

State official beats drum for tourism spending

Tourism generated about \$9 million in revenue in Eau Claire County in 2010, according to information provided by Dave Fantle, deputy secretary for the state Department of Tourism. The county ranked 19th among Wisconsin's 72 counties that year in tourism spending.

Tourism's Local Impact

Tourists generated less revenue in Chippewa and Dunn counties in 2010 — \$4 million and \$2 million, respectively.

Tourism created more than 7,500 jobs last year in the three-county area, according to data Fantle provided. His department has provided funding to support several area events aimed at drawing tourists, including the Chippewa Valley Book Festival and the Eau Claire Jazz Festival.

McLean Bennett

Wisconsin budget sets aside more money for it

By McLean Bennett
Leader-Telegram staff

The state Department of Tourism is trying to ramp up Wisconsin's image in neighboring states to attract more visitors.

The department got a boost in the state budget this year, and it hopes to use some of its new funding to slap more pictures of happy vacationers on billboards, TV commercials and newspaper ads in places including Chicago and Minneapolis, said Dave Fantle, the department's deputy secretary, in a stop in Eau Claire this week.

"When we're competing for leisure travelers, we're competing primarily with the states of Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, and to a lesser extent Iowa," Fantle said, noting those are places where the department focuses marketing efforts.

It also runs ads in Wisconsin, he said, noting much of the state's tourism revenue comes from people who live here.

The department is putting up ads on trains and bus stops in downtown Chicago highlighting Wisconsin's recreation and entertainment offerings and bearing the slogan, "The

Fun Is Closer Than You Think." Meanwhile, billboards, newspaper ads and TV commercials throughout the Upper Midwest boast happy-looking couples and families carousing in cities and fishing on freshwater lakes.

The department received \$28 million in funding in the previous state budget, and the current 2011-13 spending plan promises to give the agency \$35.4 million, according to Paul Ferguson, a fiscal analyst for the state Legislative Fiscal Bureau.

Fantle defended the increase in funding by saying his department helps increase Wisconsin's revenue by attracting out-of-state visitors.

"The reality is if we're doing our jobs right, we're going to generate more local and state taxes ..." he said.

The additional funding is letting the agency flex its marketing muscles, Fantle said, noting tourism-oriented advertising is up compared with past years. Spending on advertisements in the fall of 2010 totaled just more than \$883,000, according to figures provided by his department. During the same period this year, spending was nearly \$1.3 million.

Much of that was geared in Chicago, where the department spent nearly \$580,000 on advertising this fall. It spent a smaller amount — about \$293,000 — in Minneapolis.

"When you look at the Chicago market, that's a huge gateway for everything from Lake Geneva to Milwaukee and up to Door County," Fantle said.

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