

Armstrong: DeKalb County Barn Quilt Trail unveiled for tourism week

May 8, 2018 5:30 am

National Travel and Tourism Week is an annual tradition, where travel and tourism professionals unite to celebrate the value travel holds for the economy, businesses and personal well-being.

This year's celebration takes place May 6 through 12. The theme is "Travel Then and Now." It marks the 35th anniversary of the 1983 congressional resolution that established National Travel and Tourism Week.

Let's travel back to "Then," when DeKalb County didn't have a visitors bureau as the designated marketing organization promoting the county as a destination for business and leisure travel. Back "Then," visitor spending in DeKalb County accounted for about \$64 million.

"Now" we have a visitor bureau that is certified by the Illinois Office of Tourism. Certification entitles our bureau to a matching grant to market and promote the county within a 50-mile radius. It's no coincidence that "Now" visitor dollars contribute \$93.88 million to the local economy and have been on the rise for eight years in a row.

We are kicking off NTTW with some great news. The IESA state wrestling championships will return to the area for the next five years. Each year, this event earns an estimated \$300,000 in economic impact for the region. Do the math. We have good reason to celebrate the \$1.5 million that visitors will spend in DeKalb County. Those visitors will fill our hotels, eat at our restaurants, shop and spread those dollars across many local businesses.

We are proud to unveil the new DeKalb County Barn Quilt Trail at: www.dekalbcountycvb/dekalbcountybarnquilts as part of our celebration of NTTW.

The new trail was developed by the DCCVB staff and our Northern Illinois University intern, Brianna McDevitt, to promote the quilts and complement the existing Barn Tour on Aug. 11, which benefits DeKalb Area Agricultural Association and the J.F. Glidden Homestead and Historical Center.

The bureau collaborated with local partners Mariam Wassmann from the DeKalb County Farm Bureau, Bob Meyer from Hawk Aerial Imagery, the DAAHA and Jean Klock, a local resident and artist, to create this new self-guided tour of the DeKalb County Barn Quilts. Many of these beautiful barn quilts were painted by local artists.

Here's a quick summary of what the new landing page provides:

- History of barn quilts in DeKalb County and across the U.S.
- Previews of some of the quilts in five photo galleries
- Listing of the five legs of the trail
- Downloadable turn-by-turn directions and Google Map to create self-guided tours
- Downloadable and printable brochure to track progress along the trail

We have many more reasons to celebrate NTTW both "Then and Now." Congratulations go out to several of our Bold Spirits of DeKalb County tourism partners.

- The Forge of Sycamore opened its doors for business May 1. Stop by and celebrate this new location with the entire Forge team. The Forge Tap room in DeKalb opened March 24 and is going strong.
- Whiskey Acres is celebrating breaking ground on a new 4,000-square-foot visitors center, which will allow them to be open year-round and is expected to be open this fall.
- Prairie State Winery will be going across the street to its original location in Genoa for Wine Club members-only pairings and dining on Fridays and Saturdays starting May 17. And the patio and the main location will be open for business as usual.

Cory Jobe, state director of tourism, will be making appearances throughout Illinois during National Travel and Tourism Week. Jobe recently announced the development of the new Illinois Frank Lloyd Wright Trail, which will promote a travel itinerary and connect all of Wright's properties open to the public, complete with signage from the Illinois Department of Transportation. The Illinois Office of Tourism will develop a new landing page on enjoyillinois.com to promote the trail and travel itinerary.

Make sure to check our fun Facebook posts dedicated to this year's NTTW Theme of "Then and Now."

Until next time. Safe travels.

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

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