

Researchers Target Tourism Planners on Local Level for Listening Sessions Across the State

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must see, must do, and go back to," Dr. Holecek said after the meeting. That will involve the creation of "a super magnet that sucks people across the [Mackinac] Bridge."

Carol Eavou, vice president of hotel operations for Kewadin Casinos, which hosted Thursday's event, agreed.

"We can develop a product to bring people across the bridge, but we have to work together," she said. "We have to be the driving force."

Dr. Holecek summed up what he heard those people attending the Upper Peninsula sessions saying and his opinion is that the proposed Upper Peninsula Gateway Discovery Center may provide that solution. The Michigan Historical Center in the Department of History, Arts and Libraries unveiled a plan in March for the St. Ignace center, which will be just north of the Mackinac Bridge toll plaza.

"It's got to be big," he said. "It can't be just another little thing. It has to be like another Mackinac Island."

The discovery center would serve as an attraction in its own right, providing an area to showcase the Upper Peninsula's clean air, clear water, miles of shoreline, natural resources, history and culture, and friendly people. Much of the U.P.'s resources are unique, he said, and the Upper Peninsula

does not have the traffic congestion or outlandish prices of more developed areas.

"We've got the assets; we have a fantastic endowment," said Dr. Holecek. "We just haven't pulled them together."

In addition to serving as its own attraction, the discovery center could be an interpretive arm for Upper Peninsula communities, where areas could offer information to travelers on why they should visit.

Dr. Holecek said the secret to get people to return is to keep changing the center's attractions so people will want to come back. He also noted that a department that tracked visitor statistics and comments could then react to the tourists' changing needs and requirements.

Meetings that will take place over the next five months around the state are called listening sessions and are led by Dr. Holecek and Gary Warnell, the project specialist for Michigan Travel, Tourism, and Recreation Resource Center at Michigan State University. The sessions are open to anyone interested, but MSU is targeting destination marketing organizations, convention and visitor bureaus, downtown development authorities, chambers of commerce, and business owners. Dr. Holecek also said he hopes those involved in infrastructure development, like state officials from the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of

Transportation, will attend the sessions, since infrastructure supports tourism.

Michigan has the natural resources, including more fresh water shoreline than any state, but the state never has had a tourism marketing plan or a tourism department, something Dr. Holecek hopes to change once the plan is complete. He said the need for a state plan was first recognized by legislators in 1945, but steps to create one never began.

Tourism does not have cabinet-level representation like the Michigan Department of Transportation, the Department of Agriculture, or the Department of Natural Resources. Travel Michigan is tucked within the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, explained Dr. Holecek.

Michigan draws its largest segment of tourists from an area that has the highest unemployment in the United States, he noted, so it now needs to look at other potential visitors from outside the Great Lakes area and figure out how to attract them to Michigan.

"Quality guest services is the glue that holds the visitor's experience," said Greg Hokans, chief of development and marketing at Mackinac State Historic Parks, who attended the meeting and is on the planning council.

"We don't have theme parks, but we can out-service them," he said.

The industry council, which

has more than 80 members, was established to work on this strategic plan for tourism, includes representatives from the state association, including Kewadin Casinos, Mackinac State Historic Parks, Shepler's Mackinac Island Ferry, museums, recreation, travel, park, retailers, and snowmobile entities. The group also includes representatives from state agencies, newspapers, and convention and visitors bureaus.

Eight categories identified by the planning council that will be the basis for the strategic plan include industry organization and leadership, collaboration and partnership, funding, research and market segmentation, public policy and government relations, general promotion, training and leadership, and visitor experience.

Meeting attendees were asked to comment on each of the eight categories to provide planners with additional input, ideas, and let them know if the plan is on the right track, explained Mr. Warnell, who led the session at Sault Ste. Marie. They then voted to select the four most important categories.

At Sault Ste. Marie, participants rated visitor experience as most important, with the Upper Peninsula needing a hallmark attraction that will draw national and international visitors, provide a reason to cross the Mackinac Bridge, and a reason to return. Comments relating to this category are what drew Dr. Holecek to

conclude that the Discovery Center might support this need.

General promotion was rated as next most important, with emphasis on a shared product for both peninsulas and a specific focus on what the state represents for the tourist.

Public policy and government relations earned the next highest priority. Mary Dufina of Village Inn restaurants on Mackinac Island and in St. Ignace and Pellston shared her experience with traveling to Lansing and investing time with lawmakers to let them know what is going on in the north and what is needed. Dr. Holecek reminded participants that lawmakers passed legislation last year for the post-Labor Day school start, designed to help tourism.

Deemed least important among the Sault group is research and marketing segmentation, which concerns keeping track of visitor needs and noting tourism trends to allow the industry to remain competitive.

Also ranked as lower importance were industry organization and leadership, collaboration and partnership, funding, and training and leadership.

Dr. Holecek expects that projects from the strategic plan will be

picked up by existing industry institutions, including the Tourism Industry Coalition of Michigan, Travel Commission, and Travel Michigan.

The planning process began in November 2005 and the final plan is expected to be presented at the statewide tourism industry summit in Traverse City in March 2007.

Salmon Derby Set at DeTour Saturday

For the first time, a Salmon Derby will be offered at DeTour Village Saturday, June 10. The DeTour X Atlantic Salmon Derby will begin with a shotgun start at 6 a.m. and end promptly at 4 p.m.

Cash prizes will be given for the heaviest four salmon caught during the contest.

The entry fee is \$50 per boat, with \$7.50 of that donated to the DeTour Area Chamber of Commerce for support of the fish cleaning station.

Boy Scouts will serve refreshments as a fundraiser during the public weigh-in ceremony at 5 p.m. at the marina parking area.

The event is sponsored by River Bend Resort and North Country Sports of DeTour Village.

57th Annual Festival Highlights Island's Lilac Blossoms

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enthusiasts."

Festivities include the Friday, June 9 coronation of the Lilac Festival Queen and Court at 5:30 p.m. in Marquette Park, free concerts, walk-and-talk tours with members of the International Lilac Society, tall ship cruise and wine tasting, A Taste of Mackinac luncheon, and Kid's Day at Fort Mackinac.

Held on the lawn of the Harbour View Inn, the Taste of Mackinac Thursday, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., provides locals and visitors an opportunity to sample culinary favorites served by chefs from the Island's restaurants. Cuisine ranges from Colonial to contemporary and includes fares such as Austrian, French, Irish, Italian, Jamaican, and Mexican.

Celebrating equine and canine companions, the Mackinac Island Dog & Pony club returns with the second annual Feast of Epona and Epona & Barkus Parade. The dog and pony show will include a blessing of the animals, pony appreciation, horse etiquette, an owner and dog look-alike contest, informal best-in-show awards, and agility competitions. Events run throughout the festival.

New this season is the Barkitecture Design Competition, which brings design professionals together to compete for vacation packages by creating shelters for man's best friend. All barkitecture will be on view at the Dog House restaurant on Windermere Point. With live, silent, and on line auc-

tions, this event will cap of the Feast of Epona festivities and raise much needed funds for the Mackinac Island Dog & Pony Club and other humanitarian equine and canine groups.

Members from the International Lilac Society will be on hand for the annual festival on Mackinac

Island. The Learning about Lilacs seminars and daily "Walk and Talk with Lilacs" will feature symposium for enthusiasts and seasoned gardeners to learn more about varieties and care of their lilacs.

"Hosting members from the International Lilac Society is a unique opportunity to gather the

world's foremost lilac experts and enthusiasts here on Mackinac Island," said Mrs. Slevin. "This is home to some of the country's oldest and most beautiful lilacs."

A complete schedule of events is posted on the Mackinac Island Tourism Bureau's Web site, www.mackinacisland.org.

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