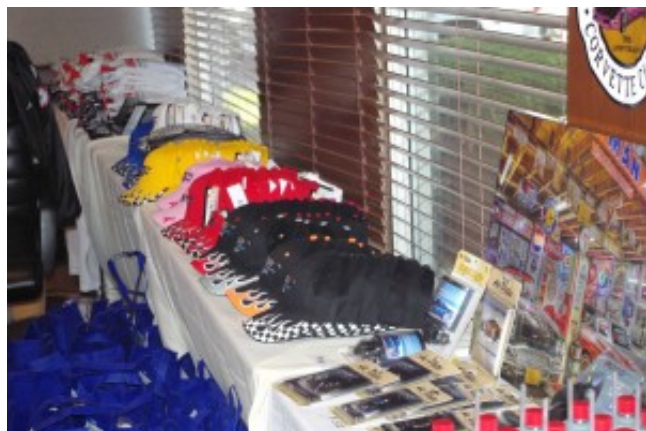




"Bring it Home" Ambassadors Contribute to the Greater Good



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One of the our nation's largest industries, travel and tourism is defined as all travel - both business and leisure, domestic and international, short hop and long haul, to and within the United States. As a result, tourism is an amalgamation of several key industries including hotels, attractions, retailers, restaurants and service providers, not to mention individual communities.

That's because tourism drives commerce. It provides a stream of revenue from outside visitors that contributes to economic development and job creation.

In the US, shopping and dining are the top two travel activities. So, logically, when northwest Indiana becomes a travel destination, more people spend their money in our region. Currently, the economic impact of tourism on Lake County is \$836 annually, and Lake County residents save nearly \$980 on their taxes (including federal, state and local) because of tourism.

The challenge, then, is how do we continue to grow travel and tourism in our area?

One effort supported by the South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority (SSCVA) unquestionably generates economic impact for northwest Indiana.

"The 'Bring it Home' program was something we started back in the '90s during my first tour of duty with the Lake County Convention and Visitors Bureau," Speros Batistatos, president and CEO of the South Shore Convention and Visitors Authority (SSCVA), said. "The idea is simple. We encourage people who belong to a specific association for leisure purposes or are members of a professional organization to become ambassadors and bring their events, meetings and conventions to northwest Indiana. The locations for most events, meetings and conventions are usually decided by someone's mere suggestion, and the host destination ultimately reaps the benefits."

Staffed by specialists who can walk you through the entire process of booking and organizing a meeting in northwest Indiana, the SSCVA also provides a wealth of resources and tools to assist you every step of the way. After all, bringing an event, meeting or convention to our area not only positively impacts the local economy by having people stay in our hotels, dine at our restaurants and support our retailers and services, it also gives you the opportunity to showcase local facilities, staff and communities to others in your organization.

Here are a few examples of "Bring it Home" ambassadors who recently assisted in generating

tourism dollars:

Karen Lauerman, marketing and communications director of the Northwest Indiana Forum, brought home the Indiana Economic Development Association (IEDA) Summer Conference June 21-22, 2012 with \$17,500 in economic impact.

"This is the professional organization for economic development people around the state," Lauerman explained. "We've actually had the opportunity to host one of the annual quarterly meetings three times in the last five years. We had a fall meeting that was basically centralized at the Radisson in Merrillville with bus tours of the industrial properties along the lakeshore and another summer meeting in LaPorte county with Blue Chip Casino, the beach and a golf outing. This time we really wanted to up the ante, to really showcase the benefits and advantages of northwest Indiana."

Approximately 200 attendees stayed 2-3 days at the Radisson, which Lauerman chose once again for its central location off I-65. Along with professional development, attendees were treated to a scenic Kanan Lake Michigan cruise in conjunction with Horseshoe Casino and a golf outing at Lost Marsh.

"The best place to start promoting northwest Indiana is here," she added. "We vie for these conferences not only with Indianapolis, which is the home base of this organization, but also with other members from across the state. We're hoping to bring it back again in the next couple years. Thanks to Spero, his staff and all our sponsors, the impression we made – from the Radisson to Lost Marsh and the Hammond Port Authority – it was truly hospitality at its best, and people are still talking about it. That's a great thing!"

Chuck DeLasCasas brought home the Lions Club Indiana State Convention April 27-29, 2012 with \$65,500 in economic impact.

"This convention rotates around the state so you have to put in bids for where you want to have it," DeLasCasas said. "Through next year one district hosts it and runs it. Then, they are going to try something different. We've been doing pretty much the same thing since I got involved in 1983, so I wanted to shake things up a bit this year and try something a bit different. The SSCVA did a great job helping us out and cutting down our costs. Since we never had offsite excursions before, they helped us coordinate things and get the word out. They also linked the schedule of events with online hotel reservations right from the state site."

Approximately 350 people attended meetings and toured club displays at the Radisson and had the opportunity to participate in a golf outing at Indian Ridge Country Club, pork chop dinner at Christ Presbyterian Church in Crown Point as well as local tours of Albanese Candy Factory or Crown Brewing plus Crown Point Courthouse shopping.

Julius Johnson brought home the United Council of Corvette Club's 34th Annual Convention July 8-15, 2012 with \$114,750 in economic impact.

Highly-anticipated, this annual convention returned to northwest Indiana for the second time since 2003 after making the rounds to major cities such as Memphis TN, Milwaukee WI, Chicago IL, Charlotte NC, Richmond VA, Washington DC, Louisville KY, Cleveland OH and Detroit MI.

"We got to do it again because it was such a great success," Johnson explained. "It's a busy week and a whole lot of fun. But, there's a lot to do since we make plans for the whole family. The SSCVA was real helpful. From the great police escort they arranged for us to putting us in contact with all the venues, they were great."

From the customary car show, line dancing and contests held at the Radisson, this group of approximately 200 did it all – from bowling and golf to casinos, shopping, a boat cruise, Taste of Chicago and Passion of the Christ tour plus chaperoned visits to Albanese Candy Factory, the Fun Center, Michael Jackson's house, Deep River Water Park, Great America and a Rail Cats game.

Brian Cummings is bringing the Professional Disc Golf Association World Championship August 3-10, 2013.

Once again Lemon Lake, in conjunction with Red Roc Disc Golf Club, Lake County Parks and Recreation and South Shore Sports Promotions, has been selected to host the PDGA World Championships. In 2010, the organization brought 324 pros from 6 countries to our region. This year, demonstrating the growth in popularity of the sport, 1,100 golfers competed in Charlotte NC.

"When we did this in 2010 everything was all new to them, but this time the SSCVA has been in on it from the get go," Cummings said. "They're already connecting us with hotels and helping us advertise. Working with them is great for the event. I've gotten to know Jason Sands (SSCVA director of sports development, south shore sports promotions) pretty well. It's nice to have someone to meet with and talk over plans."

"We continue to challenge people to think about what they belong to and 'Bring it Home' as far as events, meetings and conventions," Batistatos said. "We can always use more cheerleaders – advocates who are helping us sell northwest Indiana as a destination."

Whether you're a member or sit on the board of an organization, contact the SSCBA to learn more about proposing northwest Indiana to the site selection committee.

Contact the sales department at 219.989.7770 or submit details using the online Request for Proposal (RFP) form within the Meeting Planners tab at www.southshorecva.com.