

Executive Director's Message

Watching the presidential inauguration brought a sense of hope to America. With more than a million people crowded into the Capital Mall in Washington D.C., there was unprecedented excitement as America witnessed another peaceful transfer of power with the historical swearing in of our first African American president. The excitement of the inauguration, however, has quickly faded as our government undertakes the continuing challenge of repairing a broken economy, battling Islamic terrorists, along with a host of other real world problems that just won't go away.

January was also an exciting time for us here in Hot Springs. We had the privilege of announcing that our city was named one of America's Dozen Distinctive Destinations. Being listed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as one of this nation's elite travel destinations is indeed a great honor.

During the announcement, our Mueller Civic Center was filled with people and media. The press coverage that followed put Hot Springs in a positive spotlight. The Governor's Tourism Conference brought additional recognition from Governor Rounds during his speech at the Awards Banquet and Gala. And, like our national inauguration, becoming one of our nation's distinctive destinations has brought hope and excitement to our community.

Now that the announcement is over, the chamber and our membership have bills to pay while we face an uncertain future, considering our lagging national economy. This very real concern can dampen the enthusiasm that our national award brought us. That forces us to decide how we as a chamber and as a business community are going to face the future.

Despite last year's high fuel prices, South Dakota continued to be one of the States leading the nation in visitor spending growth. As we face the summer of '09, I am choosing to believe that we will have another good year here in Hot Springs – if!

That "if" translates to a couple of things. First, we must take maximum advantage of our Distinctive Destination designation with aggressive national marketing. We are looking at several ways that we can leverage our designation to attract additional visitors this summer.

Next, I believe that we can use our designation to attract additional tour busses to our community. We recently published a Hot Springs Tour Operator's Guide that was sent out to over 200 tour operators that have some interest in South Dakota. The guide was published in-house, and those businesses listed in the guide paid a meager fee to cover the postage. Now we wait with eager anticipation for positive results.

Finally, as a community we need to remain positive. I am proud of our chamber, that even in the midst of the funding difficulties of the past couple of years, we remained positive, and with hard work, we kept moving forward. Even though the future economic forecasts look bleak, I am certain we can find a way to make our summer a great one. As we look forward to the summer of '09 with enthusiasm and hope, I am sure that the best is yet to come for Hot Springs.



George Kotti
Executive Director