

Insider
For 12-10-08
By Kim Burger

You may have seen the recent headlines announcing that the Cedar Falls Tourism and Visitors Bureau awarded a grant of just under \$50,000 to the Sturgis Falls Celebration as disaster recovery measure. There's more to the story beyond the headlines and I'd like to take this opportunity to share it.

If you caught my article in June, you read about how the Sturgis Falls Celebration and Cedar Basin Jazz Festival organizers and city staff agonized over how to handle the events during the weeks immediately following the great flood. Our parks were in shambles and city staff, including public works, police and fire protection, the parks division and others was, working around the clock to assist homeowners who'd lost every material possession they had. While festival organizers were completely capable of modifying plans so the events could go on, we faced larger problems like hotels filled to capacity with displaced residence chased from their homes and Red Cross and FEMA personnel who'd come to help us. We also felt a responsibility to avoid the potential for having to call on public safety for the festivals when they were completely tapped out working to protect what was left of the city. A soggy, sandbag-lined dike and heavy waste-hauling equipment needing free reign of the streets through the downtown area were also issues for concern.

UNI was approached and willing to provide an alternate site until it became apparent that they could and should provide assistance to the University of Iowa in their time of need. In the end, it was determined that a drastic reduction of both celebrations was the right thing to do. We also knew this decision could put two non-profit organizations that have benefited our community for over 30 years at financial risk. A good deal of money had already been spent promoting the events, hiring the entertainers, and renting necessary equipment. While scaling back the events seemed to be the best decision, providing assistance to these organizations also seemed to be the right thing to do.

The Tourism Bureau is funded by a tax collected by the hotels to promote the city as a destination for visitors. The bureau has purposely set money aside over the years for use in special emergencies or for extraordinary opportunities. While we believe that savings should be saved, we also felt that a presidentially declared disaster was compelling criteria.

An application process was developed by the Tourism Bureau board and public announcements were made inviting organizations to apply in the event that others beyond the Cedar Basin Jazz Festival and Sturgis Falls Celebration were affected.

The outcome of the entire process is, as has been reported, that the Sturgis Falls Celebration received a financial award to put them back on an even footing for next year's celebration. We admire this organization for the outstanding entertainment and community pride they provide every year. We are also grateful for the countless

community betterment projects they have supported over the years with tens of thousands of dollars. We are pleased to support the celebration in this way.

We are also privileged to work with the Cedar Basin Jazz Festival. Our city enjoys a highly regarded reputation among Dixieland jazz aficionados due to their efforts. We were astonished to receive a letter from the Cedar Basin Jazz Festival board indicating they would not be seeking reimbursement. Relentless efforts on the part of the festival's board members to recover deposits, airfare and other expenses brought the organization back to the black. This happy circumstance is a direct result of a great deal of hard work on the part of the board members and the remarkable relationships they have cultivated among their sponsors, entertainers and vendors. What an amazing organization!

I am please to report that both groups continue to work throughout the entire year planning their events and both will be back in their full glory next summer!