

# Thriving Tourism Industry Needs Hospitality, Marketing

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was started about 25 years ago," he said. "It's a method of preserving historical communities, historical architecture, and they work with grassroots, a bottom up movement." The work is done locally, he said, but the technology for the program comes from the national level.

The Main Street approach was created to encourage economic development in historic areas, while preserving the integrity of a historical district, and is based upon strong community involvement.

Along with helping to restructure and innovate programs for a downtown area, the national organization also works with business owners on marketing ideas and helps put together workshops to improve self-reliance among independent businesses.

But Mr. MacKenzie said that the primary reason that people come to Boyne City isn't owing to clever marketing campaigns or festivals, though the annual

Poker Run and other community festivities are a large draw. He said that the primary reason people visit Boyne City, and return year after year, is something much more basic: hospitality.

"One thing we constantly hear is about great hospitality," said Mr. MacKenzie. "People are friendly and open to greeting new people. Everybody here works on customer service. For the most part, people really enjoy their visit."

While festivals will draw guests for a weekend or a few days, ultimately it's a sense of welcoming that draws guests back, he said. Like Mackinac Island, Boyne City is not directly on the way to any other tourism destination. The people who go to Boyne City specifically choose to be there, and for Chamber of Commerce members there, it is important to make certain that they enjoy their stay.

Marketing Boyne City is somewhat different from marketing places like Mackinac Island, because tourism is not

Boyne City's primary industry. "Tourism is the gravy here," said Mr. MacKenzie. "We're dependent on it to some degree, but not entirely."

Which perhaps explains another Boyne City philosophy which has helped the town to expand and prosper: focus on local businesses and local community above and beyond any one specific industry. One of the main goals of the Boyne City Chamber of Commerce is to help make the city's businesses solid and sustainable. This, however, still has some application to tourism in the town.

"If we are successful in making the local businesses solid, that is more of a draw for the tourist, because there are more shops, more diversity," said Mr. MacKenzie.

Boyne City does offer a few unique perks for the tourist. There is, for example, a gift card offered which can be used in most of the area shops. Their Web site has an option to send online postcards to friends and family, and the chamber itself can send out e-mails with reminders of a person's upcoming visit to the city. But the primary draw for tourists is the hospitality and the pleasant atmosphere of a small city.

"We want to preserve our integrity and what keeps us unique," said Mr. MacKenzie.

While Boyne City is moderately new to the business of tourism, older small towns in Michigan have also discovered

that the best way to grab and keep a market is through simplicity and openness.

Frankenmuth is the state's largest tourist draw, and constantly places first on state rankings of popular tourist destinations. Even Frankenmuth, though, claims that there are no tricks to the trade.

"People come here for tradition," said Jennifer Tebeldo, CEO of the Frankenmuth Chamber of Commerce. "They came in the past and they want to continue the tradition."

In a way similar to Boyne City, Frankenmuth works hard to establish a sense of community and hospitality toward the visitor. As she pointed out, Frankenmuth is a small town, with a population around 5,000, and the draw is in the small-town atmosphere.

"Over time, we've just tried to uphold a strong sense of welcome. Hospitality. We want people to feel welcome, so anyone from the owner to the front line clerk can answer questions, from where to go and what to see to letting people know what we want the visitor to take back home from Frankenmuth," said Ms. Tebeldo.

Frankenmuth is presently working at maintaining all of the old favorites for tourist, from the famous chicken dinners to Bronner's Christmas store. One of the important things that the city has discovered, however, is that, in order to maintain a market, they need to work at devel-

oping new things.

"Every destination has to diversify, add new things, and try to find a niche and tell travelers what's there," said Ms. Tebeldo.

Tourism in general, she said, has been down since September 11, owing to people wanting to feel safe and wanting to stay closer to family and friends. She added, however, that Frankenmuth has not suffered a noticeable decline in the most recent years. She attributes this largely to the familiar attractions of the city, drawing people back, to the sense of small town caring that can be felt, and to the hard work of businesses in creating new attractions.

"We kept the favorites and brought new items," said Ms. Tebeldo. "We want to both bring the new and keep the old."

New attractions include a water park and a community pavilion. Another new thing the chamber is involved in is reaching out to new, untapped markets. The general demographic of visitors who visits Frankenmuth is grandparents and young families. While Frankenmuth is continuing to reach out to these guests, it also hopes to attract new markets, such as conventions, sporting groups, and people with disabilities. The new community pavilion, especially, is being marketed as a destination for these new markets.

Also new to Frankenmuth are the new hanging flower baskets and boulevards. As part of a street beautification project, the city reinvented its downtown to be more pedestrian friendly.

"We put in millions, and a visitor who hasn't been here in a while would definitely be impressed," said Ms. Tebeldo. "We have beautiful baskets, benches, everything. All the shops are still there, so you can enjoy a new experience while maintaining the charm from before."

And there is the focus, she said: Maintaining the charm, hospitality, and historical integrity that has drawn guests to Frankenmuth for years.

"We're a small town. We talk about experiencing another world, escaping the hustle and bustle," said Ms. Tebeldo. "And the German heritage helps, for people to come and experience the authentic heritage."

Despite rising gas prices and decreased tourism in the post 9/11 culture, it is still possible to have a thriving tourism industry in Michigan. There is no secret ingredient to be used in a recipe for a good market, just a dedication to servicing the guests, a focus on hospitality, providing new attractions, and creating an experience that a tourist will not soon forget.

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