

Insider

For August 6, 2008

By Kim Burger

Last week we celebrated our 20th birthday with around 80 of our best friends. The Cedar Falls Tourism and Visitors Bureau was “born” in July of 1988 after the successful passage of a public referendum supporting a 5% hotel/motel tax to be collected on guestrooms rented throughout the city. During the first year that new tax brought in \$17,000 for the purpose of promoting the city to visitors and building or enhancing amenities for their use. Although the referendum was fairly controversial at the time, taking three votes to gain the approval of the public, it was quickly embraced and even increased to 7%. Collections have steadily increased each year with last year’s total amounting to \$278,000. These funds are used to support the activities of the Visitors Bureau and to supplement the Hearst Center for the Arts, maintain our parks and recreational trail system, recreation center, and provide grants for local non-profit organizations that bring visitors to the community.

Being the multi-taskers that we are, we also celebrated the world premiere of our new promotional video and some lovely new shade structures that now soar over the patio area thanks to a generous gift from Joe Burum, Pete Downs and the folks at Shade Creations by Waterloo. Our promotional video is an exciting eight-minute tour of the city and represents the work of Cyndi Sweet, a former member of our staff, and Denny Bowman, John Bloomberg and Kirk Eastman from the Cedar Falls Cablevision Division. Copies of the DVD were presented to guests and are available in the Visitor Center gift shop for \$5. They make a great gift for friends and family and an excellent recruitment tool.

The 80 guests in attendance of our celebration included Jan Andersen and Mary Taylor, previous director and assistant for the bureau’s early building years and several former board members including Sid Morris, Marv Diemer, Duane McDonald, Ward Stubbs and Phyllis Carter. Judi Cutler and Rosemary Beach, also originally involved in getting the bureau started were unable to attend, but continue to contribute to bureau activities on a daily basis, as do many others. Former chamber president, Lee Miller, also joined the celebration and like so many others, continues to be involved by serving as an Envoy Volunteer. It was a gratifying experience to acknowledge and thank these people for breaking the ground and providing the solid foundation on which we’ve built our successes of today.

In scanning the room, the diversity of our guests was notable. Former and long-time board, marketing committee and Envoy members mixed with new additions to the fray. Attendees included life-long natives of the community and newcomers, former students who now have significant careers and continue to volunteer, partner/stakeholders representing non-profit organizations and for profit businesses, elected officials and our friends and neighbors from Waterloo.

Indeed, as we gathered at our four-year old Visitor Center to celebrate and reminisce, everyone in attendance marveled at our good fortune to do the work of welcoming visitors and newcomers in such a striking facility surrounded by cheerful native prairie blossoms and a perfectly placed public art piece, Horse and Rider. While we chuckled at 20-year-old images of ourselves we also sought to imagine what accomplishments we might celebrate when we gather again for future anniversary celebrations.