

Insider

For January 21, 2009

By Kim Burger

Having just returned from showcasing the Cedar Valley at the Quad Cities Sports Show, it occurs to me that you may be interested to learn how that part of our business works. Quite often we partner with the Waterloo Convention and Visitors Bureau for these activities and I tend to categorize them into four different market segments – meetings and conventions, sporting events, groups, and leisure travelers.

I consider sports shows like this a consumer show for our leisure market. It's a consumer show because it's the consumers themselves who attend to "shop" the different destinations being exhibited rather than us meeting with travel professionals seeking experiences to package up and sell to their various constituencies. These professionals could be representing a sports tournament, an annual Shriner's convention, or a group leader building a three-day trip for their travel agency or bank club. I also place this activity into the leisure market because that grouping represents small travel parties that could include families or friends. The leisure market is very strong for us due to the trails, the university, and our downtowns. I have long believed it to be an important niche for us. These people are a little harder to track since they come in on their own without a lot of hoopla like the NWCA Duals, for instance; but they are steady and consistent and I believe the familiarity these visits generate leads to more business. That fellow who brought his family for a weekend get away last summer may be looking for a place to hold his association meeting the following year. If we've done a good job and created a favorable experience, we're quite likely to enjoy more business from this visitor or at least he'll tell his friends about us.

I've always enjoyed interacting with these potential visitors, but it's really fun now! An 80+ mile system of trails and nationally recognized Main Street are fabulous draws that regularly create excitement in these conversations, but add to them the new Phelps Youth Pavilion and Iowa Veterans Museum, and you've got an extended weekend getaway going. Here's how it goes – a family walks by the exhibit and a huge water slide photo from the Lost Island Water Park catches the attention of the children. The children stop dead in their tracks to dream of the water park and then we show the parents where we are on the map and how long it takes to get to us. While they're visiting they really should allow time to take in the Youth Pavilion or the Iowa Veteran's Museum. Or maybe it's a couple walking past. Wouldn't they enjoy exploration of our bike trails together, or maybe he's looking for a fishing or hunting trip with the guys and might she enjoy the upcoming It's a Girl Thing shopping weekend in downtown Cedar Falls? Why she could get her sisters or a few friends together and plan a great little getaway! It's also great fun when UNI alumni stop by to reminisce about their time in Cedar Falls. They love to hear what's new and since there's so much to talk about they really begin to think they should come back for a look see.

When we live here day after day it can be easy to overlook how much quality entertainment we have access to. We really do have the whole package here in the Cedar Valley and it's great fun to get out and tell folks about it!