



Executive Director's Message

It has been a busy start to a new year. Let me touch on a couple of events and let you know about some of the things that are happening as we begin 2008.

First of all, I attended another very informative South Dakota Tourism Conference. As always, the mood was upbeat, and there were many good opportunities to learn what is going on in our state concerning the tourism industry. Some of the highlights for me were the emphasis on customer service. With the internet and the increasing number of "blog sites" both positive and negative feed back can be shared with the entire world almost immediately. It is vital that all of us take the time and effort to teach our front-line workers the importance of outstanding customer service.



George Kotti
Executive Director

Certainly another highlight of the conference was the targeted marketing and visitor tracking that our state is doing. We are gaining some very valuable information to assist us in developing more effective marketing campaigns. The hard work by everyone throughout the state resulted in a significant 8.8 percent increase in visitor spending to a total of over \$941 million dollars in 2007. The tourism industry has a tremendous economic impact in our state.

The economic news for Fall River County was not quite that rosy. Our increase in visitor spending was only 1.7 percent which is significantly below the state average. This shows that we need to improve our marketing efforts which highlight a desperate need for additional marketing dollars. As a chamber we are asking the city to release over \$30K of un-budgeted and un-obligated 2007 BBB Tax revenues that the council withheld from the chamber in 2007. This money will be directly invested into initiatives that will bring more visitors to Hot Springs and attempt to get them to stay here longer. Our new president, Dave Batchelor, is leading the charge, and we request your support in contacting our city leaders and attending the city council meeting on February 4, 2008, to voice your support.

I also want to thank our Ag Committee and our office staff of Pati and Cathy for the outstanding job they did in putting on another successful Ag Banquet. We also appreciate the area businesses that help sponsor this event each year. The banquet gives us an opportunity to honor our agriculture producers, present awards, give out our yearly agriculture scholarship and raise funds for our chamber's agriculture related activities, all while enjoying an evening of fun and good food. Thanks again to all who assisted to make this annual event a great success in 2008.

One other quick update, Clint Gregory, our transportation chairman, and I met with Darin Berquist, the Director of Transportation for South Dakota. Although we received no promises, we did communicate the safety concerns about Highway 18/385 between Hot Springs and Maverick Junction and the inadequate directional signage at Maverick Junction directing people to Hot Springs and the Southern Hills attractions.

Mr. Berquist did listen to our concerns and both Clint and I felt that there could be some hope of getting the program to widen that segment of road back on program plan.

One of the lessons I learned at the tourism conference came from one of our speakers. He said that he had studied the most successful of America's Fortune 500 companies and the CEO's of the top nine of these companies had two common characteristics. They were perseverance and humility. As we march on in 2008, let us have the perseverance to keep on working to make Hot Springs better and the humility to try new things along the way. If we do, we will certainly insure that the best is yet to come for Hot Springs.