

Insider
For March 4, 2009
By Kim Burger

For February being such a short month, we packed a great deal into it! On February 3rd representatives of Iowa's tourism industry met in Des Moines for a legislative seminar and our annual evening showcase event. The noontime seminar is a fairly new component to the day designed to provide an overview of the session to those in attendance. We were proud to have Senator Jeff Danielson as our featured speaker. Senator Danielson is well respected throughout the state and represents our area in an extremely positive light. He provided an overview of issues facing the state this year and advised us how best to communicate our priorities to his colleagues.

The evening showcase has taken place for many years and continues to be well attended. 71% of all the legislators came out, which is astounding considering the unending hours these dedicated men and women put in every day *and* given the fact that four other events were scheduled for the same evening. We appreciate the effort they make on our behalf. We understand that we won't agree on everything, but they are in Des Moines working for us and they are doing their very best.

I believe one reason our showcase is well attended is because tourism can benefit every single county in the state no matter the size, and constituents from every conceivable facet of the industry attend including volunteers and workers from hotels, attractions, events, casinos and destination marketing organizations. A perusal of the exhibits essentially provides a tour of the entire state in an evening.

Thanks to the efforts of the Travel Federation of Iowa, our industry is organized and concise in our message too, boiling our many issues down to three points: 1) Bring the Iowa Tourism Office budget to the Midwest Regional average of \$10.2 million; 2) Enforce the current school start date; 3) Continue to support TIME 21 funding to repair and improve Iowa's road system. Given the financial challenges that loom before us we realize an increase to the tourism marketing budget is not going to happen, but we implored our lawmakers NOT to cut this area too deeply. While marketing efforts tend to be first on the chopping block, it makes little sense when every dollar invested in tourism marketing is returned at least tenfold and unlike many other investments, that return is realized almost immediately.

We also encouraged legislators to add teeth to the existing school start date. Waivers to begin classes early are routinely granted by the Iowa Department of Education, cutting our summer travel season shorter every year. The Iowa Great Lakes Chamber estimates a \$1 million loss in their community alone for each day school begins before the Labor Day weekend. The Travel Federation's web site, www.TravelFederationOfIowa.org provides facts supporting each of these three priorities and I encourage you to log on and learn more.

The other really exciting event we recently took part in was the first annual Cedar Valley Sports Commission's Summit. Over forty people representing various sporting teams, clubs and organizations; facilities, and special events gathered to meet with members of the Sports Commission. These guests were thanked for the many exciting events they already bring to the Cedar Valley and were encouraged to dream a bit and share ideas for improvements or impediments holding them back from developing even bigger events. I think all who attended were enthused by the possibilities that lie before us and look forward to following up on these ideas to bring more entertainment to the community.