**PRESS RELEASE**

**PORTAGE COUNTY VISITOR SPENDING INCREASES BY 7 PERCENT IN 2014, STATE FIGURES SHOW**

***Travelers spent $111.7 million in Portage County communities in 2014***

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**STEVENS POINT, Wis. (May 1, 2015) –** Visitors spent $111.7 million in Portage County in 2014, the third year in a row that traveler expenditures topped $100 million in the county, according to figures released today by the Wisconsin Department of Tourism.

The $111.7 million in visitor spending was an increase of 7.07% from the $104.3 million visitors spent in Portage County in 2013. Overall, visitor spending has increased by $13.7 million since 2011.

“It is wonderful to see such strong growth in tourism for Portage County as we build off of our success year after year,” said Sara Brish, executive director of the Stevens Point Area Convention and Visitors Bureau. “It shows us that people are learning about all of the great offerings we have here, and generating a positive impact for the communities throughout Portage County.”

Brish said the increase in visitor spending locally can be attributed to several factors, including successful marketing campaigns, hosting numerous sports events and a strong meeting and convention market in 2014.

The sports and meeting market was extremely strong in 2014, with hosting numerous semi-final and regional tournaments culminating with hosting the NCAA’s Division III Women’s Basketball Final Four National Championship. Additional events boosted overnight stays in the region’s hotels by more than 11% during the first quarter in 2014, including the Great Northwest Basketball Tournaments, SPAYH State Hockey Tournament and the Wisconsin State Senior Bowling Tournament.

The campaign ‘Celebrate the Arts’, as launched in spring 2013 to promote the numerous arts offerings in the Stevens Point Area—including visual arts, performing arts, culinary arts and the art of brewing— across multiple platforms. The 2014 campaign generated more than $511,206 in local economic impact, augmenting the strong gains for spring. Momentum continued through the summer and into the fall with additional events, including the state’s largest agricultural outdoor show Wisconsin Farm Technology Days bringing nearly 50,000 people to the central sands region.

The ‘Central Wisconsin Craft Collective’ campaign, conducted last fall, promoted the Stevens Point Area’s craft breweries, winery and distillery. The promotion featured a unique giveaway allowing one lucky winner to win a prize package which included lodging, dining and VIP tours and tastings at the breweries, winery and distillery. The Central Wisconsin Craft Collective will continue into 2015, which will be expanded to include Sunset Point Winery in Stevens Point.

“It’s wonderful to highlight the region’s biggest assets, to help educate visitors and locals about the tourism offerings in the Stevens Point Area,” Brish said. “When someone experiences our area, whether it’s coming to an event, using our recreational trails or stopping by a local brewery, we create a positive impact for the region and hopefully create a local tourism ambassador.”

Statewide, traveler spending generated $1.4 billion in state and local revenue and $1 billion in federal taxes. The Department of Tourism worked with a national research firm Tourism Economics and Longwoods International to produce the reports.

“The past four years have been outstanding for Wisconsin’s tourism industry. Since 2010, tourism activity is up by $3.7 billion, a 25 percent increase. And this is the first time in recent history that all 72 counties posted a positive increase in visitor spending,” said Department of Tourism Secretary Stephanie Klett. “Tourism continues to be one of Wisconsin’s most important economic resources. What’s more is research shows that tourism advertising goes beyond just promoting vacations, it also positively influences the state’s overall image as a great place to live, find a job, or open a business.”

The Stevens Point Area Convention and Visitors Bureau is an economic and community development organization whose purpose is to expand Portage County’s economy by attracting conventions, sporting events and leisure tourists to Portage County. The SPACVB provides visitors with local and state information, including travel guides, maps and brochures.

For more information about the Stevens Point Area, visit [www.stevenspointarea.com](http://www.stevenspointarea.com). The SPACVB can also be found on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/StevensPointArea](http://www.facebook.com/StevensPointArea)), Twitter ([www.twitter.com/StevensPtArea](http://www.twitter.com/StevensPtArea)) and Pinterest ([www.pinterest.com/StevensPtArea](http://www.pinterest.com/StevensPtArea)).

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