

# DCCVB View: Second IHSA Destination DeKalb a success

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More than 25,000 high school football fans braved less than ideal weather this year to travel to DeKalb to celebrate their teams being part of IHSA Destination DeKalb. Wet and cold conditions were not great for the Spirit Zone but fans braved them to cheer on their teams.

They came early to decorate their fan tents and celebrated their teams making their goal of reaching DeKalb on Thanksgiving weekend to play for a state title in one of eight classes in games contested at Huskie Stadium. Many brought their bands to perform along with cheer groups and poms for all the fans that enjoyed the hospitality in the Spirit Zone before and after their games.

The sights and sounds of the Spirit Zone were joyous and enthusiastic as booster clubs and fans loaded in portable helium tanks, banners, balloons, team photos, jersey replicas and all manner of football decorations to compete for the coveted Spirit Zone plaque and show team pride. Team colors were displayed and school mascots posed for pictures while bands performed and fans cheered.

Community volunteers greeted fans with complimentary hot chocolate, popcorn and coffee generously donated by Starbucks. Many took a turn on the armchair quarterback inflatable that was provided as part of the fan experience in the hospitality tent.

Volunteers were provided with an ample pasta bar on Friday and tasty box lunches on Saturday. Our thanks to Sodexo and Hy-Vee for donating these meals to keep our volunteers fed and fueled while they performed their many duties throughout the championship weekend. That is what is so great about this community. We have support and everyone pitches in to help. Volunteers and operations staff went above and beyond to make this event successful. It really does take a village and ours is wonderful.

Team Ambassadors greeted each of the 16 contending teams and welcomed them to Huskie Stadium. They watched jaws drop as the players entered the Chessick Practice Center to warm up for their games. Our heartfelt thanks to each and every one of these ambassadors that volunteered a minimum of six hours to give each of the 16 teams their undivided attention so they could focus on their games and have a great experience at Huskie Stadium. That is, after all, what they had been working toward all season ... to make it to DeKalb.

Everyone attending IHSA Destination DeKalb was a champion including all the volunteers.

The economic impact numbers aren't all in yet. Those will be reported at a later date. However,

we do know that many of our restaurants booked private parties and caterings for all the visitors that we had in town for the weekend. Some of the teams' fan bases are so large that they actually booked pre-game parties at two different local restaurants.

Kudos to 2015 IHSA Destination DeKalb chairwoman Wendy West-Krauch for her tireless and devoted efforts to make our second IHSA state football championship a success, along with Brad Hoey, Sue Hansfield and Matt Gonzalez. Thank you to our sponsors, restaurant owners and their staff, hotel managers and their staff, retailers, Northern Illinois University and its operations team, the city of DeKalb and the hundreds of volunteers who made this event memorable and fun for all our visitors. It really isn't easy to throw a party for 25,000 but we know how to do it here in DeKalb County.

Many unsung heroes worked together to pull off another great IHSA state football championship. We thank them all and congratulate our community on coming together for another Communiversities partnership that impacted the state and our entire region.

As we all gather to celebrate the holidays with family and friends, take a little time to remember that we should be thankful for all the wonderful community members that come together to make DeKalb County a wonderful place to visit, live and play.

The DeKalb County Visitor Bureau staff, board and IHSA Destination DeKalb wishes you all a joyful and prosperous 2016.

The IHSA Destination DeKalb Committee will reconvene to recap 2015 in January. We will, however, need support – both financial and volunteers – as we look forward to hosting the third of our five IHSA state football championships here in DeKalb County at Huskie Stadium in 2017. Please consider joining our team of sponsors. Events like this require financial support to keep them going.

Safe travels.

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