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Tourism revenue on record pace at state, local levels

State officials hit the road last week to tout a healthy increase in statewide tourism numbers that are also reflected at the local level in DeKalb County.

In Chicago, Gov. Pat Quinn announced that Illinois hosted more than 99 million domestic visitors in 2012. That's a 6 percent increase from the 93.3 million U.S. residents who visited our state in 2011. Tourism generated more than \$31 billion for the state's economy from domestic visitors alone last year, a 5 percent increase. State and local tax revenue from tourism totaled \$2.3 billion in 2012 and all of the above numbers should increase when counts on international visitors become available later this summer.

"Another year of record-breaking numbers proves that travel is back and the tourism industry in Illinois is thriving," Quinn said.

It's the second year in a row that visitor numbers for Illinois have broken records and outpaced the national average, which increased 5.4 percent.

Illinois Office of Tourism Deputy Director Jen Hoelze congratulated the state's 40 certified visitor bureaus, travel industry professionals and tourism partners for working to generate an increase in tourism revenue throughout all 102 counties in 2012.

"The tourism industry plays a vital role in growing Illinois' economy, providing valuable jobs for residents and spurring business of all sizes," Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity Director Adam Pollet said.

The Illinois Office of Tourism directly supports the travel industry by promoting visitor travel both domestically and internationally, to help grow the tourism industry throughout the state. It is funded by a percentage of the state's hotel/motel tax revenue.

DeKalb County economy benefits

The DeKalb County CVB helped generate \$81.46 million in tourism revenue for the local economy in 2012, up 3.6 percent from 2011. It is a number that has increased each year since 2009. State and local taxes generated for the county from tourism were reported to be \$5.46 million (up 3 percent) and \$1.28 million (up 5.2 percent), respectively.

Tourism is an economic engine that helps businesses and residents prosper. It attracts new business and residents to our area and is vital for a healthy and thriving economy.

Our bureau continues to help generate more economic growth through our sales and marketing efforts to promote DeKalb County as a destination for both leisure travelers and event planners. One such event, the Tour of Champions Drum Corps competition sponsored in part by Kishwaukee Fest, FunME Events and the DCCVB, last week drew approximately 6,500 visitors to Huskie Stadium.

We have yet to see the economic impact that the IHSA state football championships will generate for our local economy, although input from communities that have hosted them, estimate it will be \$800,000 or more.

Our office works for months and sometimes years to attract new meetings and events that generate revenue through tourism. The latest numbers released by the state indicate that one visitor that spends the night in our area spends another \$100 a day either visiting attractions, dining, shopping and purchasing gas. Tourism revenue spreads throughout our local economy with each hotel night that is booked.

Our most recent shopping and dining video is one example of our ongoing marketing efforts. Go to www.dekalbcountycvb.com and take a look at the unique places to shop and dine. Today's visitors are looking for unique experiences. DeKalb County provides a wealth of diverse experiences, unique meeting places and is a destination for all age groups.

Safe travels.

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

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