieticians can [work] … via zoom; they don't even have to come on site. But that additional challenge and additional stress really took its toll on many of the individuals … in the healthcare field as well as the teaching field. The educational system and healthcare system are such critical businesses. They're vital to our communities, but we face so many challenges that take an emotional toll on all of our employees, even in the best of times. We deal with family circumstances, we deal with life and death, and so, when you add something like a pandemic, over and above that, it does create a lot of anxiety and – what do I want to say – an unsettled atmosphere. I think we're starting to see more and more normalcy which has really helped us mentally. The summer, of course, is always a good time for employees overall. Just to get outside and travel has been so important. Just to get away. We just need to get away sometimes. So**, it's been quite a roller coaster. I think we've weathered the storm overall pretty good, but we're still watching our employees and their mental fitness, their mental health, and trying to be aware of subtle changes that we might see. To offer our EP program or offer additional time off if they need it. Just to be aware of that *'you might just need to take a step back'* from time and come back healthier and happier."**

[48] "We went into 2020 pretty optimistic. I had a lot of events on my calendar; it was shaping up to be the best year we had had, and I was feeling really good about that. Then about February or March about every time my phone rang somebody was canceling one of those things. … **I very much had the luxury of hunkering down and going a different direction. I never quit business, but no one was gathering. It was a non-issue. … The way I dealt with that was I'm a registered nurse as well, so I went back to work in an occupation that I was fairly familiar with.** Previously, I had worked in the acute care in the emergency room in Ord. However, I wanted something that I could easily step into, so I could easily step back out. I worked for every bit of a year at the Burwell Nursing Home. I kind of mused that if I knew I was going to have to do it for as long as I did, I might have chosen something different. … My whole experience there was flavored with COVID-19. Working at the nursing home, I was able to meet all my financial obligations. That wasn't an issue at all."

[49] **"I would also add that. The sense of, *'we can do it.'*** Like, *'this is something that we've tackled before. We can do this. It isn't going to touch me. I know what I need to do. What I've always done has always worked.'* So, there's a little bit of that too. You know *'If I don't change then I'll be fine, because I've always been fine.'* And so, then there come things that we've never had to talk about before, things that we've never had to go through before. And the isolation and the disconnection and *'oh my gosh, my kids are actually not doing well with this. And I don't know how else to help them, because what has worked in the past isn't even accessible to me. So, what the heck do I do now.'* **I think that it had an effect early and then like you said we're seeing a different [impact in] the second and third wave where it's like, *'okay, now we're in. We're halfway through the year and my kids are… we're just trying to keep them in school.'*** We were very lucky here. My daughter went to kindergarten with

a mask and honestly, she got home, and she would barely take it off because she didn't even realize that it was still on. So, we're trying to normalize it for her. But then you have kids that aren't that lucky when they go home."

[50] "Supervision is something we always have access to – weekly supervision for those of us who want it. But**, honestly, we continued our own therapy work and … some of those things to reduce trauma. So, not only did I do my own therapy work, we also have a supervisor that I can meet with if something is extra difficult. We have a staff of peers, that we can bounce ideas off of.** I also went hardcore on exercise, eating right, making sure that we were scheduling and making sure that we're having those human connections. We had game nights. We had online game nights. One of my favorite parts of quarantine was we tried, a new meal once a week and the kids got to decide, and then we rated them. Just some of my own advice honestly."

[51] **Personally, had I not had my horses and ranch on the side it would have been difficult. My great grandpa started our ranch in the forties. We've been around for a long time. He was always big on, *'you gotta always have both horses and cattle.*** *When those markets fluctuate you need to have that back up.* ***You need to have that diversification.'*** **And, I'm the same way.** I play a little in the stock market. I play a little in the horse market. I play a little in the spa deal [Utopia]. I've got a lot of different streams, and there's times when maybe you pull a little more from one stream than from the other stream for needed capital. I had a good support system**. I felt like the ranch deal went well during the pandemic.** So, [the pandemic] worked okay in my circumstance. It's not like I had to sell the [Utopia] building off or close the doors because I couldn't come up with the capital to make it through the pandemic. **… [W]hen you're a business owner … and you have those multiple streams, T**here's going to be changes in the economy, there's going to be changes in situation where you're gonna have to make those choices. *'Where do I want to put my time? How can I allocate more time to the things that are making me the best return on my investment?'*

[52] **"Now actually a whole new situation has arisen from this because I have actually listed this building for potential investment because I am too busy to allocate time to that [Utopia] and the ranch**. What's happening now is time is my most limiting factor. I don't have two of me unfortunately to run a whole ranching operation and a spa operation. So, for me at this time, 'well, I don't have an attachment to the property.' I could have a potential investor or a potential provider that wants to get out of the city and have a slower pace of life and maybe see patients out of here and invest in the property. … That frees up one more day a week that I can be seeing clients, not having to do accounting, property management, and things like that. **That could definitely be outsourced. I've had to make personal adjustments based on my available time and where I want to put my time. I had to choose to let a few things go. … I've decided skin and yoga are my specialties. I've let a few other licenses go because I don't have the time to even accommodate those patients."**

[53] **"I had a really great teacher. She was sort of a physical therapist-yogi. That was her style and with my spinal injury that's how I got into yoga. I gravitated toward that side, the rehabilitation side. She told me,** *'you don't know if that person just lost her spouse. You don't know if that person is coming off a hip replacement.* ***Everyone in this room is in here for a different reason. So, you don't want to project your reason for being here.*** *You don't know if it's the aerobic side, the rehab side, or the mental side. So, you just have to make it more like you are leading them into exploring why they are in your class.'* So, keeping it more open, broader is just going to benefit more of them, not assuming that it's the aerobics, the meditation, or why ever they're in here."

[54] **"I'm a member of the VCCF and they're like a pulse on the community. When [the pandemic] happened, they sought to encourage nurses and people that are care givers. They created thank you baskets. They did things to say, *'hey, we see you. We see what you're doing and the hours you're working, and we appreciate you beyond what words can say.'*** I would say from what I saw, VCCF was great. They were there helping people with projects. The historical society needed roofing help. There were always people who would come to them and say, *'we're hurting right now. We just need a boost here.'* Based on the guidelines, they were able to insert finances where people were hurting. That was huge. That is a community organization where people give. It goes to this fund and then it's distributed throughout the community to help**. I noticed that was huge.**"

[55] [Both situations] **"…created a stronger sense of community and togetherness, because people were going through a shared experience and shared hardship.** I have a friend who … said, *'at some point in time we're going to look back and we're going to miss some of the things in COVID.'* I think that's very true! It created some bond because we did not have to physically separate here at the brewery and chose [our circle]. I noticed, people were

choosing their little circles, and everybody stayed within that little circle. It was to prevent that circle from becoming infected. … We basically turned inward, and we rallied around each other. We supported each other and oftentimes were the only social outlets. We had each other. On occasion we got together outside around the campfire and stayed socially distant. **It really created a sense of camaraderie that we were one.** There's a sign that was posted all over town that, *'we're all in this together.'* I certainly felt like that. For the first three months of COVID [that seemed to be the case everywhere.] **Then, as we started moving into the new reality, I think a lot of people jumped off that ship and they were in it for themselves. That did not happen here."**

[56] **"We took some 840 money and basically allowed them to sell some gift certificates. And we matched those gift certificates to the tune of 50 cents for every dollar they put out. What people bought gave the store another 50 cents. And that kind of helped the … nonessential uptown businesses** - we didn't go to the grocery store or places like that which were open all the time. **We were looking for the smaller businesses that didn't do too well.**

You know, the one thing that we did notice, we probably had more people consciously shopping in Ord. And we did a lot of that through letting a lot of people go out and sell gift certificates. And the stores all had some kind of promotion that if you buy a gift certificate, maybe you get a 10% discount. You know maybe if you buy a $100 you get a $100 worth of gift certificates. And then we give them 50 cents on the dollar on top of that. **So, people did come out and buy a lot of gift certificates. And that helped people become more conscious about shopping in Ord."**

[57] **"One of the shifts in leadership on the social emotional side was, *'how are you doing? How's your family?'* Just to take some of the pressure off of employees. Just to take some of the pressure off peers even. I think that that if you were able to do that and connect, that was helpful because of the human connection. But also, just not being alone in trauma. You can survive so much if you don't feel alone. So, I think that that's one of the things that has been helpful for those people who have reached out for mental health services. For a mentor or a caregiver, we're talking about a population that has the skills to do that. There're others out there that don't. They have struggled, and domestic violence rates are increasing.** There's a whole realm of other things out there, and **I think that one of the things that was helpful was just communicating with other providers as well.** Here we do a good job of that and I think that's helpful."

[58] "I love to hear what's going on with their kids. I love to hear about their kids or their grandkids or the baseball games or the graduations. I love to hear the personal things about my employees. That helps me understand them, and I'm genuinely interested. I mean **I'm genuinely interested because they live in our Community and they're part of our sports teams and they're just part of the people that we take care of. So yes, in turn, they take care of me. It's by sharing that information with me, by trusting me enough to share those stories, to me that's them taking care of me. That shows that they trust me, and I so appreciate that. I really, really appreciate that.**

Family and community have been the core values, the core success of the whole community here. The sense of family and the family relationships, the family dynamics, the overall trust that we have, and the desire to take care of our families is key. That's why the Community voted for a new hospital and passed the bond issue in 2008 to build the new hospital. That's why just right on the heels of that, they voted for another bond issue to renovate the school. That's huge.

And, the farm economy was okay at the time, but the farm economy's like this. [Here Nancy makes a sine wave with her hand.] That's where a lot of the taxes come from here, the property taxes. This is a heavy burden on our farmers, and we understand that. So, we have tried our very best from a financial standpoint to remain solid, so that we wouldn't have to burden our families and our farmers. But **the farmers and the families, they support us, and so we try to in turn support them. On a personal note, I am here to take care of my employee family, and by taking care of my employee family they're taking care of my family, my biological family** – I mean my parents my cousin's my…. My kids don't live here anymore, but my nieces and nephews use the school system and the health care system. **I think it's really, really important that we all take care of each other, and I think that's why we are so successful in the Midwest, I mean truly. And I think in Ord it has just been a real key part [of our success]. Don't get me wrong, we have our challenges, and we have our disagreements. But it's nice to see that we've weathered so many of those and we've become stronger because of all that."**

[59] **"They're hands on with these kids. I had three kids graduate from here.** Two of my kids are now teaching. What they learned here, I couldn't have learned where I went to school back in the 70s in Ohio. The teachers here are very… again, their hands on. **They're caring. They don't want to see kids fail.** I don't remember ever a high school – till I came to this area – that's putting so many students in college and how many graduating college students there are from around here."

[60] **"I think for us it instilled a belief that government can work sometimes, and government does work, sometimes. I think government works, especially well when there are crises.** … I was old enough to witness [9/11] as a college student. I watched that, and I remember the response to 9/11. I remember a response to a number of things that have happened in this country over the years, and it's oftentimes at crises where it definitely works well. I also **think it put a lot of trust in small operators like Scratchtown to spend those monies wisely. … 97% of the user base in my mind went out and used those funds exactly like they were supposed to do. They kept storefronts open. They kept people on payroll. They invested in things that made those businesses more resilient.** That's where we [Scratchtown] are sticking the monies that we've received, into things that make us a more resilient business so that we don't have to debt-finance changes that we were planning on making anyways.

I'm very transparent about this, because it's all public record. Not only did we get two rounds of PPP, we got two rounds of business stabilization grants (SBC). We also got a USDA rural energy partnership program grant that just happened to hit fortuitously during the pandemic. [This] was a grant that I had written two years prior for the solar installation we put on the top of our brewery in 2019. We went through the funding cycle, a couple of times before we hit on that. We were very fortunate to hit on that right the middle of the pandemic. It's [all] going to make us a much better business. **In terms of propping up and keeping businesses open in America, especially in and at-risk places like rural communities, it was to me a wise investment strategy by our government."**

[61] **"…something else we did as mayor and the economic development board** because we had all these loans out there. The economic development director and I met one day thinking, *'what do we do? What do we do?'* So, **we deferred the payments on those loans for three months, basically we just added it onto the end of their** loan because a lot of businesses lost money through COVID. If they didn't have enough money to make a payment, they didn't have to worry about it…. They still had to pay, it was just adding more months onto their loan. **That was one thing we could do for them. I don't know what else the city could have done for the businesses."**

[62] **"I feel like in Ord we are very progressive minded. My business is very progressive minded.** I feel like for our area we're maybe a little bit different, maybe a little weird. And, that's okay because we gotta have different strokes for different folks. But, I'm also a well-established ranching family, so there's that kind of stability where, *'it's okay even though it's a little weird.'* **I do feel like we're going to have to bridge some of those gaps because we are going to get more different people, more different types of people. I don't feel like that's a bad thing.** I know some people don't like change, but change is okay. Like I said, *'it's just ebb and flow. That's the way life goes.'* And **if that's where our job pool is going, that's where I'm going to pull from."**

[63] **"I feel like we are pretty fortunate here. I feel like our school is pretty open. We get a lot of foreigners that come work for us at the ranch.** We do because actually we are the last family owned ranch in the country of our scale – a big ranch and that. We get people from all over. We're pretty well known – the Pitt's ranch. We've had families from Israel, Australia, Germany, all over. And, **when they come here and they have kids, I say, *'go to Ord.'* … I don't send them to other towns in the area**. When I came back here we had an Israeli family that didn't speak any English. I brought them in in the summer, helped translate … at the school, and [the school] came up with a plan where we could help them learn English and get them into the education system. The school was like, '*we would love to have them here.'* It's just more kids and more money for the school and they're very receptive to that. Not that every school would be that, but **I felt that Ord would be very receptive.**"

[64] **"For the most part, there was faith in our public health department. Just a little bit south to us in the central health department there wasn't a lot of faith. And, that was creating some conflicts and misinformation, and it wasn't very nice.** We have a very large health department. It's very rural and it covers nine counties so what's happening in Greeley is not the same what's happening here or what's happening in Broken Bow, in Arnold, in Callaway**. But it was also almost like the canary in the coal mine. '*If it happens there, it can happen here. So, what are we going to do?*'** And, you hate to capitalize on other people's misfortune that way, but the very first week of school Broken Bow had to shut down. And, they were not mask-mandated, because none of us were at

that time. We were just like, *'oh, let's just see how it goes.'* But, I was like, *'we're not starting school to stop it four days in. We're not. We can't. I cannot do that… My mental health cannot take that. I cannot go back.'* So, we were – like I said not to capitalize on others' misfortunes – but **that's part of the story process. If you can't learn from what happened in other places, how are you going to reflect on what's best practice for you and your community?** And so, some of those things really played in our favor."

[65] **"In my mind I was thinking there are advantages to being a small town, there are also disadvantages to *'everybody knows your situation there's no point in trying to hide anything cause everybody's going to know. … Everybody knows we are shut down.'* Are we going to come back and just be like, *'oh we're dying out? No. We're going to come back and have double* [the business] *every year that we did in 2019.'*** We were in the top 25% of revenue for all spa's in the country according to *Mind Body Booker* which is one of the main booking platforms for the United States and across the world. That's pretty good for a little town like this. I said '*we're going to come back, and this is going to be our biggest year yet*' because we actually are growing during this process versus just dying out. **That was a goal of mine."**

[66] "Because **kids can handle the truth very well and know when you're trying to buffalo them a little bit. So, I think just honesty and love and trust. And the kids in our Community trusted us which I think, made it easier for our parents to trust us. I've been here 10 years. I've got a pretty good relationship with most all of my parents, and I feel like they know that their child will be treated as if he or she is my child and [that we are] going to make the best decisions that we can based on love and not fear.** [We] agreed with some things that we needed to do, but also as a professional educator I know that they weren't always best for education but were the best for safety. And **safety had to trump everything else as we were trying to make decisions** on, *'how are we going to keep our kids in school, all day every day all year long?'* So, **it's a lot of safety and a lot of love because kids and adults still need to know that they're safe and they need to know that they're loved before they can learn before we can teach.** And I think that I've got a resilient group of teachers that put that in the forefront and knew that we needed to conquer those obstacles before we [could] start doing academics."

[67] **"Yeah. There was hope. There was kind of a light at the end of the tunnel, and it gave people choices….** When I'm talking with leadership, I always talk about there's a wartime general and a peacetime general. And when you're in that war time general mode you're listening to instructions all the time. You're being told exactly how to do things all the time. There is not a lot of flexibility. And man, **we have a lot of flexibility here, most of the time**, because we are isolated. My kids can walk to the park and walk back mostly by themselves. They can go around the block on a bike and if they don't come around I can call my neighbor and say, *'hey, are they over there?'* They have that freedom, so our entire population was used to having that freedom. **When that freedom was taken away, people felt robbed. So, I think that, being able to move into*, 'there's a vaccine or lessening restrictions. Yes, you can go see your family in nursing homes. You can go see your elderly grandparents. You can go do that and know you'll be a little bit safer.'* That was very helpful**, especially around the holidays. I mean most of us are probably pretty traditional, but at the same time, **I would say that it's still just that human connection."**

[68] **"I think the two words that come to mind mostly – just to summarize – are willingness and curiosity. I say that because every day you got to have the courage and the willingness to show up. You notice, if someone is doing something that may look a little bit better than how you're doing it, but you have to have curiosity and you have to have the courage to go say, *'hey, what's she doing? Can you teach me how to do that?'*** I think that's how we that's how we started having this location [the Wellness Center] at Ord. I said, *'we can we make this work.'* And it was a yes. You don't know until you ask the last question. I think that **when it comes to mental health, it's having the courage to step up and do it. And not being fearful to do it. I think that's integrated in a way that we don't even realize. We use it in our school. We use it with our elementary students. We use with our high school students. We use it in our academics. We use it in drama and swing choir, and we use it in volleyball and basketball and track. It's just all about people. People!"**

[69] **"I do see it. My senior management team is young. I'm the oldest. I'm by far the oldest. They've got great ideas. They get the job done every single day. I never have to worry about them. I know that truly if I am gone in an hour, this place will continue to hum. It will. They are good. We have a good strong board. We have young people on our board. We have a good mix on our board, so this hospital's in great shape for years to come.**

At a community level, I see people that are involved in the Valley County Community Foundation, and I see the young energy there. I see young people on boards, and I see a mix. It's not just young. It's not just old. It's a mix, a mixture of age, experience and background. I think that we have done [a good job]. I mean, some people may disagree, but I think that's just a personal thing like they didn't get asked or something like sour grapes for some reason. But objectively, if you look at the boards of the successful organizations around here they are a mixture of age and talent. **That to me is the reason this place will continue to succeed. It goes to diversity.** Whether it's male, female, transgender, black, white, purple, orange, it doesn't matter. **If you can do the job and you're successful and work well together, being a team player is just key. The more that we understand one another and accept one another and value their contributions that's how we are successful."**

[70] **"If you want to look at it cosmically, it probably is true is that, *'nothing matters and we're all gonna die.'*** I'm … acutely aware that it doesn't matter how hard you work. It doesn't matter how good that you are at your job, or your trade, or your skill. **There are circumstances that may still explode or implode or destroy all of your dreams, all of your hopes, all the things that you hold dear. But, you should still do it anyways. There is something righteous about the work. There is something righteous about the Karma that you put out into the universe. It's just a greater acceptance of '*not being in control and thinking that I have things figured out.'* I've come to the realization as most people do that, '*the older they get the less they know.'* And the older I get the less in control I am.** I think that's a reason why some of the elderly I know just don't give a heck. They went through it just like I did, and it's that learning process that makes us better people.

But, '*what am I?'* I would say that I am someone that will have a great story to tell his grandchildren someday, I hope. And, that the hard work is important, even if you lose it all because you're never going to have any regret over building something like we built here – *even if the chances of a pandemic impacts your industry more than another and self-selects it for complete obsolescence, it is its own reward, especially in something you find meaningful.'* I had a conversation one time with a good friend of mine, Kyle, about *'what if this is all a futile. Our efforts in rural community building are just futile because they're still going to go the way of the dodo anyways because of the way the scale of the farm economies is going.'* We had that conversation one time and I likened it to the fight that Aragorn and the Lord of the Rings had against Sauron. **You're expecting that it may not work, but you still do it anyways. That's kind of how I feel it now, especially about the last 18 months. There is righteousness in what we do. There is value in what we do, even if it doesn't work long term. I would much rather try to row upstream then go with the flow because I went with the flow and I was super unhappy. There is happiness to be found in struggle, and I think that's another lesson that I learned very acutely this last year. There is happiness in struggle."**

[71] **"…ripple effect. I felt like we were getting more clients here because other places we're still shut down. And, women are going to go wherever they can because they are not going to have three-inch roots and janky nails. They will drive all the way to Ord, Nebraska if we're the only ones open. … There were some positive things I think about us being more rural versus more city because a lot of the city's spa's and spots really struggled** – really struggled – just because they were shut down a lot longer than us. And, they lost clients because they would just go out of the area. They didn't want to have to deal with the masks [and restrictions in the city] … if they could go to Ord, Nebraska. **The lake traffic we had during the pandemic was just insane. People just wanted to come up here and go camping because they wanted to get out of the cities. So, those clients stop here. They stop in town.** They use Scratchtown. They use the gas stations. I mean those things were actually positive for us. **It felt like we had a ripple effect from that, it definitely … brought in some new clients from outside our demographic, which was nice."**

[72] "I'm not the best marketer or advertiser. We're kind of a hidden gem, so to speak. I'm not from the generation where that comes naturally to me. I have to learn how to even just make a post. … With COVID and not being able to be here, **I had to learn how to live-stream and teach virtually. I did whole virtual platforms. Now if I teach a yoga class, I can offer it nationwide.** I have people practice with me from Kansas, Illinois, South Dakota, just all over the place because they're horse people that had injuries. They are like, *'now I can take a class with you because you have virtual access.'* So even though I'm teaching a class to ten students in Ord Nebraska, I might have twenty people around the country doing that class with us. **That's increased our revenue stream.** That's $10 a person a class. That's been a positive that came out of the pandemic. **I had to get over my attachment or fear of teaching to a larger, broader audience."**

[73] "You can't see what those people [on zoom] are doing, but you're making mental notes. It was challenging to learn to teach in that manner. I've helped a lot of yoga teachers across the country in my forms and they say, '*oh gosh, how do I teach like this. I'm so different.'* **I'm a real hands-on teacher. I had to get to where I used more verbal cues because I couldn't touch people. I felt like it probably did change somewhat the way yoga was being taught. But, it's better than nothing. We just had to do what we had to do. And now, maybe we have a larger audience and maybe we've reach people we couldn't have reached before."**

[74] **"In the summer it was kind of shell shock, but we said, *'we want to just keep going.'* And, we kept going back *to 'what do we want to see?'* We were just honest with our team.** We said, *'here is where we are at. Here is where we want to be. And, we see that you are all a part of this.'* They all took it to heart, and just gathered around us. **We said, *'we want to focus on culture.*** *Who are we, and who do we need to be to come out of this well and hit all the opportunities that are going to come to us in the next year?'* And then we talked about*, 'what are we going to do to shore up our projects, so that they are profitable.'* **So, it was culture, and it was projects and it was profit, in that order, and *'where do we need to be?*** *Who will we need to be in order to lead this work in a way that serves our clients, and we get repeat customers?'* We call it the five W's of communication: who, what, when, where and why does this matter? With some team members we say, *'you have great technical skills, and what we are going to ask of you is that you bring a positive mindset with you. If you cannot bring a positive mindset with you to work, then we ask that maybe you take a sick day and just really work on that mindset.'* **That mindset is so important because it affects the whole ecosystem when you have someone that is discouraged or down. It really affects the culture of our team, so we're really boosting that. Our mindset will be positive. It will be solutions. It will be *'what do we want to see?'"***

[75] **"COVID was a good thing. It was a hard thing, but it was a good thing. Unless we are challenged or unless things are taken away, we don't appreciate what we have first of all, and then we don't realize where we're falling short. Basically, anger is fear. At the root of it, it's fear, and I was fearful. As a leader I was simply trying to keep my head above water, *'everything's fine. We're moving forward. We're doing this. We're doing that.'* But then I had to deal with the waves underneath, and when I was at home by myself, '*who was I?'*** When things went wrong was I blaming my team, or was I looking for a solution? *'How did I get here?'***... It was a self-reflection time, a time to face fear and a time to just look at myself and say*, ***'I am so thankful for this opportunity to grow and be free.'*** **When you face your fear instead of walking around it, you gain a confidence that you didn't have before. So, in that way it was a good thing. And I think my anger was just that fear coming out.** It was a great safe space to have people around and Dr D coaching to orchestrate that. It was community with a purpose to being more influential in our leadership. **I love the gratefulness and consideration, but I think COVID taught me compassion.** You get the compassion, and you let go of the fear. I found I'm a creative person, but I didn't use the creativity because I was so focused on fear and self-preservation. **This year it helped me face fear; it helped me start dreaming bigger. I'm not who I was before this."**

[76] **"The safety of my places is really paramount. I always want to keep them safe, regardless of whether it's COVID or physical violence or some other some other disease. So, we did make some changes.** We turned a couple rooms into negative pressure which really helps with air circulation. We were able to accommodate some patients, so they could enter the building through a different entrance. Therefore, they aren't going to be coming through the waiting room and exposing everyone else that's in that waiting room. We have put up some Plexiglas barriers that we will probably keep. We locked some doors that will probably remain locked. We've implemented screening. We will probably always screen our employees and visitors, as they come in. With the emergency room we actually did a remodel there, so we can register patients through a Plexiglas area. We also have a second locked door now, so if family members come in, they can't come in to the actual emergency department. They're going to stay in that [entrance] area. So that helps keep our staff safe from either irate patients or physically aggressive family members, or even law enforcement. They need to stay back there until we can take care of the situation first. So, [we'll keep] some of those things. Keeping the scrubs available for employees so they don't have to take them home. … Some [employees] are choosing to wear their own scrubs now which is fine, but at least we're able to accommodate their comfort level. So, if they still want to use them, they can. **So yes, those things will continue to remain in place, and I think those are good changes."**

[77] **I graduated from high school here…. We moved back here. We love the area … the recreation and just a small-town feel, the community, and all of that. It's the same for us, the safety within that Community.** One of

the things that I remember Caleb saying was, *'you can't hide here.'* I think one of the initial reactions [to the pandemic] that I think helped us to maintain … was adding zoom to the practice. That wasn't even a thing when we first started. It's not only helped us reach our clients, but it also has helped us maintain connection. [We focus on] treating the whole person and with zoom one of our fears was that, *'how are we going to do that? How are we going to make sure that we're not only keeping our clients safe but that we're still making progress through sessions.'* People are overwhelmed … and crave human interaction."

[78] "There were so many unknowns that were creating trauma reactions within families, so starting zoom chat sessions right away [was good, but it] … was a lot more work. I work with kids of all ages. **When treating children, one of the things that we did was we made up packets – small play therapy kits with some sensory stuff – and we sent them out to our families. That was one of the things that I think made them feel seen, but also, it helped them to stay connected as human beings.** There were a lot of economic resources that we used as well, because of the financial issues with our families.

[By fall] **we were starting to get the healthcare workers [as clients] and … the trauma that we were experiencing, we're still seeing it now. So, we got through that first wave of *'how are we going to survive this'* by focusing on scheduling. We focused on connecting with others, with family meals, games, telling stories making music, and using all of those things to maintain our creativity to maintain our curiosity. As described earlier the third wave of patients were those who had put off seeking help and now found themselves unable to put it off any longer."**

[79] "one of the things that we've moved into is **we started to build resiliency and build on the strengths we had developed. '*Now you've gotten through this. Now we're going to focus on this new year. Let's build resiliency. Let's build on our strengths that we've created* – *because we have created some. Whatever it looks like it's now, it's our new truth.'* I think that, being able to move into that phase was just wonderful for us, because now we're like, *'Okay, now we know how to do this. We know how to help people build this resiliency.'* **I think that that's where we were at, where we are at now. We can get back to the real stuff.**"

[80] **"I think one of the things that hit Ord right away was we were so used to [thinking in terms of the community as a whole.]** 'Okay *yes, we understand how this affects the whole, but let's talk, let's intertwine it. Let's do all this.'* Honestly **that really comes from the fact that we have leaders that are older than me that have done a really good job at teaching and helping and being willing to change.** My dad was on city council for a long time and I always tell him, *'some of you men* [shaking her finger] *I'll come here and I'm going to tell you, "we're going to do this, a little bit differently this time. I'm going to remind you, where I learned that from. It's from you."* I always tell my dad, *'if you ever have a problem with me talking out loud it's your fault. You created this Sir, so I don't know how to tell you what to do now.'* **And sports is a big part of it too.** We're not afraid to remind each other of those things [success by the women as well as the men]. Student success happens in all the sports [referring to her valedictorian and salutatorian volleyball players]. **I feel like as a coaching staff at the high school, we do a really good job of respecting each other and making sure that we're showing up for each other,** because if you have a class of 40 and they need that. So, it's fun to watch them win a State football championship, and it's fun to watch those girls go and support them.

[81] **"We have a restroom in the park, a white building. One day the librarian called me to say her daughter could not graduate college because she had to have this last art project done, but the college was shut down. [Her daughter] wanted to paint this art on that bathroom – I think they call it abstract art – and it was what she sees Ord as through her eyes.** I thought, *'you know, I think that's a great idea'* because one thing people did do was drive around. So, we let her do it, and she put on Facebook that she was going to do it. The funny part of this whole thing was we had a staff meeting here with the police chief, the utilities superintendent and the city clerk and of course they were teasing me, *'oh you are really gonna catch a whole bunch of crap over letting her do that 'cause it looks like something you put on a railroad car.'* I just let it go, and they were laughing at me when we got done. But, I told them*, 'do you know what? Look at all the fun you had with this, and it ain't even there yet.'* But we did it. What she created? **I never heard one bad word about it, and it created a sense of something going on and something that people could see.** That's the way I looked at it anyway. So, then I brought [the librarian] and the daughter on the radio with me to explain it all."

[82] **"I think one of the things that really came out of COVID was people – even us in here in the office – used to take things for granted.** You think about what you went through, of course, but it made you appreciate more of what you've got and what's around you. Along the same lines, **people learned something about** walking and taking care of themselves, **taking better care of their health. On the negative side COVID hurt a couple of businesses, and getting these businesses back started was a tough thing. Something else good that came out of it is I think people got back more to the basics of family than they have ever been. It kind of woke you up and made you realize, *'maybe we better pay attention to what we've got.'"***