

Armstrong: New DeKalb County Visitors Guide is now available

5:30 am

We kicked off a new year by taking delivery of our 2018 DeKalb County Visitors Guide.

One of the benefits of having a certified bureau is that all the printed marketing materials we produce to promote our area are distributed free at nine tourist information centers. This benefit provides us with statewide visibility and promotion for DeKalb County as a destination for leisure and business travel.

Last year, the Illinois Office of Tourism negotiated a new partnership on our behalf with Union Station in Chicago. Certified bureaus now are able to display visitor guides at the terminal, so the thousands of people that travel to and from Union Station each day can pick up one of our guides. Cory Jobe, state tourism director, and his staff even negotiated with United Parcel Service to ensure that certified bureaus get the same discounted shipping rates the state of Illinois receives. Those are just two examples of the many partnerships Jobe has forged that benefit us as he advocates for tourism and the 40 bureaus he oversees.

Our visitors guide, rack cards and Bold Spirits brochures also are distributed at Chicago-area attractions, Chicago hotels, hotels along I-80/I-88 and at four Illinois Tollway Oasis visitors' kiosks (Belvidere, DeKalb, Hinsdale, O'Hare) through paid partnerships.

Visitors guides are available at all DeKalb County municipalities, towns, chambers of commerce, hotels and attractions, the DeKalb County Legislative Center, Northern Illinois University and our bureau. You can

make arrangements to pick up guides at our office from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Call 815-756-1336 or email us at office@dekalbcountycvb.com

Visitors and residents also can go online to view our interactive visitor guide at <http://dekalbcountycvb.com/visitors-guide/>.

The cover of the 2018 visitors guide features Whiskey Acres, the first estate distillery in Illinois. The welcoming smiles of Jamie Walter, Jim Walter and Nick Nagele are front and center with a tower of whiskey barrels surrounding them.

They were featured in the Wall Street Journal last January, as well as in many trade publications, regional newspapers, radio and television. They and their team are shining examples of just how important tourism is to the local economy. The increasing demand from visitors has promoted Whiskey Acres to plan to add a 4,000-square-foot visitor center. It would allow them to be open year-round and pave the way for more special-events business. They aren't the only attraction in the area that is expanding to accommodate more visitors and special events. Visitors are discovering more in DeKalb County.

It's our bureau's job to keep drawing visitors to our destinations by continuing to support all our tourism attractions with effective marketing that promotes DeKalb County as a premier destination. Our mandate from the Illinois Office of Tourism is to invest our marketing dollars to draw visitors from 50 miles outside of our radius. Our marketing and promotion efforts generate economic impact for our area. It's our mission. And, we are succeeding. The dollars we help generate save each Illinois family of four \$1,300 a year in taxes based on what visitors spend in our state each year.

Part of our integrated and strategic marketing plan includes producing more videos. Our promotional videos are engaging and captivating. Video is king according to all current marketing reports. Tourism marketing is at its best when it draws you in, evokes emotion and makes you say, "I have to see and experience this for myself."

We are showcasing our videos through social media marketing channels and Comcast Digital to our key target markets. More than 12,000 people viewed the DeKalb County CVB Holiday Happenings video in December. It received rave reviews from residents and visitors alike. It evoked pride from locals and brought visitors to DeKalb County all throughout the holiday season.

Make sure to check out the new winter video on our home page this month. We have a new video for each season. We plan to take full advantage of each season with these latest videos as they are key to the success of our overall marketing strategy.

You also can sign up for our events e-newsletter to keep posted on the ever-changing and growing list of things to do in DeKalb County. There is something for both residents and visitors to enjoy and experience every day of the year. Make sure you're checking our online calendar of events regularly to keep up-to-date and in the know.

Cheers to everyone in the tourism industry who promotes Illinois as "Amazing" and brings in more than \$32 million to our state budget and \$93.88 million to the county's economy. What we do is crucial to our economy and the quality of life for our residents. It is an honor to promote and work with all the amazing people that are part of our thriving tourism industry in DeKalb County.

Until next time, safe travels.

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

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