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Heritage Corridor CVB Hosts State Tourism Road Show at Chicagoland Speedway

Will County now ranks 4th in Illinois Tourism -- 4.5% increase in Visitor Travel Expenditures

Joliet, Illinois, July 12, 2013 -- The head of the State's Tourism office took a victory lap at Chicagoland Speedway Friday afternoon. Flanked by more than 100 Eagle Riders, whose route took them from Illinois Harley Davidson in Countryside to one of the area's top visitor attractions, Jen Hoelzle and her team were in town to celebrate the end of the IOT Road Show to promote strong economic impact of the travel effect in Illinois. State Representative Natalie Manley also joined in the ride at the Speedway, before taking part in a presentation that reported record increases in tax revenues and visitor travel expenditures for the second consecutive year. Hosted by the Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), the event drew elected officials, local tourism partners and members of the public to hear 2012 figures for Will County, which moved into 4th place among all counties in the state where tourism impact is concerned.



According to the U.S. Travel Association, which compiled the figures on domestic travel from 2012, the state of tourism is strong. Numbers released this week across the State show travel expenditures up for the second consecutive year in Illinois, totaling an impressive \$30.9 billion. "All across the Illinois and Michigan National Heritage Corridor, the effect of travel is clear and it is powerful," said Heritage Corridor CVB President/CEO Bob Navarro. The region benefitted from \$837.28 million in travel expenditures, and \$61.11 million in state and local tax receipts. In addition, Corridor-wide, the tourism industry employs 7,900 persons representing a payroll of \$190.96 million.

Overall, travel expenditures increased in each County, with Will County seeing a 4.5 percent boost, Grundy showing 4.3 percent increase, and both LaSalle and Putnam County showing 2.5 percent increases in 2012 compared to the previous year. Local county figures were detailed by Jan Kemmerling, Assistant Deputy Director of the Illinois Tourism Office.

"We are thrilled with the figures and tourism's ability to attract visitors, support our towns, and bolster the success of local businesses," said Navarro. "Our partner members are definitely helping each other succeed, and making for a great visitor experience in which we can all take pride," he added, applauding the efforts of the City, County and area travel partners. The Historical Museum's top-notch exhibits and Route 66 Welcome Center is a key hub for visitors to downtown Joliet, which gives them information to visit other attractions in town, whether taking in a show at Rialto Square Theatre, embarking on a Summer Tour, or stopping into the two area casinos. He noted that Star Wars Day, held annually at the

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Joliet Public Library and also at the Museum this year, drew nearly 5,000 people early in June. Navarro spoke of the cooperative marketing campaign where City of Joliet expanded its partnerships for the 2012 summer. That program generated almost 15,000 leads and those numbers are trending slightly higher in 2013, as a result of a new creative promotion, "City of Excitement, That's Joliet!" In his role, Navarro heads up Convention and Visitors Bureau, which is responsible for marketing and promotion of all its partners across four counties within the 94-mile Corridor.

Moving up to 4th place among all Illinois Counties, Will County leaders were thrilled with the results of the 2012 Economic Impact Report. County figures echo the State's increase in tourists and tax revenues, and are as follows: Travel expenditures were \$602.12 million, state and local tax receipts came in at \$42.23 million, with 6,240 persons employed in tourism related jobs, and payroll at \$153.1 million.

On hand for the news was Will County Executive Larry Walsh, County Board Chairman Herbert Brooks, County Board Member Jacquie Traynere, a CVB Board Member, as well as City of Joliet Mayor Tom Giarrante, City Manager Tom Thanas, and Deputy Manager Ben Benson, who also serves as President of the Board for the Heritage Corridor CVB. Joliet Region Chamber of Commerce leader Russ Slinkard, as well as the new Executive Directors of both the Joliet City Center Partnership and the Joliet Area Historical Museum were in attendance. For the Museum, Pam Owens and Greg Peerbolte, respectively, and Development Director, Mike Brick, also took time to participate in the presentation. The Route 66 Diner in downtown Joliet was recognized for its part in drawing international, national and regional visitors who travel The Mother Road. Since rebranding its image and changing its name over a year ago, the popular eatery has seen business increase by more than 30 percent. Owners John and Valentina Georgouses spoke of the information they share with visitors, encouraging them to visit the Museum and its Route 66 Welcome Center and Gift Shop, as well as Rialto Square Theatre and other nearby destinations along Route 66. Helping out with the presentation, announcing during the "Victory Lap," was WJOL-AM Radio's Mike "Googs" Guglielmucci.

Thursday's presentation was one three stops along the Corridor being made by the Illinois Office of Tourism to share the good news of this 2012 report. On Monday, Governor Quinn announced that the State hosted more than 99 million domestic visitors. International figures are due out at the end of the month, and preliminary estimates point to similar, impressive increases. The \$31 billion in revenue generated by tourism across the state from those domestic travelers is up 5 percent from last year's record-breaking high. According to Hoelzle, "The positive gains prove that Illinois' tourism industry is thriving, and continues to make vital contributions to the state's economic growth, job creation and tax revenue." Friday's presentation also included an announcement that Bill Kurtis will be "the Voice of Illinois," for an upcoming marketing and media campaign. In her comments, Hoelzle continued to discuss the travel effect. She added, "Record breaking numbers for the second consecutive year in a row show that tourism is clearly a key economic engine for the whole state." She explained that the Road Show, including stops at key attractions like Chicagoland Speedway, are a great way to "celebrate the continued industry success by efforts that drive visitors to the people, the places and the experiences that make a trip to Illinois memorable."

For more information on the Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) or any of its partner members, visit www.HeritageCorridorCVB.com, or call 800.926.CANAL (2262).

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