

Armstrong: Behind the scenes doesn't mean boring at the DCCVB

June 27, 2017

Much of what the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau does is behind the scenes, but our job is never boring.

Our two-person staff features just one full-timer, which keeps us going at a fast pace. Priorities can change with one phone call or email. When a meeting planner or tour group operator calls, we drop everything to encourage them to choose DeKalb County as the location for their event.

Our bureau does a lot of the heavy lifting when it comes to building our region's brand and driving groups to our area. Our staff is an extension of their staff. We make their jobs easier and provide expert and objective assistance. CVBs promote awareness and get a planner's foot in the door, which results in visitor spending that supports our local businesses and economy.

When a planner finds partners they can trust, they tend to stick with them. That's why it's critical for our bureau to provide efficient, courteous and expert assistance. Planners have a choice. We do everything possible to make them choose DeKalb County as their destination.

This month alone we worked with a travel agent from New York to book a tour of Whiskey Acres for 25 visitors from France, collaborated with Northern Illinois University conference and meeting planner colleagues to submit a proposal to host a convention for 1,500 in the fall of 2018, assisted the DeKalb County Farm Bureau with planning and marketing a new Farm & Food Tour, started planning for Kite Fest 2017 and IHSA Destination DeKalb for state football championships at NIU Nov. 24-25, promoted DeKalb County events to more than 140,000 potential visitors with our leisure e-newsletter and e-blasts and completed a new DeKalb County marketing video.

These are just a few of the June projects that generate economic impact for the region.

On June 6 to 9, we welcomed 1,200 bike riders for the annual MS: Tour de Farms ride through DeKalb County. The Convocation Center was the hub for registration and events provided for the riders. Our office works with the event organizers year-round to

negotiate hotel rates and block their rooms. We book 300 to 350 hotel room nights for this event for an estimated \$180,000 in economic impact for DeKalb County.

Our thanks to the MS organization, riders and hundreds of volunteers it takes to make the ride a success. We appreciate the fact that they have hosted their ride in our region for more than 15 years. We look forward to welcoming them back in 2018.

In March, we met with organizers for USA Track & Field to help land the group's Region 7 Junior Olympic Championships July 6-9 at NIU.

The estimated economic impact of approximately \$195,000 for the weekend would be generated by more than 1,500 visitors. We connected organizers with local contacts, provided on-site tours of venues and hotels, and blocked more than 350 room nights with DeKalb and Sycamore hotels for the event.

Other typical visitor services we provide to groups include complimentary DeKalb County Visitors Guides, a list of top 10 things to do, restaurant and shopping referrals, a list of places to worship, and contacts to help them secure volunteers.

Another project will allow our bureau to provide the number of visitors DeKalb County welcomes annually. This month all major county attractions will be contacted and asked to share their visitor numbers from 2012-2017. We plan to update them annually going forward. We need our residents to know just how many visitors make DeKalb County a destination for leisure and business travel. It will help everyone understand the power of tourism and that those visitor dollars contribute to a healthy local economy.

One of the new events that we helped promote was the inaugural Hard Cider Run at Jonamac Orchard on June 17. Approximately 900 runners participated. Congratulations to the team at Jonamac Orchard, the volunteers and runners who got to enjoy a taste of DeKalb County with another one of our very own "Illinois Made" recipients.

Residents and visitors alike can take advantage of the DeKalb County Farm Bureau "Farm & Food Trip." Two tours featuring two local farms will be offered July 22. The morning tour departs at 8:30 a.m. and returns at 1:30 p.m. The afternoon tour is from 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Both will provide visitors a chance to interact with local farming operations, learn about the care and feeding of animals, compare organic and conventional food production, and explore how technology impacts sustainability. It's open to ages 12 and older with a fee of

\$10 per person, which includes lunch featuring Illinois-grown products. The deadline to sign up is July 12. Reserve a seat by calling the Farm Bureau at 815-756-6361.

We are partnering with FunME Events to recruit volunteers for the Tour of Champions Drum and Bugle Corp Show to be from 5 to 9 p.m. July 15 at Huskie Stadium. Volunteers will receive a staff shirt and meal voucher. About 6,000 people are expected to attend based on ticket sales from previous years. Kudos to Michael Embrey and the staff at FunME Events for bringing this family-friendly event back to our region. Email M.Embrey@funmeevents.com for details.

The DCCVB calendar of events will keep you posted on all the fun happenings in the area. Visit us at dekalbcountycvb.com.

- Debbie Armstrong is executive director of the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

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