

# Visit Nebraska. Visit Nice.®

Nebraska Tourism Commission 2014 Annual Report



## Nebraska Tourism Commission

301 Centennial Mall South, 1st Floor  
PO Box 98509-8907  
Lincoln, NE 68509-8907  
(888) 444-1867 or (402) 471-3796  
VisitNebraska.com

## Social Media Sites

facebook.com/VisitNebraska  
facebook.com/NebraskaTourismIndustry  
twitter.com/NebraskaTourism  
pinterest.com/visitnebraska  
youtube.com/nebraskatourism  
instagram.com/visit\_nebraska

## Nebraska Tourism Commission Members

Jeff Boeka, North Platte, Nebraska Hotel & Motel Association (NHMA), jeff.boeka@nebraska.gov  
Chair: John Chapo, Lincoln Children's Zoo, JChapo@lincolnzoo.org  
Vice-Chair: Roger Dixon, Omaha, Metropolitan Entertainment & Convention Authority (MECA), roger.dixon@nebraska.gov  
Lisa Burke, North Platte/Lincoln County Visitors Bureau, lisa.burke@nebraska.gov  
Roger Jasnoch, Kearney Convention & Visitors Bureau, roger.jasnoch@nebraska.gov  
Roger Kuhn, Lincoln, Nebraska Game & Parks Commission, roger.kuhn@nebraska.gov  
Treasurer: Deb Loseke, Columbus, Nebraska Travel Association (NETA), deb.loseke@nebraska.gov  
Dana Markel, Omaha, Nebraska Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus (NACVB), (resigned November 2014)  
Tony Moody, La Vista, John Q. Hammons Hotels and Resorts, tony.moody@nebraska.gov  
Carol Schlegel, Red Willow County Tourism, Nebraska Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus (NACVB), carol.schlegel@nebraska.gov (appointed November 2014)

## Nebraska Tourism Commission Staff

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Emily Frandson, Public Relations Intern, NTC.tourism4@nebraska.gov  
Taylor Cruse, Director's Intern  
Molly Shane, Tourism Intern

## Nebraska Tourism Commission Awards and Recognition

- The "Visit Nebraska. Visit Nice." campaign print ads were featured in and recognized in the Communication Arts Journal.
- Nebraska Tourism was a finalist in the Government Division for the Digital Signage Group International Awards.
- NTC's Advertising Agency, Bailey Lauerman, received a Silver ADDY for the print ad "And Clowns" which was produced in cooperation with NTC for the National Western Stock Show.



# Director's Report



*"The gift to see ourselves as others see us, has the ability to free us of foolish notions",* the words of poet Robert Burns were never more true for Nebraska Tourism in 2014. As the Nebraska Tourism Commission unveiled the new Brand and promotional campaign, "Visit Nebraska. Visit Nice.", lots of chatter occurred. You will see the results of that chatter throughout our 2014 Annual Report and the numbers are strong. We have also had a great year in several other areas:

- For the first time in the history of Nebraska Tourism, we ran out of our 2014 Travel Guides, and then ran out after a re-order.
- Upon the release of the new Brand campaign, our demographics shifted and our website spiked with new interest.
- Our social media platforms surpassed our goals and continue to gather followers.
- The Nebraska Passport Program doubled numbers over 2013.
- The Commission completed staff desk audits and moved into new office space.
- The Commission partnered with BRAND USA, and hosted an international FAM Tour.
- VisitNebraska.com was overhauled to better serve the traveler and the industry.

In 2015, we look forward to increased opportunities for the Tourism Industry. We will be looking strategically and building upon the completed elements of our 2012 Statewide Strategic Plan. We will be working harder to build additional private sector support and strengthening those partnerships. We will be researching funding mechanisms to assist the marketing efforts of the Commission. The Commission will conduct research to develop new and measurable opportunities that are a product of the synergy from all of our diversified tourism partners.

Tourism is hard to define. However, the impact is a major economic driver for our Nebraska communities statewide. There are no boundaries in Tourism, you find it everywhere from unique shops and boutiques, to rugged outfitters and outdoor enthusiasts, to cultural and historic sites, to family attractions.

The Commission is a conduit for an industry that brings businesses, non-profits, statewide associations and Nebraskans together.

As we look to the future, we are thankful for the leadership from the Nebraska Tourism Commissioners and our industry partners. We thank Governor Dave Heineman and the Nebraska Legislature for their support and confidence in us.

We are honored to serve in this industry and represent our state. Together, we are better.

**Kathy McKillip, MPA, MS, CDME**

Director, Nebraska Tourism Commission

## OUR MISSION

The mission of the Nebraska Tourism Commission is to expand Nebraska's dynamic and diverse travel industry making it more viable by creating awareness, attracting increased visitors which results in greater tourism revenue and economic gain throughout the state.

# Financial Report

The Nebraska Tourism Commission’s (NTC) budget is approximately \$6.2 million, of which \$500,000 is appropriated from the State’s General Fund. Of that \$500,000, the legislature appropriated \$250,000 for the Community Impact Grant Program for marketing assistance to communities hosting national events that have the potential to attract out-of-state visitors. The remaining funds are used for research and statewide marketing grants. In 2014, NTC was appropriated just under \$5.5 million in cash funds from the State Lodging Tax for operations including salaries.

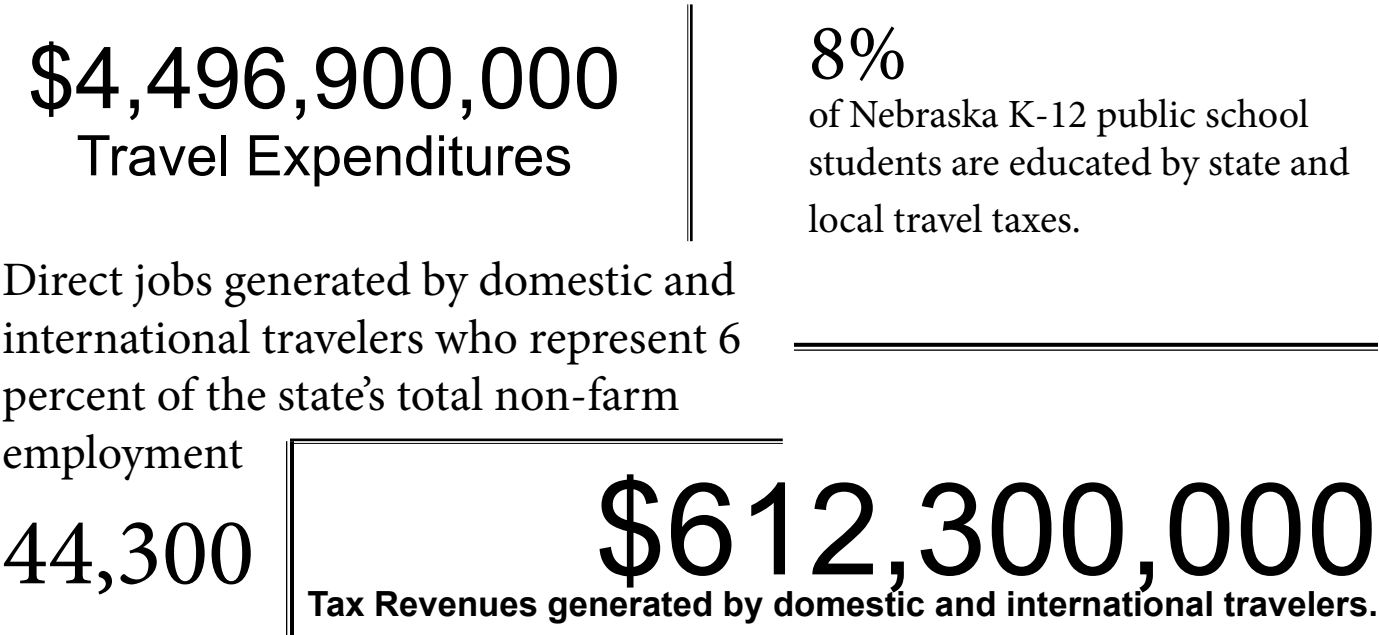
- Between January 2003 and September 2014, Nebraska Tourism has collected a total of \$43,287,323 in lodging tax.
- Between 2003 and 2013, lodging tax revenue increased by \$1,905,265, an increase of 73%.
- Based upon projections, the total amount of lodging tax revenue collected in 2014 is expected to be 8 percent more that was collecting in 2013, which was up by 5 percent over 2012.
- Lodging tax revenue collected in 2014 will be available in February 2015.

## Year Lodging Tax Revenue Collected

2012	\$4,312,178
2013	\$4,524,464

The NTC recently endorsed the Best Practices and Guiding Principles for allocations of Lodging Tax Dollars. These guiding principles for county officials, tourism representatives and others in the tourism industry address and encourage a cohesive approach to promoting the tourism industry. For a copy of Best Practices and Guiding Principles contact the Commission at (402) 471-3796 or go to <http://industry.visitnebraska.org>.

## Tourism’s Economic Impact in Nebraska



Source: The U.S. Travel Association *Impact of Travel and State Economies 2013*

# Nebraska Passport Program 2014



The Passport Program, sponsored by the Nebraska Tourism Commission, encourages travelers to explore Nebraska and take home great prizes. The 2014 Passport featured 80 attractions and events on 10 themed tours throughout Nebraska. The program encourages locals and visitors to get out and explore. Travelers visited participating locations over the summer and collected stamps that could be redeemed for prizes.

## 2014 Passport Program Statistics:

- More than 19,000 travelers participated in the program
- The average number of stops completed was 30.5 (up from 27.93 in 2013)
- The average age of participants was 53 (down from 55 in 2013)
- Participants included Nebraska residents and visitors from all over; including Iowa, Kansas, Utah, Texas, Wisconsin, Colorado, Pennsylvania, California, Montana and Canada
- 49 participants did all 80 stops (up from 20 in 2013)
- 134 participants completed at least 40 stops (up from 132 in 2013)
- 275 participants completed at least 20 stops (up from 264 in 2013)
- 96% of participating stops stated that the program increased awareness and generated additional sales
- 13% of the businesses had to increase their hours of operation and hire additional staff to keep up with the increased traffic

### Most Popular Tour:

1. How We Move
2. Can't Get Enough
3. Without Walls
4. Patchwork Passion
5. Rare Finds

### Most Popular Passport Stops:

1. Golden Spike Tower
2. Lauritzen Gardens
3. Lincoln Highway Diner
4. 3 way tie for 4th place between the Nebraska State Capitol, UNL's Morrill Hall & The Chocolate Bar



As a retired school teacher and grandmother, Linda Weichel and her family enjoy participating in the Passport Program together each year. Weichel commented, "This year, my oldest daughter and I decided that we were going to make it to all 80 stops. We planned our routes in loops that were based out of Lincoln and Kearney. We did take a one week vacation in Western Nebraska with overnights there in order to get to all of those stops."

Other passport participants shared their stories on NebraskaPassport.com. Richard Chapell of Bellevue wrote, "We visited 67 of the 80 stops. I thought we had traveled around the state quite a bit, but wow, some of the passport destinations were such a surprise. I had favorite stops in each tour. Nebraska National Forest in Halsey made my list for being just beautiful. I loved learning about the Nebraska Canteen at the Lincoln County Historical Museum, but what really made this whole adventure so memorable were the people we met along the way."



# Public Relations

Our public relations strategy includes several key components:

- 1) Passport Program
- 2) Media Tours
- 3) Press Releases / Community Support & Promotion
- 4) Visitor Communication
- 5) Partnerships / Sponsorships

The 2014 Passport Program was very well received by residents and visitors alike. It ties directly to our mission statement by creating awareness, attracting increased visitors and increasing tourism revenue and economic gain throughout the state. We will be continuing this very successful program in 2015.

By the end of 2014, NTC had completed 10 media tours throughout the state of Nebraska. These tours are used to generate travel writer and media awareness by encouraging the writers to create stories about Nebraska as a tourism destination. The writers also often use social media, blogs, radio and video to share their stories.

To date, more than 240,151,642 potential visitors have been exposed to this coverage. If this editorial coverage had been purchased as paid advertising it would have cost more than \$9,000,000. National and in-state tourism sponsors have provided more than \$335,970 in goods and services including air transportation, lodging, meals and activities to support the media tour program.

Some 231 journalists have visited Nebraska as a result of media tours, resulting in more than 475 articles or broadcast segments which have appeared in media outlets including *Midwest Living*, *Smithsonian*, *Better Homes & Gardens*, *Parade*, *USA Today's Go Escape* magazine, *Saveur*, *American Cowboy*, *Group Tour*, *Group Travel Leader*, *Canadian Geographic*, *Byways*, *Smart Meetings*, *Short Escapes*, *Huffington Post*, *Texas Golfer*, *AAA Journeys*, *National Public Radio*, *Kansas City Star*, *Miami Herald*, *Nashville Tennessean*, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, *Oklahoman*, *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, *Toronto Sun*, *Albuquerque Journal* and *The Coloradoan*.

The commission also uses traditional press releases to spread the word about key events and to keep the public and stakeholders up-to-date on what is happening in Nebraska's tourism industry. These press releases and media relations efforts have resulted in 22 million+ impressions.

In addition to press communication, we provide information to hundreds of thousands of travelers per year at our visitor centers, over the phone and on the Internet. In 2014, NTC hired 34 seasonal travel counselors in 16 rest areas and visitor centers across the state. Ten facilities were staffed March 8-September 28 and the remaining six were staffed May 17-September 28. The reasoning behind staffing some facilities early was to accommodate travelers visiting for the Sandhill cranes migration. All travel counselors passed a certification exam prior and are certified as state travel counselors through the U.S. Travel Association's State Travel Counselor Certification Program.

Travelers are also able to call our toll-free inbound call center. From January 1-November 30, NTC's toll-free, in-bound call center received 3,862 phone calls inquiring about the state and 10,210 requests for brochures via Internet inquires through VisitNebraska.com.



Travel Writers Touring  
Northeast and Western  
Nebraska in 2014.



# Online Marketing

The Internet has surpassed all other communication platforms in its ability to provide travel information and influence travel decisions. NTC continues to expand our online presence in order to meet the high consumer demand for easily accessible and relevant online travel information.

## Nebraska Tourism's Website

In mid-October the Nebraska Tourism Commission launched a new website. The new VisitNebraska.com offers a completely re-imagined way for visitors to explore and plan a trip to the state of Nebraska. It is the main source of information for Nebraska visitors and is the call to action for all Nebraska Tourism advertising. The website is built with easy-to-use navigation that allows visitors to quickly browse and compare all of the state's attractions, restaurants, lodging and events. Intuitive new features include free profile pages for attractions of all sizes, quick-bookmarking of interesting destinations, and the ability to create, view and share customized trips and itineraries.

Destination profile pages, trips and events can be shared easily across social media sites and can additionally be embedded into third-party websites, blogs and news sites for further exposure.

The site also dynamically scales to the visitor's device to provide a consistent experience across desktop, tablet and mobile platforms. All of these features combine to make a best-in-class tourism website that not only takes advantage of new technology and best practices, but also sets a new bar for the entire tourism industry.



Since the launch of the new website there was a 80.9% increase in users, a 38.24% increase in the number of pages viewed, a 52% increase in pages viewed per visit, an 80.75% increase in duration of visit, and an 18.08% decrease in the bounce rate.

## Social Media

NTC increased its presence on social media in 2014, using Facebook and YouTube to share videos, event information and photos. In 2014, NTC used both channels to launch a series of ads and videos aimed at communicating the new "Visit Nebraska. Visit Nice." campaign while also increasing engagement and followers. The campaign proved to be very successful by increasing NTC's Facebook fans by 89% over the year before.

Twitter followers also grew for @NebraskaTourism from 6,331 to 8,000 followers. Pinterest, YouTube and Instagram saw modest growth in 2014. The commission is looking at ways to expand this presence in 2015 including hiring a social media intern to dedicate their time solely to social media.

## Travel Guide Downloads

Electronic versions of the 2014 Travel Guide were downloaded using Zinio more than 2,700 times.

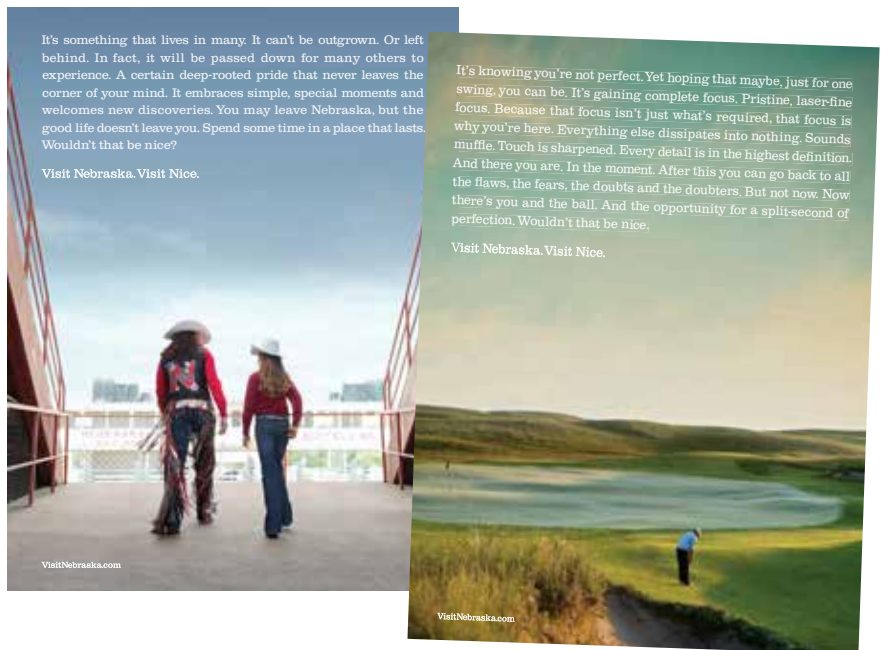
## Destination Nebraska

Every year, more than half a million subscribers receive 20 issues of this free e-newsletter listing statewide Nebraska events and attractions.

# Traditional Advertising

In 2014, the Commission ran traditional print advertisements in a wide variety of local and national publications, some of which included:

*Nebraska Life*  
*Prairie Fire*  
*Midwest Living*  
*AAA Living*  
*Reader's Digest*  
*Better Homes & Gardens*  
*Warrior Magazine*  
*Endless Vacation*



along with special placements in the 2014 Men's College World Series program and Husker game programs. The commission also partnered with NET, NTV Kearney and Husker Sports for special coverage and event sponsorships like Husker volleyball and football and more. In addition, Director Kathy McKillip and the Tourism Commission staff did more than 50 TV, radio and newspaper interviews throughout the year to promote Nebraska tourism.

## Brochures & Publications

The Nebraska Tourism Commission printed 225,000 Nebraska Travel Guides in 2014. Each January, large deliveries of new Nebraska Travel Guides are arranged to a number of tourism facilities and welcome centers. During January 15-17 of 2014, more than 80,000 Nebraska Travel Guides were distributed over the three-day span. Thousands of individual travel packets were also requested via media leads, inbound calls, Internet inquiries, friend referrals, newspaper articles, etc. An additional 50,000 Nebraska Travel Guides were distributed through travel and trade shows, staffed Interstate 80 rest areas, bulk order requests and the annual Nebraska Travel Association's Brochure Swap. Additionally, NTC distributed more than 3,000 Nebraska Golf Maps and 78,000 Nebraska Highway Road Maps via trade shows, visitor centers and mail.

The Commission also provides opportunities for Nebraska Convention and Visitors Bureaus, communities and attractions to boost and support businesses by building a database of direct leads.

As a lead program advertiser, participants have their own opt-in box on the VisitNebraska.com page where visitors go to request a free Nebraska Travel Guide. When they choose to receive additional information by checking that location's box, their contact information is forwarded directly to the organization for follow-up.

### Top 10 State Requesting Nebraska Travel Guides in 2014

1. Illinois
2. Kansas
3. Missouri
4. Colorado
5. Minnesota
6. Iowa
7. Nebraska
8. Texas
9. Ohio
10. Wisconsin

## Group Tours

NTC attended four group travel conventions in 2014 and met one-on-one with 85 operators from across the U.S. and Canada. These conventions were American Bus Association Marketplace, National Tour Association Travel Exchange, Select Traveler Conference and TAP Dance. In addition to the eight existing statewide sample group itineraries, NTC also created 12 theme and specialty sample itineraries to give group operators, the Nebraska Group Tour Planner and group website were updated for 2015.

# Building Relationships

## Tourism Marketing Grant Program

In 2014, the Nebraska Tourism Commission awarded tourism marketing grants to 25 entities across the state totaling more than \$180,000. Grant funds are used to promote tourist attractions and activities in Nebraska. Funding for tourism marketing grants comes from revenue generated by the state lodging tax. Proposals came from 71 applicants requesting nearly \$650,000 in funding.

“Interest in the grant program continues to escalate each year, as does the price tag on marketing projects. The Commission chose to increase the funding allotment for the program from \$125,000 last year to \$180,000 this year to help Nebraska communities spread the word about what Nebraska has to offer potential travelers,” said Nebraska Tourism Commission Director Kathy McKillip.

## Community Impact Grant Program

In September of 2014, the Nebraska Tourism Commission announced the awardees of the Community Impact Grant program totaling \$170,570 for tourism promotional groups to secure national caliber events, increasing national exposure through promotional efforts. All the applications selected for funding under this program focus on one common goal, which is to gain national exposure for the state. The next round of awards of grant funds will occur in the first quarter of 2015.

“We are pleased to provide this opportunity to Nebraska communities in assisting them to compete for events that bring national attention and visitors to Nebraska. This would not be possible without the support of the Nebraska Legislature and we look forward to enhancing this program in the future,” said Tourism Commission Director Kathy McKillip.

## NEBTOUR listserv

NEBTOUR is the email listserv setup exclusively for the Nebraska tourism industry. The listserv totals over 2,700 tourism industry members. It provides a fast, efficient and effective way for Nebraska tourism professionals to communicate.

## Agri-Eco Tourism Workshop

Nebraska’s rural communities are full of tourism potential. Agri/Eco-Tourism provides the public with an opportunity to experience rural areas while generating income for the operators, which can help sustain the rural way of life and keep more producers in Nebraska. In February, the Nebraska Tourism Commission organized the 9th annual Nebraska Agri/Eco-Tourism workshop in Kearney with 110 attendees.

## Industry Conference

The 2014 Nebraska Tourism Conference was held in North Platte, October 20-23. Delegates could choose from 18 different sessions, including green lodging practices, social media marketing, determining the economic impact of festivals, customer service, creating and sustaining event success, and fundraising methodologies and techniques. The 2015 Nebraska Tourism Conference will be in Columbus.

## Free Tourism Facility Listings

Destination listings in Nebraska Travel Guide and VisitNebraska.com promote nearly 400 campgrounds, parks and recreation areas, 700 lodging facilities, 800 restaurants, 200 golf courses, 800 attractions and outfitters and 1,000 events.



2014 Nebraska Travel Guide

# Partnerships / Sponsorships

## Nebraska Tourism Commission's Tourism Think Tank

The 3T project is a collaborative effort between NTC and UNL's Hospitality, Restaurant and Tourism Management degree program. This partnership provides students opportunities to brainstorm about industry challenges, engage in activities with industry leaders and offers insight on internships, mentoring with industry stakeholders and employment opportunities.

In 2014, the Tourism Think Tank (3T) program continued to develop. The group embarked on a spring marketing trip across the state targeted at college students. The trip titled, "Nebraska, A Two Day Adventure" took the students from Lincoln to Crawford and back. In between they saw some of Nebraska's finest sights and documented the trip on social media channels.

The Tourism Commission also was a participant and sponsor of the "UNL Hospitality Meet and Greet" a career fair event that was a goal of 3T for 2014 and combined with an existing event goal for the UNL HRTM Program. The event took place in November and the HRTM program is planning on continuing the event in 2015. The 3T group plans on taking another marketing trip in spring 2015 to destinations around Lincoln with a specific focus on what UNL students can do as a day or weekend trip. They will again document their trip on social media, building on the 720 Facebook followers they had from the first trip.

2014 Tourism Think Tank members included; Jen Bramhall, Katie Curatola, Blayke Johnson, Gina Beller, Katharine Moustakes, Kayla Busboom, Brandon Hile, Megan Personett, Megan Weber, Rachel O'Donnell, Rachel Spader and Samantha Pellatz

## Nebraska State Fair

The Nebraska Tourism Commission expanded our presence at the 2014 Nebraska State Fair in Grand Island and hosted a 1,100 square-foot area inside the brand new Nebraska Building. Our theme for the 2014 Nebraska State Fair was Wide Open Imagination, and our area encompassed the 600-square-foot Edgerton on the Move exhibit with 30 different hands-on activities, an Information Zone where visitors stopped to plan their Nebraska vacation, and a Performance Zone which included a variety of Nebraska artists, musicians and performers.



Our space averaged 419 visitors per hour during the 11-day event, and we received great feedback from families and people of all ages as they stopped by to pick up brochures, explore our exhibits and watch the performances.

Nebraska Tourism's exhibit space was open 12 hours each day, which totaled 5,028 people per day and approximately 55,000 for the 11 days of the State Fair.

# State Your Pride Program

In 2014 the Tourism Commission invited several top Nebraska-based corporations to promote state tourism activities to their employees. This initiative was centered around the Passport Program. Through internal communications, companies promoted the Nebraska Passport Program, which just completed its fifth year. In

addition to Passport program prizes and incentives, some organizations offered extra incentives and contests. These 12 companies represent more than 36,500 employees across the state.



Other companies show their support of state tourism through various activities, such as wrapping their fleet of trucks in campaign creative or donating lodging, meals and admissions to media representatives during sponsored media tours. By reinforcing their commitment to the state and its growth, Nebraska-based corporations continue to help build brand awareness with audiences in our own backyard.

## A Closing Word From Our Commission Chair

Greetings and a happy 2015 to all of our great partners in Nebraska Tourism. As we reflect back on the past two and a half years it is remarkable at all of the progress which has been made. Especially if one looks at the strategic plan developed 2 years ago and reviews all of the tasks that we have accomplished. To say the least, it takes an awesome staff of dedicated professionals and exceptional team of volunteer industry-wide stakeholders across the state, as well as the support of elected officials and all of our great Nebraska residents.

As of this year here a few of our accomplishments and milestones:

- Completed the comprehensive brand survey of more than 3,500 people
- Used the results of the brand survey to create and launch a new brand campaign which included a new and improved website
- Completed our 10th National Media tour, which have resulted in more than \$9,000,000 of editorial coverage for the state tourism industry.

As you can see, much has been accomplished because so many have worked hard working together. The tourism industry and the Tourism Commission are both evolving quickly and strategically in our awesome state and that is because of all of us working hard together. My good friend, Larry the Cable Guy has a great saying of "git-r-done" and that is what the Commission is doing we are getting things done for the Nebraska tourism industry. I'm looking forward to even getting more done as more industry leaders, participants and stakeholders join the tourism team so that we can "git-r-done" for Nebraska tourism.

Feel free to contact me anytime to lend your helping hand and "git-r-done" support for Nebraska tourism efforts. With warmest regards, have a great 2015.

Nebraska Tourism Commission Chairman

*John Chapo*



It's something that lives in many. It can't be outgrown. Or left behind. In fact, it will be passed down for many others to experience. A certain deep-rooted pride that never leaves the corner of your mind. It embraces simple, special moments and welcomes new discoveries. You may leave Nebraska, but the good life doesn't leave you. Spend some time in a place that lasts. Wouldn't that be nice?

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