***By Carolyn Lee***
***The Imperial Republican***

A company created by former Imperial resident Andrew Norman received the Nebraska Tourism Commission's 2012 "Friend of Tourism" award at the Nebraska Travel Conference in Gering Oct. 23.

As Norman wrote, "Coming...in only Hear Nebraska's second year of existence, the award is a very nice honor. It may as well have been written with the nonprofit's mission statement in mind, which includes making Nebraska an internationally known cultural destination."

Hear Nebraska's primary objective is to tell the story of the state's music and arts culture to Nebraskans and the world.

Volunteer contributors produce multimedia reporting, organize socially focused community events and broadcast on hearnebraska.org and on social media channels.

Over the past two years Hear Nebraska has produced or sponsored many events promoting the arts in Nebraska.

Concerts, live music videos and even filming former Imperial resident Mike Smith's "Skate the State" trips are part of Hear Nebraska's work.

Norman said tentative plans that also include Smith might be a "Shred the State," combining skateboarding and music.

"We'd bring musicians from Omaha and Lincoln and expose them to the western part of the state," he explained, and also incorporate bands from Western Nebraska on the bill, along with skateboard demonstrations.

Norman said he also wants to "get into the schools" by having artists and musicians tell students how the arts can enrich their lives.

Upcoming events include an "intimate event," a four-course vegan dinner with an acoustic set afterwards, Nov. 18 in Omaha, and "Take Cover" in Omaha and Lincoln in January, where between 12-15 Nebraska bands play one or two songs by other Nebraska musicians.

"I find it rewarding to cheer for someone in our back yard," Norman stated.

As for the tourism award, Norman said Hear Nebraska not only wants to document important cultural history, it wants to "positively impact travel to and within the state, small business economic development and arts education."

"We love living here, and we want to make it even more attractive to creative class members and music-and-arts lovers from outside our borders."

Norman said Hear Nebraska was honored to receive the tourism award. "If you support arts in the state in any way, this is for you."

Norman, a 1998 Chase County High School graduate, and his wife Angie live in Omaha.

More information about Hear Nebraska can be found at http://www.hearnebraska.org.