



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
EXTENSION

Tourism Development News

A Publication of the University of Illinois Extension-Fulton County

New Developments at Dickson Mounds

Dr. Michael Wiant

Over the past 80 years, millions of people have traveled to Dickson Mounds to learn about the extraordinary record of Native American history in the region, and the study of Native American culture remains the primary mission of Dickson Mounds Museum. Two and a half years ago, museum archaeologists unearthed the remains of a 2,300 year-old bison along the Illinois River.



New exhibits and programs at Dickson Mounds Museum will welcome and orient visitors to Emiquon.

The oldest example, by far, of Native Americans hunting bison in Illinois. This summer museum archaeologists joined colleagues and students from Michigan State University to explore the nearby Morton site, the location of the remains of a 700-year-old village overlooking the Illinois River valley.

Meanwhile, museum curators are developing exhibits that feature artifacts from new discoveries in the region and draw attention to previous research.

While many persons are interested in Native American culture and archaeology, it is clear that the public is also interested in other aspects of Illinois

River valley environment, history, and contemporary culture; so, we've developed exhibits and programs to explore those subjects. Emiquon, the restoration of a vast stretch of Illinois River floodplain and nearby upland landscape by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife

BENEFITS OVERVIEW AND ORIENTATION Peoria Area Convention & Visitors Bureau

Learn how Fulton County's affiliation with the our regional tourism marketing partner creates opportunities for your business, tourism organization, or event!

PACVB presentation at December 16, Tourism Alliance Meeting—see calendar (p. 4) for details.

Service (USFWS), presents an unprecedented opportunity for the museum to explore in much greater detail how Native Americans, and our ancestors, relied on flood plain resources to sustain life. Dickson Mounds Museum, TNC, and USFWS are in the process of developing trails, wayside exhibits, and new exhibits in the museum that consider the history of the Illinois River, its environment, and the people who have lived here for the past 12,000 years or more.

During this past year, museum visitors have had the opportunity to view an exhibit of late 19th and early 20th

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Group and Motorcoach Tours can Bring Big Crowds

Ashley Chitwood

Attending tradeshows provides the Peoria Area Convention and Visitors Bureau (PACVB) a perfect opportunity to showcase our region's unique attractions, accommodations, and dining options to group tour operators from the United States and Canada. Earlier this year PACVB staff attended the American Bus Association Marketplace in Virginia Beach, VA,

and the Heartland Travel Showcase in Milwaukee, WI. Hearing first hand from these tour planners allowed the PACVB an opportunity to see what is needed in our area to become a true destination, as well as giving us the chance to inform them of what already exists.

The American Bus Association Marketplace and Heartland Travel

Showcase are premiere events for the group travel industry. We meet face-

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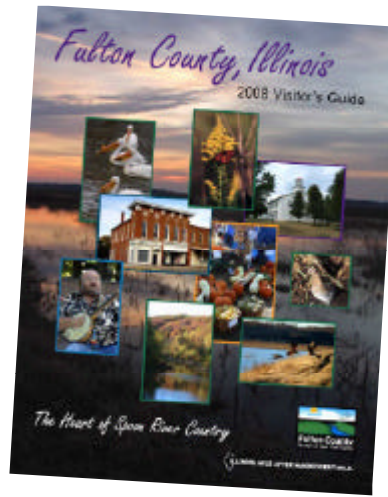
News & Updates

Visitor Guide:

The Fulton County Visitor Guide was completed and received from the printer in early summer. Under the Illinois Bureau of Tourism grant that provided half the funding for the guide, 75% of the printed guides must be distributed outside of our area (50 miles). Thirty-five cases of the guides have been distributed to the 15 official Illinois Tourist Information Centers (TICs). Most of these TICs are located in rest areas on interstate highways where they welcome and assist inbound visitors. The guide has been distributed to Spoon River Drive Fall Festival visitors by Scenic Drive area representatives, to the local businesses that advertised in the Visitor Guide, and to various other local and regional locations. A special thanks to the volunteers that have hand-delivered Visitor Guides!

In addition a cooperative arrangement is in place to send out packets containing the Visitor Guide and other

promotional brochures to those who call or e-mail from outside the area to request them (309-547-3721).



The Fulton County Visitor Guide has been distributed throughout the state.

Peoria Area Convention and Visitors Bureau (PACVB):

Our friend Ashley Chitwood, PACVB's Tourism & Special Projects Manager, has left the PACVB. She moved with her husband to the

Collinsville area, where she is the Executive Director of the Southwestern Illinois Tourism Development Office. Special thanks to Ashley for being such an engaged liaison between us and the PACVB! Cheryl Bockhold-Sloan is the PACVB's new Tourism & Special Projects Manager, capably picking up where Ashley left off.

Fulton County Tourism Alliance:

The Tourism Alliance's Coordinating Group continues to meet on the third Tuesday of even numbered months in joint session with the Tourism & Economic Development Committee of the Fulton County Board. The next meeting will be Tuesday, December 16, at 4PM in the Veterans Office across from the rear entrance to the County Courthouse in Lewistown. Cheryl Bockhold-Sloan and Chad Cunningham from the PACVB will provide an orientation and overview of member benefits and our county affiliation with the PACVB. New members and guests are welcome!

Group Tours *(Continued from page 1)*

to-face in pre-scheduled appointments with tour operators throughout the 2 to 3 day event to share information.

With a total of over 40 face-to-face appointments with group tour operators, the tradeshow were a success. The overwhelming trend from tour operators was shorter distances and shorter trips overall. This comes as no surprise to the PACVB. We have noticed this developing over the past several years, partly due to the increase in cost for gasoline. However, some groups are still willing to travel those greater distances. What is luring those willing to travel farther? Come up with something completely unique and interesting, and the groups will come!

The Peoria area is fortunate to have such a wide array of tourist attractions. Although we have such diverse choices (nature, sports, history, arts, outdoor recreation, etc.), we still need to be

creative in order to get the attention of these tour groups.

Experiential tours are all the buzz lately. Not only do the tour participants want to see a museum, they want to experience it. They want to be swept up in a story. They want to feel what those in the past felt. They don't just want to hear about nature, they want to walk through it. They want to be a part of it. It's about making it worth the trip and experiencing something pleasantly unique.

Not only do unique attractions pique their interests, but having quality lodging and restaurant choices nearby help tremendously. Because these groups are taking shorter trips, these essential elements need to be easily accessible and group-friendly. Maybe there isn't a restaurant that has enough seating for 40 people near your attraction. Talk with the restaurant about different options that might

remedy this, such as delivery in partnership with you. Group tour operators are always looking for the most convenient, and creative, way to entertain their clients. It's our job to assist in making this happen.

By attending tourism tradeshow, the PACVB can hear what group tour planners are needing first-hand. We are able to give a face to our organization and build relationships with tour operators. We will continue to spread the great word about all the wonderful attributes of the Peoria area and group-friendly attractions and events. But in order to attract the crowds, we need to creatively stand out from the crowd.

Ashley Chitwood is the former Tourism & Special Projects Manager for the PACVB and now the Executive Director of the Southwestern Illinois Tourism Development Office in Collinsville.



Ask “Dr. Tourism”—*Extension Budget Cuts-Tourism Prognosis*

Dear Dr. Tourism,

I understand that Kevin McGuire is being laid-off by U of I Extension for budgetary reasons. I know from his radio interviews that he’s worked on tourism here. What will the impact of him leaving be on local tourism efforts?

Uncertain in Norris

Dear Uncertain,

It is true that the University of Illinois Extension position currently held by Kevin McGuire—Unit Educator, Community & Economic Development—is being eliminated. State budget cuts and increasing costs have placed a great deal of financial stress on the whole U of I Extension system. Under these conditions the Fulton Unit was forced to eliminate one position. McGuire’s contract doesn’t end officially until the end of June 2009, but he will likely leave before then upon finding other employment.

You asked about the impact of his leaving on local tourism development efforts. Even a “doctor” like me can’t really predict the impact of McGuire’s departure. Like many things, it will depend to a great extent upon how we respond. It’s clear that Extension will have a dramatically reduced role in local tourism efforts. Rather than trying to anticipate the impact, my “doctorly” advice would be for us to view Mr. McGuire’s departure as a time of transition and therefore an important occasion for thinking carefully about what’s next.

The following list represents activities that would likely be part of any full-fledged tourism operation:

- Maintaining a top-quality website
- Updating, printing, distributing a visitor guide
- Working with local businesses and attractions to develop “packages”
- Advertising and promoting the area, local attractions, “packages,” etc.
- Maintaining database of attractions, events, visitor services, etc.
- Forwarding information on local events to regional and state events calendars
- Seeking, obtaining, and managing grants to support tourism activities
- Working with a local advisory or policy board
- Communicating, coordinating, and networking with and among tourism stakeholders
- Maintaining contacts and mailing lists for work with stakeholders and partners
- Engage and coordinate with regional partners, i.e., Illinois River Road National Scenic Byway, Peoria Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, etc.
- Encourage/train for excellent customer service among area tourism businesses
- Monitoring visitor flows, trends, etc.
- Working to support, encourage, and attract new tourism businesses.

Several of the activities above are ones that McGuire has been addressing.

Others are being addressed in partnership with Tourism Alliance members; still others by different individuals and organizations. Some of them have yet to be effectively addressed at all.

Members of the Fulton County Tourism Alliance and the County Board’s Tourism & Economic Development Committee have expressed an interest in maintaining the momentum they feel, the progress they have shared, and in continuing to build toward a full-fledged tourism operation for the county.

Times of change are important times to take stock and make thoughtful plans for what lies ahead. McGuire’s coming departure makes “What’s next?” a timely question. Is it time for county government to put in place a part-time tourism office? Is there a way for one of our existing non-governmental organizations to expand to include a full-fledged county tourism operation? Would it be better to continue to cobble together time and expertise from various partners as we’re able? What’s the future of the Tourism Alliance? What *is* next?

Fulton County’s Tourism & Economic Development Committee wants your ideas! Send your input on “What should be next for tourism?” to Mark Lynch, County Administrator, Fulton County Courthouse, Second Floor, Room 202A, Lewistown, IL 61542 or by e-mail to mlynch@fultonco.org.

Museum *(Continued from page 1)*

century photographs of farm life in Illinois, to experience a reenactment and celebration of Abraham Lincoln’s speech in Lewistown 150 years ago, to contemplate the 2,300 year-old bison skeleton, to attend a concert of French Creole and Cajun music, to explore award-winning exhibits on Native American life, to celebrate the winter arrival of eagles, and on their way to

the museum, to marvel at how quickly the Illinois River flood plain has been transformed from row-crop production to a lake that has not been seen for eight decades. Tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of water birds have found their way to Emiquon, and we’ve seen many raptors such as hawks and eagles. Museum attendance increased last year and it is on pace to

be higher this year. We believe it will continue to grow as new exhibits, new programs, and new opportunities draw the attention of people for miles around.

Dr. Wiant is Director of Dickson Mounds Museum and an adjunct faculty member at Illinois State University.

Tourism Development News and U of I Extension

The *Tourism Development News* is a newsletter from the Community & Economic Development (CED) Education program of the University of Illinois Extension-Fulton County.

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Events and Meetings

Due to limited space, this section highlights only some of the upcoming events & meetings in our area.

December

Nov. - Jan.	Fulton County Arts Council , Annual Membership Show, Atrium Gallery—Graham Hospital, Canton
Nov. - Jan.	“Nature Sketches” Gladys & Ruth Dudley, Art Exhibit, Lobby Gallery—Dickson Mounds Museum (309-547-3721)
Dec. - Feb.	“The American Bald Eagle— featuring the photography of Jim Miller,” Photography Exhibit, Dickson Mounds Museum (309-547-3721)
Dec. 16	Joint Meeting—Tourism Alliance and Co. Board’s Tourism & Community Development Committee , 4pm, Veterans Office (across from west side Courthouse entrance, Lewistown), Guests welcome. (309-547-3711)
Dec. 20	Opening Reception—“The American Bald Eagle— featuring the photography of Jim Miller,” 5-7pm, Dickson Mounds Museum (<u>RSVP needed</u> . Call 309-547-3721)
Dec. 20	Hickory Ridge Coffee House , Barry Cloyd, 7:30 pm (Doors open 6:30 pm), Dickson Mounds Museum (309-547-3721)
<u>January</u>	
Jan. 17	Hickory Ridge Coffee House , 7:30 pm (Doors open 6:30 pm), Dickson Mounds Museum (309-547-3721)

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