

Success Story – Tourism - Visit Kewaunee County Partnership

Visitors to Kewaunee County contribute about \$32 million to the local economy and are responsible for 800 full-time jobs each year. However, over the past twelve years Kewaunee has lost the competition with other tourist destinations and subsequently on many community and economic development opportunities. In 2006, Kewaunee ranked dead last among all other Counties in the State in terms of growth in tourism spending between 1994 and 2006.

In 2007, Claire Thompson conducted two applied research studies which revealed the importance of visitor spending on local business. She presented results from these studies, along with secondary data garnered from state sources, to a number of businesses, government and community groups. Prior to 2008, Kewaunee County had no unified approach to promoting tourism. Scarcity of resources combined with uncooperative working relationships stymied collaborative efforts to promote the County.

In 2008 Thompson facilitated a visioning roundtable attended by nearly twenty community leaders who decided on a series of activities they felt were feasible and would positively impact tourism attraction. Thompson continued to facilitate the monthly group meetings, which eventually formalized into the Visit Kewaunee County Partnership (VKCP). The VKCP includes three chambers of commerce, the economic development corporation and other community organizations. Its mission is to advance the economic well-being of Kewaunee County through the development and promotion of tourism. By close of 2008, the VKCP developed a plan to educate visitors about Kewaunee County's tourism assets. The plan includes developing a joint web-site, County-wide branding, marketing and outreach and developing new tourism-based activities.

By the start of 2009, VKCP had funds from various public and private sources and with Thompson's facilitative leadership, the VKCP successfully launched a high-profile web-blog www.VisitKewauneeCounty.com in spring of 2009. The web-blog highlights tourism related assets, events and activities in the County, as well as stories of historical importance. This work was assisted by a UWEX District Resource Management grant in the amount of \$4,000 that funded the hiring of an intern to support the efforts of the VKCP and the Buy Local Initiative. With educational assistance from Thompson, the VKCP then decided to apply for a Joint Effort Marketing (JEM) Grant from the Wisconsin Department of Tourism to fund advertising in print and web-based media outlets in the Midwest, and promote the new web-blog and travel package deals in Kewaunee County.

At the close of 2009, the VKCP announced that they obtained the JEM grant totaling \$38,400. They also received additional boosts of confidence in the form financial support from more local businesses, municipalities and grants totaling \$10,000 from a local foundation. Thompson's facilitative leadership and educational assistance has been crucial to the group in its founding. As one member of the VKCP evaluated Thompson in her 360 review: "Claire has exceptional communication and facilitation abilities. She has the ability to move a project forward with these strengths and we are seeing excellent progress. She is also committed 110% to whatever she works on and that is truly invaluable."

With educational assistance and leadership facilitation from Thompson, the VKCP in collaboration with the Buy Local Initiative, the Algoma Farm Market Kitchen, and UW EX in Door and Kewaunee Counties have been asked to compete for additional funding to support the development and growth of agri-tourism resources, activities and events. A grant for \$13,000 was submitted in November, 2009 and we are hopeful for positive consideration.