

Tourism growing in northwest Kansas

The Northwest Kansas Travel Council has been promoting tourism in the 18-county region for nearly two decades but the monthly meeting March 31 in Morland drew one of the largest crowds in years. Fourteen of the 18 counties in the region had at least one representative at the Prairie Junction Restaurant where the luncheon meeting was held.

Why is the interest in tourism in northwest Kansas gaining momentum? One reason of course is the continued promotion of rural Kansas communities by Marci Penner, director of the Kansas Sampler Foundation in Inman.

The biannual WeKan Conference in Salina on March 24 drew 170 participants (many from travel council) who could relate to the "Relentless for Rural" theme of the day-long presentations. The audience heard from the experts on what sells tourists on destinations to rural communities and what visitors are wanting to experience as they drive to small towns taking in attractions, history, culture, cuisine, geography and more.

Part of the renewed interest comes from the current 8 Wonders of Kansas statewide competition that results in communities promoting all that is good about their people, their architecture, their culture, and their recreational opportunities. Nominations for the 8 Wonders of Kansas Cuisine ended this week with nearly 10 nominees from the 18-county travel council region alone including reputable restaurants from Hays, Goodland, Russell, Oberlin and Bunker Hill.

Kansas Sampler Festival

Much more can be gleaned about tourism opportunities in the region during the annual Kansas Sampler Festival to be held May 2-3 in Concordia. Committee chairman, Jennifer Spesser, Hoxie, went over plans for organizing the 2,400 square foot northwest Kansas tent, where all members have an opportunity to promote their attractions, festivals, eateries, history and recreation.

The regional tent at Sampler Festival is a beehive of activity with the smell of fresh popcorn filling the air, local entertainers charging up the air waves and this year a couple of Bird City entrepreneurs will offer a sample of Monty's Beef Jerky to promote this new local product.

The corn dig is a kid pleaser while adult travelers will be browsing display tables for day trips, boating and

skiing adventures, fishing tournaments and educational trips that allows them to re-live a historic event or even a chance to investigate the family tree. Plus there are prizes for correct answers to questions from the "Wheel of Wonder" and candy bowls filled with sweets.

For the past decade the travel group has worked to enhance an area directory that began with a mere 12 pages and since has blossomed into a four-color 36-page picture packed Ultimate Guide that focuses on hunting and fishing opportunities but also highlights community attractions, historic sites, lodging, restaurant locations and local events.

While member brochures are also distributed at each opportunity such as the Sampler Festival the big push to promote as a region comes in the winter when travel council members hit the road with brochures from member communities and boxes of Ultimate Guides for travel and sports trade shows in Denver, Kansas City, Wichita and most recently Long Beach, Calif.

If any business owner involved with tourism pays the membership fee to travel council they do not have to go to monthly meetings to reap the rewards as promotional pieces are displayed at trade shows and Sampler Festival for anyone who joins the council. The Ultimate Guide is our most popular piece handed out at the Denver International Sportsmen Show.

Promotional video

Discussion at the Morland meeting centered on a new promotional effort being coordinated with Martha Slater, First Generation Video of Hutchinson, to capture the intrigue of outsiders with an interest in wild west history to explore the Arikaree

Breaks in Cheyenne County and to research Indian lore that encompasses surrounding counties like Rawlins, Decatur, Sherman, Wallace and Buffalo Bill's exploits in Logan County.

Those who have more of an archeological tenor might find the Keystone Gallery, Sternberg or Fick Fossil Museum the best place to start looking for skeletal collections from the Western Interior Sea that once covered Kansas. The online video promos will allow explorers surfing the web to find information easier and hopefully assure easy access with other newfound technologies.

The third part of the promotional package will be focusing on scenic byways and backways that have already been developed to promote Post Rock territory in Russell County and Smokey Valley scenic vistas in Trego County. This project will culminate next spring with another tourism promotion to help showcase rural communities offered through Eagle Communications.

Through their television network system, northwest Kansas will be on air to new audiences in a program called "Community Pride Profiles." Again, a coordinated plan to combine the small ad budgets of a lot of counties will do more good than each county having to come up with the funds for individual promotion.

With a little arm twisting from Ms. Penner, a partnership has been formed between the Kansas Department of Commerce Travel and Tourism Division and the Sampler Foundation that will bring \$50,000 of state money to assist in branding those rural idiosyncrasies that make each community unique. A theme song written by Jim Farrell of the Diamond W Wranglers called

"Rural Kansas: Come...and get it" is now being aired on radio stations and was played for those who had not heard its premiere in Salina the week before.

What travel council members have learned from one-on-one discussion with travelers is that when visitors come to Northwest Kansas they want to make the drive worthwhile and that is done by making as many stops as possible.

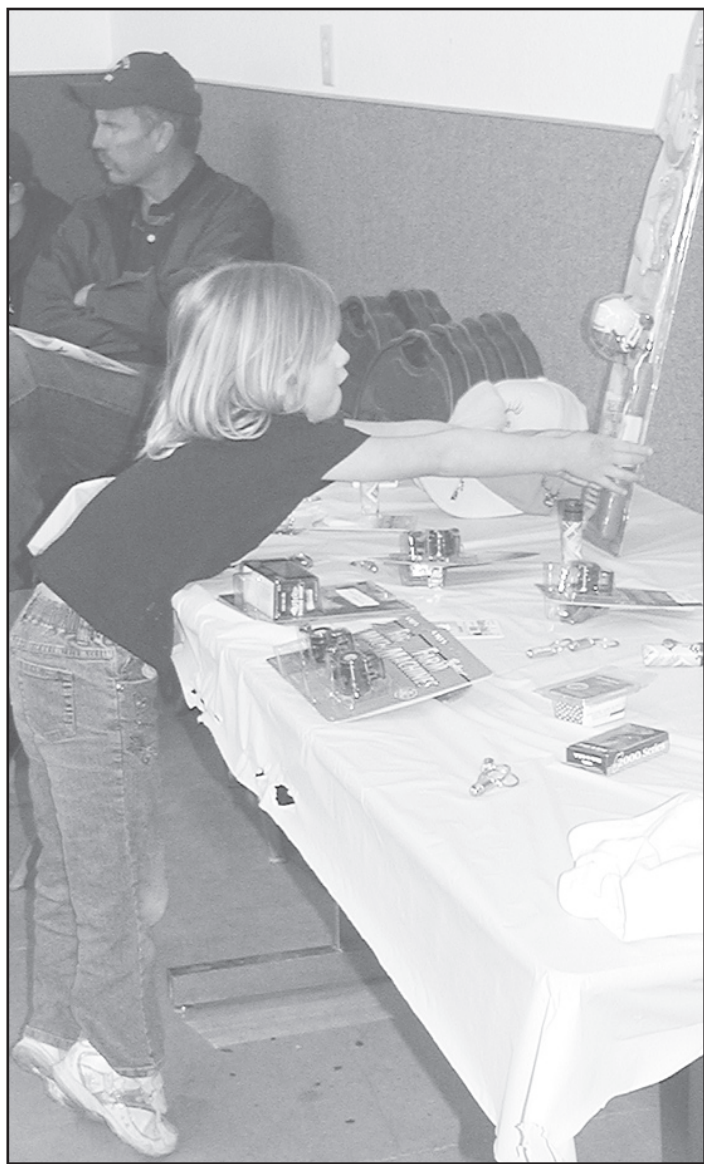
"That effort to sell each and every community makes the travel council membership worth the money, said Connie Grafel, Oberlin, currently chairman of the Northwest Kansas Travel Council.

Find more information on the year-round work being done by the membership by going to the web site at www.northwestkansas.org.

"We joined Northwest Kansas Travel Council immediately upon buying the RV park because they promised to inspire tourists to visit our area," said Mary Arlington, certified park operator for High Plains Camping, an overnight camping facility along I-70 in Thomas County. "We maintained our membership now for 7 years because the council delivered on their promise. They market the park in places we simply can't do alone."

Another pleased member of the 18-county organization is Mike McCafferty, Proprietor of A Moment In Time Antiques located in Thomas County.

"I joined the council after having been invited to a free seminar on internet marketing tools," he said. "The value of that one seminar far exceeded the cost of their dues. It was very interesting to get a broader view of the overall opportunities available to all business people."



CHECKING OUT THE PRIZES — McKenna Poling checked out a fishing pole that was being given away at the Wildlife Banquet March 27.

Herald staff photo by Casey McCormick

Bowling News

Wednesday Afternoon Coffee

Team standings: Lodge Sleepers 33-23, Dairy King 28-28, Western State Bank 27-29, Kale's Girls 24-32.

High game (scratch): Pat Confer 197, Carol Peterson 178, Virginia Lengel 151; (handicap): Confer 235, Peterson 232, Lengel 207.

High series (scratch): Confer 547, Marlys Poulignot 408, Lengel 399; (handicap): Confer 661, Lengel 567, Bonnie Mullanix 563.

Wednesday Night Mens 4-1

Team standings: Bonny Solutions 34-14, Wray Lumber 29-19, Wright & Wrong 29-19, Krien Steel Buildings 25-27, Haigler Two 24-24, Cheyenne Bowl 21-27, Haigler One 20-28, Idalia JV 10-34.

High game (scratch): Rod

Heaton Jr 216, Ted Mosier 212, Eddie Zuege 207.

High series (scratch): Bob Lippert 560, Kelley Faylor 553, Zuege 552.

Ladies Nite Out 4-2

Team standings: Bankwest Alley Kats 30-18, Strikers 29-19, Dundy Ag 27-21, Mel's Gals 27-21, Wray Meat Packing 25-23, Jersey Maids 24-24, Wright Carpet 23-25.

High game (scratch): Renea Mathies 193, Tammy Zimbelman 186, Tammy Drommond and Kathy Blecha 183; (handicap): Zimbelman 227, Mary Bier 226, Mathies 225.

High series (scratch): Blecha 524, Mathies 492, Zimbelman and Drommond 486; (handicap): Blecha 623, Victoria Windell 616, Zimbelman 609.

Don't Take Chances. Call Before You Dig.

Remember to call **811** at least two working days before you begin any digging. This free service coordinates local utilities to mark underground pipes and wires before you start your project.

Don't take chances. A call to **One Call 811** will help you avoid potential expense—and the possibility of serious or fatal injury.

For your own safety, call **811** before you dig.



Know what's below. Call before you dig.



Improving life with energy



WRAY COMMUNITY HEALTH FAIR

Blood Draw Dates: Weekdays April 1st-22nd 6:00-9:30am @ Wray Hospital
Idalia Visions March 30 and 31st, 7:00-9:00am
May take normal medications prior to test
Fast for 12 hours (but DRINK plenty of water!)

Cost: \$25.00 – Chem Panel (glucose, blood count, electrolytes, thyroid & more)
\$15.00 – PSA (prostate blood test for men)

Fair Date: April 25th @ the Wray Schools Kitzmiller Building 8am-Noon

Call for a Blood draw appointment: 970-332-4811

(Appointments Highly Encouraged!)
Call for any questions 970-332-2245
Jennifer Kramer-RN, Lynn Clapper-RN, Mary Gelvin-LPN



Learn how to deal with the Internet Valuable Business Seminar

Join John Dehn, director of new media services for Haynes Publishing Company and learn how to use the Internet and the northwest Kansas business directory and search engine. He'll answer any questions you might have about web site design, e-commerce and Internet marketing.

He has been in the Internet and newspaper industries for over 20 years combined and is an award-winning online director in content, revenue and systems. "We want all

of our businesses in northwest Kansas to benefit and prosper from what the Internet has to offer." He says, "this is for any business owner who wants to learn how their business can benefit from a web page, e-commerce payment gateways, and Internet marketing."

We look forward to seeing you at this valuable business seminar. Cost is only \$10 and applies toward the purchase of any of our online products.

Wednesday, April 15, from 4 to 5:30 p.m.

call 785-462-1149 to reserve your seat

The Saint Francis Herald
(785) 462-1149