

Insider
For 12/30/09
By Kim Burger

As we prepare to ring in the New Year, it seems appropriate to reflect on 2009 recounting what's transpired and to gear up for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. As I look back over the past year, I believe we should all feel a great sense of accomplishment. It's been another outstanding year!

In May we, at long last, received the state's first official Bicycle Friendly Community designation from the American League of Bicyclists. This honor was the result of the work of a tenacious and dedicated team of volunteers appointed by Mayor Crews and led by Councilman David Wieland. The task force regularly sought public input to assure community support and, with funding from the Cedar Falls RAGBRAI Committee and the Cedar Trails Partnership, engaged the services of the Active Transportation Alliance (formerly Chicagoland Bicycle Federation) and the Iowa Bicycle Coalition to develop a master plan. The plan was recently adopted by City Council as was a Complete Streets Policy. One of the major purposes of the master plan is to help educate and encourage the public to consider bicycling beyond recreational purposes and begin to use it as a green and healthy form of transportation. Once we begin to implement elements of the plan our status as a bronze level Bicycle Friendly Community should easily be elevated to the gold level.

In July, we welcomed ABC's Good Morning America program to town. Several segments of the show were shot with downtown Cedar Falls and hundreds of enthusiastic Cedar Valleyians as the back drop. When producers of the program learned how we handled the adversity of the horrible floods of 2008 they came to share our story with the rest of the country. While the floods created a good deal of long lasting hardships, we showed visiting workers and volunteers what Iowan's are made of as we worked to save what we could and help restore normalcy to the lives of our neighbors to the extent that each of us could.

Also in July, we ended the fiscal year with a whopping 20% increase in hotel/motel tax revenues. While much of this increase was a result of the 2008 floods, visitors are still coming to the Cedar Valley despite the dismal economy.

In September I received the Individual Professionalism Award at the Upper Midwest Convention and Visitors Bureau's Conference. This meeting included destination marketing organizations from seven Midwestern states and it was a humbling, memorable and gratifying experience for me.

In October we were astounded to receive the Iowa Tourism Office's Community of the Year Award – for the second time! The award was last presented to Cedar Falls in 2005 and is based on several criteria including outstanding performance in 2008-2009, outstanding economic impact, effective marketing, and a well-rounded mix of local events and attractions. Our own Senator Jeff Danielson was honored with the Legislator

of the Year Award and the Phelps Youth Pavilion received the Tourism and the Arts Award.

As you can see, it has been a very good year – and we have great hope for the next one as we plan to capitalize on our momentum. Thanks to the creativity and commitment of dozens of volunteers who work with us regularly to foster, market, service and promote our community as a quality destination for visitors, we have no shortage of inspiration or ideas. Our plans for next year include a focus on public relations and a concerted effort to bend the ears of travel writers to create awareness of our community. We plan to upgrade our web presence and will continue to engage in social networking to invite people to experience the Cedar Valley.

Happy New Year to one and all! We look forward to working with all of our local businesses and volunteers for the continued prosperity and quality of life we enjoy here in our community.