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Tourism as economic development? How do you incorporate tourism development as an industry into the economic development forte?

Let's step back for a moment and look at tourism at the macro level in the State of North Dakota. Tourism is the #2 industry in the state. (Not surprising is that agriculture remains #1) The state tourism department often totes that every dollar invested into marketing of ND tourism has generated \$81 of return in the dollars that the average tourist spends in ND. Now take a look at how Devils Lake participates in this industry. What is the most common reason that tourists are drawn to Devils Lake? FISHING AND HUNTING! What a remarkable fishery we have in Devils Lake. The notoriety of the lake and its story of flooding made us known far and wide. Now it's time to take advantage of the press we have received over the last fifteen plus years and share our lake story in a positive light.

The fishing element brings with it the needs of the fishermen (and women). Many bring their own boats, but is there enough availability of boat rentals? Equipment? Are there enough temporary and long term marina slips? Overnight accommodations? Guides? Supplies? Packaging and shipping of their catch home?

Hunting brings many into the area for waterfowl and deer hunting. Again, are there enough accommodations that cater to this group? Boarding and pampering for their four-legged partners? More often than not – these groups are men that are utilizing this trip for a vacation. However, what if there was more for the spouse to do? Spa treatment for the day, shopping, and otherwise exploring the Lake Region? Evening restaurants are fabulous in the Lake Region, what about offering sack lunches for these hunting parties to take into the field as part of the hotel accommodation package?

Let's not forget the seasonal campers. The seasonal campers occasionally shop on weekends as well and are often shopping for outdoor types of décor items both for their campsite and homes as well as items specific to camping. Again service is an action item. Services such as housekeeping, lawn mowing etc. can certainly be marketed to the seasonal campers.

This is not to say that hunting and fishing are the only tourist attractions in the Lake Region. They certainly are not, but they do create what is called an "end-destination" tourist attraction. This means that the point in coming here is to enjoy those elements and have longer overnight stays. Points in between are incidentals and also reap the rewards of the tourist dollar.

How can the average citizen take advantage of this tourism opportunity? I've mentioned several business ideas above, certainly some can be part-time and of course seasonal.

However think back to communities or trips you have taken. What caught your eye? Did anything unique make you stop and take a few minutes? Did you walk through an art gallery? Did you purchase typical souvenirs or something even more unique to the area? Jelly? Trinkets? Art? Crafts? Driftwood? T-shirts? Antiques? Candy? A special food delicacy of the area? (think benets in New Orleans) Visit a one-of-a-kind restaurant? Stop somewhere just because of the distinctive marketing (Wall Drug, South Dakota)?

Devils Lake Tourism does a fantastic job of promoting Devils Lake, but let's create even more of a pro-tourism atmosphere for the tourism department to promote!

Until next month, feel free to stop in and visit or call me at 701-662-4933.