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Tourism impacts economy - Cass County EDC Breakfast Get Together reports

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About 35 attended the Cass County Economic Development Corporation Breakfast Get Together on June 18 at the Northern Lights Convention Center in Walker.

Keynote speaker Carol Altepeter, regional manager at Explore Minnesota Tourism, presented statistics on "How Tourism Impacts Our Economy."

Altepeter reported sales at leisure and hospitality businesses grew 47 percent – \$2.8 billion – from 2000 to 2011. There were 1,849 jobs in the leisure and hospitality industry in Cass County during year 2011, according to Altepeter.

Cass County has the highest number of tourism related jobs than any other county in Northwest Minnesota. Jobs in tourism have increased during 2011 and 2012 in Minnesota, following three consecutive years of job losses.

Local business leaders, Larry Jacobson of Hiawatha Beach Resort, Larry Gavin of The Anchorage Inn Restaurant, and Skip Duchesneau, bike trail supporter, shared how tourism affects their business. They suggested being creative and partnering with others. Gavin mentioned how they started "On the Lake Bocce Ball Tournaments" to bring people in during the winter months.

One participant pointed out snowmobile users and all-terrain vehicle (ATV) users actually spend the most per trip in local communities. The Cass County EDC reported ATV users typically spend \$28.11 per trip and snowmobilers spent \$42.24 per trip, as compared with \$7.68 per trip bicyclists spend when travelling within 30 miles.

"The thing about bikes is they have seven to eight months for a season, verses maybe four with snowmobiles – a ... reliable base," said EDC Member Dave Johnson, in response to biking and trail use debate.

"We need a diversity of groups to use our trails, which makes each trail investment dollar more worthwhile," said Gail Levenson, EDC executive director.

Dave Holk, EDC president, thanked the participants for attending and reminded all the EDC thrives on local business participation – through becoming EDC members and also sending businesses to the EDC for assistance.

Those interested in developing a business to support tourism in Cass County, may call the EDC at 218-947-7522 for technical assistance.

The Cass County EDC is a local nonprofit corporation with the mission to "improve the business environment of Cass County by encouraging a strong, diverse, and sustainable economy, and to build better relationships between business, government agencies, and local communities."

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