

DCCVB View: March Madness means visitor dollars and more

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Spring has certainly sprung at the DeKalb County Visitors Bureau.

Two weeks ago, we helped host more than 5,000 visitors for the Illinois Elementary School Association State wrestling championships. Congratulations to everyone that made the cut to compete and all the state champions. The estimated economic impact from this weekend was \$255,000.

We also hosted IHSA basketball Supersectional doubleheaders on successive weeks at the NIU Convocation Center, and cheered on our NIU Huskie men's basketball team as they competed in the first round of the Mid-American Conference championships. The team advanced to Cleveland to compete in the MAC quarterfinals but fell to Ohio, 79-62. Congratulations to the team, Coach Mark Montgomery and his staff on one of the most successful seasons in 20 years.

I just returned from the Governor's Conference on Tourism March 21-23 in Springfield, where more than 400 tourism professionals gathered to network and discuss tourism trends and marketing.

Our thanks goes out to Nick Nagele and the entire team at Whiskey Acres for sponsoring and participating in the vendor trade show at the conference. Nick not only met Abe Lincoln and Mary Todd but I think he met every one of the 400-plus tourism professionals that attended. He made sure that DeKalb County tourism and Whiskey Acres Distilling Co. was top of mind throughout the entire conference. Whiskey Acres is open from 1:30 to 8:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday and 1:30 to 5:30 p.m. on Sunday or for private events. Tours are \$10 a person and include a souvenir shot glass and 3 sample pours.

One of the other highlights of the conference was a session with Peter Greenberg, a respected and honored travel news journalist. Greenberg is travel editor for CBS News, appearing on The Early Show, CBS Evening News with Scott Pelley, CBS Sunday Morning and across many broadcast platforms.

His book, "Don't Go There! The Travel Detective's Essential Guide to the Must-Miss Places of the World," is a New York Times best-seller. His latest book, "Tough Times, Great Travels," offers his expert advice and insight on how to travel efficiently – and well – during tough economic times.

His travel news website, PeterGreenberg.com, is one of the fastest-growing travel news sites in America.

We are anxious to incorporate all that we learned at the conference into doing the best promotion and marketing that we can to attract visitors to DeKalb County.

We will be at Wednesday's DeKalb/Sycamore Chamber Community Expo at DeKalb High School, where more than 120 vendors are expected to participate with displays. We will be busy answering questions about local events and attractions, passing out 2016 visitor guides and our local, bold spirits brewing brochure and promoting Kite Fest. Mark your calendars now for Sept. 11 for DeKalb Kite Fest.

Speaking of our spirits brochure ... this has been one of our most popular and sought-after visitor brochures to-date. We printed 20,000 last June. They have all been scooped up. We spent time this month working with the owners of our spirits attractions to do a reprint. We made some changes that are even more beneficial and appealing to visitors. Check it out online. Visit dekalbcountycvb.com and click on Download our Brochures.

Our social media campaign launched this month. We are making a big push as tourist season will be in full swing as soon as school is out. We are geotargeting visitors 50 miles outside of our radius, focusing on several of the key niche markets that we have identified, along with promoting our printed and interactive visitor guide. This campaign will rotate four ads and run through June. We already have seen an increase in requests for our guide, click thrus and Facebook likes. Our first ad campaign results with the firm ROI numbers will be available in April, and I look forward to sharing those in a future column.

We have been reaching out to local attractions and restaurants to secure discounts and special promotions for the more than 1,800 MS: Tour de Farms bike riders that will make DeKalb County their destination June 25-26. To date, we have helped block more than 350 rooms for this event. The estimated economic impact from this group is anticipated to be more than \$160,000. That doesn't account for all the rental fees for venues and other local services needed to make the event run smoothly.

Our bureau closed out March sending our quarterly events enewsletter to more than 6,500 leisure travelers from our "opt-in" list. Key area events were highlighted and promoted to prompt visitors to make their plans to visit DeKalb County.

Remember to check our Calendar of Events for all the updates on great things to do in DeKalb County.

Until next time ... Safe travels.

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