

Insider

For May 19, 2010

By Kim Burger

May is Tourism Month and we generally observe it by inviting our Cedar Valley partner/stakeholders to gather for some networking, celebration and education. In recent years we've invited speakers to help us brush up on customer service skills and how to educate the public on the impact this \$6.4 billion industry has on our state. Did you know that visitors spent over \$275 million in Black Hawk County last year? While that's a substantial amount of money, it should come as no surprise when you consider the quality of events and attractions we have in the metro area!

This year we celebrated at the Holiday Inn and, rather than bring in a speaker, we tried something a little different and invited the public to submit photographs representing what they think makes the Cedar Valley a great place to visit. I am pleased to report that we had nearly 60 entries in our contest. Ed Blumenshine with JRS Photo Restoration and Mike Walden helped with the judging and honors went to Courtney Dierks, David Poe and Randy Darst for their depictions of UNI Homecoming, January Snowfall and a RAGBRAI 2007 concert. Honorable mention was made of Isabel Ganuza's and Michael Ficken's photos of the Cedar River, Hartman Reserve and the UNI Arboretum. We're looking forward to using these photos on our web site and print publications to promote the Cedar Valley to visitors. In the meantime, you can view them in the What's Hot Section of our web site at www.cedarfallstourism.org. We are also making plans to repeat the contest again next year so, if you've got a camera, we encourage you to keep it handy and snap a shot of your favorite event or attraction and submit it for consideration.

Once the Photo Contest winners were announced, we moved on to the industry awards. These honorees were selected from amongst a number of nominations made by the public and evaluated by a selection committee comprised of volunteers from both the Waterloo and Cedar Falls Visitors Bureaus. The Comfort Suites in Cedar Falls was named the Cedar Valley Hotel of the Year due to its recent recognition as a Choice Hotels International Platinum Hotel, which means it is rated among the top 3% in the world.

Cedar Falls Community Main Street was honored as the 2010 Organization of the Year in recognition of their highly successful Holiday Hoopla promotion and lead role in attaining the National Historic Trust's Dozen Distinctive Destinations award.

The Event of the Year is the Irish Cultural Association's Irish Fest due to the nearly 30,000 visitors it draws to the area and the uniqueness of the event. With only three years under its belt we look for even more excitement as the event matures.

The Grout Museum District and Iowa Veterans Museum was honored as the 2010 Attraction of the Year. The museum offers visitors stunning exhibits and inspirational stories, has exceeded all attendance expectations, and has directly contributed to the landing of several important meetings and reunions.

The Bureaus' Friends Awards went to Isle[®] Casino Hotel Waterloo and Cedar Falls Cablevision for their outstanding contributions to the tourism industry in the Cedar Valley. The Isle was honored for the nearly 1.5 million visitors through their doors and the \$4 million they have donated to local non-profit organizations. Cedar Falls Cablevision was honored as a friend for the contributions they regularly make to the Bureau's promotional efforts.

With around 125 people in attendance, these worthy recipients were given the honor they deserve. We look forward to another great year of tourism in the Cedar Valley and another round of honorees next May.