

## Armstrong: Visitors spent \$35 billion in Illinois in 2017

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Illinois tourism professionals recently gathered for an Illinois Council of Convention and Visitor Bureaus meeting and Lobby Day in Springfield to network and advocate for the tourism industry.

We attended a press conference at the Abraham Lincoln Museum hosted by Gov. Bruce Rauner and Illinois Office of Tourism Director Cory Jobe. They announced that Illinois Tourism had record growth for 2017. An additional 1.6 million travelers visited Illinois in 2017, bringing an increase in visitor spending, tax revenue and local jobs.

Rauner said nearly 114 million people traveled to the state last year to give a \$1.1 billion boost to the state's economy. Travelers came from all over the world, 17 percent for business and 83 percent for pleasure. The Illinois tourism industry supported 335,000 jobs in 2017, an increase of 18,600 jobs since 2016.

Visitors spent \$39.5 billion in Illinois in 2017, according to the U.S. Travel Association. That's an increase of \$1.1 billion, up 3 percent from 2016. Visitor spending for goods and services generated \$2.95 billion in state and local tax revenue, up \$75 million from 2016. Visitor spending saves the average Illinois household more than \$1,300 in taxes each year.

Jobe credits the record numbers to several integrated marketing campaigns including Illinois Tourism's "Up for Amazing" advertising campaign that launched in March 2017, targeting 14 domestic and five international markets. Jobe said that every dollar invested in the campaign delivered nearly \$9 in economic impact for the state.

The Illinois Office of Tourism is expected to release the 2017 economic impact that each of the 102 counties contributed to their region in late July or August. This report is provided by U.S. Travel and Research. We will share the economic impact that visitor spending had on DeKalb County as soon as we receive those numbers.

In the meantime, we are busy wrapping up several projects. Our new DeKalb County Quilt Trail has been met with many compliments and enthusiastic praise. It was the second most visited landing page on our website in May.

Our office will distribute the first-ever DeKalb County Museums and Historical Center brochure later this month. The goal of this new marketing piece is to provide awareness and visibility for this important niche market.

The glossy trifold will be distributed as a resource for local partners, to nine Tourist Information Centers and to other visitor-distribution kiosks with which the DeKalb County CVB partners. All local museums and history centers will be provided with the brochures free of charge. This also is a very effective cross marketing tool, which is part of our overall marketing strategy.

The brochure also will be available as a digital download on our website. Our thanks to all our partners and attractions that provided information and photos. Cooperation and collaboration is the key to success for DeKalb County tourism.

Our Bold Spirits brochure is being updated and will be available later this summer. We'll also unveil the new Bold Spirits of DeKalb County logo that will be integrated into marketing for this niche.

The Bold Spirits partners are making significant strides that are growing our tourism industry. The Forge of Sycamore closed its original location in Sycamore and reopened in April at 1330 E. State St. in Sycamore. In March they opened a new Taproom in DeKalb at 216 N. Sixth St. Whiskey Acres is adding a 4,000-square-foot visitor center in the fall which will enable them to

be open year-round. Prairie State Winery recently opened the Prairie State Sipper Club in their original building at 217 W. Main St. in Genoa. The Sipper Club is a members-only lounge. Waterman Winery has expanded its visitors area with a new water feature and has plans to do more soon. Jonamac Orchard is busy booking more unique events and providing other experiences such as food pairings and craft/painting at the orchard.

Sounds like the perfect time to announce a new event. The Bold Spirits of DeKalb County Tasting Festival will be hosted at Jonamac Orchard in Malta. Jonamac was instrumental in coordinating all necessary permits, marketing and meetings for this fun new event. The date is Aug. 11. Stay tuned for more details. We are eager to share more with you as the Bold Spirits of DeKalb County partners work to make this a must-attend event on the second Saturday in August every year.

Until next time, safe travels.

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

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