Armstrong: Visitors spend $98.8 million in DeKalb County

5:30 am

It's time to celebrate the industry that drove $98.8 million to DeKalb County businesses in 2017 – tourism! That's an increase of $5.13 million (5.5 percent) over 2016. Tourism also generated $1.66 million in local taxes, an increase of 5.7 percent over 2016. The economic impact from tourism in DeKalb County has risen eight years in a row. That's not a coincidence. It's the result of hard work and stakeholder investment to promote tourism for the region.

It is a strategic effort by the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau board and its partners to generate economic impact by promoting DeKalb County as a premiere destination for business and leisure travel. The work the board does is about more than putting heads in beds at hotels. It is about keeping dollars and visitors flowing into local attractions, meeting venues, restaurants, retail shops, grocery stores, gas stations and so much more. We would be hard pressed to name a business that isn't affected by the work that we and our partners do to generate economic impact through tourism promotion for the region.

The $98.8 million visitors spent in DeKalb County plays a significant role in the state's economic domestic growth as well. So, a big thank-you to our local investor partners and tourism partners. They know the power and importance of the work we do to promote DeKalb County.

For each dollar invested by a local partner, we get another matching dollar back from the state as the certified bureau and destination marketing organization for the county.

Our quality of life is directly affected by that money. Those visitor dollars that we help generate go back to the bottom line and get reinvested in DeKalb County.

If you question the importance that tourism plays in the local economy, then stop and look around. Many local attractions are expanding because of the growing demand from visitors. They are creating more jobs and contributing more money from the taxes they are bringing into the economy at both the local and state level. The work they do makes DeKalb County a better place to live, work, play and visit.

Cooperation is the key to success. A perfect example of this was the first Bold Spirits of DeKalb County Tasting Event at Jonamac Orchard on Aug. 11. All our local craft artisans gathered at one location to kick off the new Bold Spirits marketing campaign. There were
food trucks and a band for visitors to enjoy as well. Each visitor received a beautiful souvenir glass featuring the new Bold Spirits of DeKalb County logo as well as two tastings at each partner booth.

We unveiled the new Bold Spirits of DeKalb County Passport at the event. Visitors will receive a stamp from each of our Bold Spirits partners – Forge Brewhouse, Jonamac Orchard, Prairie State Winery, Waterman Winery and Vineyards and Whiskey Acres Distilling Company. If you visit all five in one year, you will receive a gift to show our appreciation.

More than 200 people attended the event. Our thanks to Jonamac Orchard and their team and all the Bold Spirits partners that made the event a success. We plan to make this an annual event. Stay tuned for the 2019 date to be announced.

Tourism drives economic development. Together, they create a solid foundation of success for the economy. Tourism professionals should be at the table when communities are planning economic development and vice versa. When both segments support each other, the possibilities are endless.

The money that is invested in local tourism marketing helps support the resources that we enjoy as residents. Visitor dollars help pay for our police, teachers, firefighters and other social services. And, the entire county benefits.

It is also true that each community’s success drives another. Community leaders who understand the power of tourism investment will reap the rewards. The more local dollars that are invested with the DeKalb County CVB, the farther our reach and greater the economic impact.

Here are some fast facts about tourism for 2017:

• Every $1 invested in Illinois tourism generates $9 in economic impact for the state.

• Illinois welcomed 111 million domestic visitors.

• Of those domestic visitors, 17 percent were for business and 83 percent for leisure.

• In the past 10 years, domestic travel to Illinois has increased by 23 million visitors.

• The visitor expenditures generated by domestic visitors supported 308,490 jobs in 2017, which is an increase of 6,040 jobs since 2016.

• Domestic travelers spent $36.3 billion in Illinois during 2017, a 3.3 percent increase from 2016.

• Tourism dollars save the average family of four $1,300 a year at the state level

The Illinois Office of Tourism received domestic visitor volume estimates from DK Shifflet and international visitor numbers from Tourism Economics. Visitor expenditures, tax revenue and jobs numbers come from U.S. Travel Association.

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