

Insider

For October 29, 2008

By Kim Burger

The Iowa Tourism Conference is always held in mid-October and having just returned, I'm anxious to share my experience with you. The conference brings between 300 and 400 tourism folks together to network, sharing best (and worst) practices, to hear motivational speakers and attend educational workshops. Attendees include hoteliers, for-profit hospitality businesses, non-profits, destination marketing organization staff (like myself) and volunteers. We come from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences so it's always a fun and interesting gathering.

A couple of this year's educational sessions included tips on communicating with people from different generations. Have you ever stopped to consider that our workforce consists of four different generational sets and how each has very different styles, attributes and communicational habits based on the time period when we grew up? It was all very interesting. We learned about how the Internet is rapidly making the change toward user-generated content and how to communicate better with the traveling public through our web sites and others like Face Book. We also learned how to conserve resources and "green" our meetings and events.

The conference moves around from year to year giving communities from around the state a chance to host. This also helps us to familiarize ourselves with various areas so we can all sell the entire state. This year's conference was about as far away as it gets, taking place in Sioux City! I tell you this because we were all so grateful to Senator Bill Dotzler for his willingness to travel there to address us during one of the sessions. We in fact, showed our gratitude by giving him an award! Actually, it was the primary reason for inviting him, and a very well deserved honor, indeed. Senator Dotzler has worked unceasingly for many years to make our state a fun and exciting place to live and to visit by securing funding for historical tax credits, Vision Iowa, CAT and RECAT and countless other programs that benefit tourism. We, his local constituents, are grateful for this work, as are our counterparts from the entire state. His concern for workforce development fits so well with the goals of the tourism industry that honoring him with the Legislative Friend of Tourism Award made perfect sense. Congratulations, Bill!

Other awards were handed out at the conference as well, including Ames and Adel as Communities of the Year (for populations over and under 10,000) and Reiman Gardens and National Mississippi River Museum & Aquarium's Ice Fest for Attraction of the Year and Event of the Year for communities with a population over 10,000. You may recall that Cedar Falls, the Sturgis Falls Celebration and University Museums also won these honors in recent years. A complete listing of award recipients can be found on the State Tourism Office's newly redesigned web site www.traveliowa.com.

We are actually very pleased with the look and feel of the new web site, bringing a more interactive and user-friendly feel to it. I encourage you to take a look. We're also very proud of the 7.6% growth our industry experienced last year, outpacing the national

average growth of 5.7%! I am also extremely proud to announce that Black Hawk County, ranked fifth in state for travel expenditures and experienced an amazing 15.82% increase!

We are all aware of the challenges we'll be facing in the coming year, but we're looking forward to putting this new knowledge to work to accomplish another great year.