Hoey: Abundance of things to see and do in DeKalb County

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Though the season got off to a sluggish start, summer definitely has arrived in DeKalb County.

A quick look at the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau’s events calendar reveals that summer festival season is well underway throughout the region. From Genoa to Sandwich, Malta to Waterman, Sycamore, Shabbona and destinations in between, an abundance of attractions, celebrations and festivals are available to entertain residents and visitors to DeKalb County.

The Bold Spirits of DeKalb County group kicked off the season in early June with its Bold Spirits Fest. Jonamac Orchard in Malta again served as host for the second annual event that highlighted the artisanship and products of the county's brewers, winemakers and distillers and attracted nearly three times more attendees than the previous year. Guests tasted samples from Forge Brewhouse, Prairie State Winery, Waterman Winery and Vineyards, Whiskey Acres and Jonamac, and enjoyed music from local favorite Back County Roads.

The band also was the headliner the following weekend at Malta Days and Whiskey Acres’ inaugural Homegrown Music Festival, which provided a showcase for DeKalb County’s home grown entertainers, craft spirits and beer makers. Event organizers were beyond pleased with the turnout for the inaugural music fest, which served as a prelude to a variety of entertainment events that Whiskey Acres plans to host in the future.

A number of visitors to the area’s early summer festivals reside outside DeKalb County. While these travelers come to our communities to explore a wide variety of events and attractions, the region’s rich agricultural history and innovation also draws visitors to the county. Sycamore’s Steam Show and Threshing Bee, Waterman’s Summerfest and Antique Tractor and Truck Show and the DeKalb County Barn Tour in August are among local events that significantly contribute to
a growing agri-tourism market, attracting visitors from across the state, the country and from around the globe.

Early this month, the Illinois Office of Tourism confirmed that visitors are flocking to the state, and they are doing so in record numbers. More than 117 million visitors traveled to Illinois in 2018, marking the eighth straight year that the state has set a new tourism record. According to data provided by the U.S. Travel Association, visitors to the state spent $41.7 billion last year, boosting Illinois’ economy by $2 billion over 2017. DeKalb County’s tourism growth has mirrored the state’s success. In 2017, the county generated $1.66 million in local tax revenue and $98.8 million in visitor spending. Local tourism numbers for 2018 soon will be available, and the DCCVB anticipates yet another year of increased visitor expenditures contributing to a significant boost to the local economy.

Speaking of numbers, DeKalb’s historic Egyptian Theatre recently received a $200,000 grant from the Illinois Office of Tourism to help with the venue’s current expansion project. The grant, which the state is awarding for the first time since 2015, provides additional validation of tourism’s impact on the local economy, helping the Egyptian Theatre in its efforts to draw visitors to DeKalb County for years to come.

Be it a festival, community celebration or weekly event such as our local farmers markets and concert series, the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau events calendar is chock full of events, festivals and activities taking place throughout the county during the summer months and into the fall. The DCCVB’s online calendar is available on the organization’s website at http://dekalbcounty,cv.com/calendar.

Like most folks, I am certainly not in a hurry to see summer depart anytime soon. Plenty of opportunities for fun in the sun remain, with signature events such as DeKalb Corn Fest and NIU football’s Aug. 31 season opener vs. Illinois State signaling summer’s twilight. Autumn looms on the horizon, and Genoa’s Volksfest, Sandwich Fair, Sycamore’s Pumpkin Fest and the IHSA Football State Championships are among the many activities highlighting this year’s fall calendar.
As residents of DeKalb County, we are fortunate that the seasons ahead presents seemingly endless opportunities for fun, frolic and adventure in the place we call home.

• Brad Hoey is president of the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau Board of Directors.

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