Nebraska Tourism Commission Members
Commission Chair: Jeff Boeka, North Platte, Nebraska Hotel & Motel Association (NHMA), jeff.boeka@nebraska.gov
Vice-Chair: John Chapo, Lincoln Children’s Zoo, john.chapo@nebraska.gov
Treasurer: Roger Dixon, Omaha, Metropolitan Entertainment & Convention Authority (MECA), roger.dixon@nebraska.gov
Mitch Glidden, Mullen, Central Nebraska, mitch.glidden@nebraska.gov
Mike Kesselring, Crawford, Western Nebraska Tourism Coalition, mike.kesselring@nebraska.gov
Roger Kuhn, Lincoln, Nebraska Game & Parks Commission, roger.kuhn@nebraska.gov
Deb Loseke, Columbus, Nebraska Travel Association (NETA), debloseke@nebraska.gov
Dana Markel, Omaha, Nebraska Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus (NACVB), dana.markel@nebraska.gov
Tony Moody, La Vista, John Q. Hammons Hotels and Resorts, tony.moody@nebraska.gov

Nebraska Tourism Commission Staff
Kathy McKillip, Executive Director, kathy.mckillip@nebraska.gov
Micheal Collins, Group Tours Manager, micheal.collins@nebraska.gov
Heather Hogue, Grant Administrator, heather.hogue@nebraska.gov
Karen Kollars, Agri-Tourism Development, karen.kollars@nebraska.gov
Twyla Witt, Nebraska Passport Coordinator, twyla.witt@nebraska.gov
Angela White, Media and Public Relations Manager, angela.white@nebraska.gov
Kathy Krogh, Accountant, kathy.krogh@nebraska.gov
Bryce Arens, Office Manager/Director’s Assistant, bryce.aren@nebraska.gov
Gina Beller, Travel Counselor Intern, NTC.tourism1@nebraska.gov
Megan Lehl, Tourism Staff Intern, NTC.tourism2@nebraska.gov
Taylor Cruse, Director’s Intern, NTC.tourism3@nebraska.gov
Caitlin Hassler, Public Relations Intern, NTC.tourism4@nebraska.gov

Staff Awards & Accreditations Earned in 2013
The Nebraska Tourism Commission achieved the industry’s top accreditation, DMAP, from Destination Marketing Association International. The Destination Marketing Accreditation Program is designed to recognize destination marketing organizations that meet or exceed industry standards. The Nebraska Tourism Commission and Visit Florida are currently the only state entities among those with this accreditation. Commission Director, Kathy McKillip also received her Certified Destination Management Executive (CDME) from DMAI, Masters in Destination Management.

Staff member Micheal Collins earned his Certified Industry Travel Specialist (CTIS) designation through the American Bus Association (ABA). Karen Kollars was elected to the Board of the North American Farmers’ Direct Marketing Association Board of Directors. Twyla Witt was appointed to the board of the National Scenic Byway Foundation.
**Director’s Report**

*Miles to Go Before We Sleep…*

In 2013, the Nebraska Tourism Commission completed 10 more tasks as recommended in the 2012 statewide strategic plan. The plan, recommended 17 potential changes for the Commission. We made great strides toward making Nebraska Tourism more viable by creating awareness, attracting visitors, and building tourism revenue and economic gain. Our focus should be on increasing travel and enhancing the traveler’s visit. Our job is to provide services to the traveler that enhance their visit and motivate the traveler to become mobile throughout our entire state—to experience what we offer and bring us repeat business. Our goal should be to convert the consumer from a day visit to an overnight visit.

In order for all of this to happen, we need to be proud of our product and be prepared to promote it. We need to believe in our product, ourselves and our ability to change the national perception of Nebraska as a flat and boring state. We have to convince consumers that an experience in our great state is worth their time and money. In the industry, we must trust and believe in each other as leaders united for the cause. We can accomplish these goals by marketing Nebraska well—telling our stories. We need to operate like a business - a multifaceted organization with measurable objectives that strongly support marketing and promotion, advocacy, education and research. Most importantly, we need to communicate, share our concerns, successes, enthusiasm, data and be willing to collaborate, always with the intention of increasing stakeholder support and generating revenue.

Much has been accomplished in 2013. This report provides a glimpse of those accomplishments, including:

- NTC Achieved the industry’s top accreditation, DMAP, from Destination Marketing Association International.
- Completion of a comprehensive, scientific brand research plan.
- A new approach to marketing with ad agency Bailey Lauerman, public relation expansion with our team at Swanson Russell and expanding into new targeted markets with Omaha based RFD-TV and Husker Sports.
- Continued commitment to emerging trends and developments in Agri/Eco-Tourism by hosting the only statewide Agri/Eco-Tourism workshop specifically targeted for small business owners and rural attractions.
- Increased support and expansion of the Nebraska Passport program, which drew more than 19,000 participants in 2013 continuing to stimulate interest and ignite passion among travelers and residents.
- Extensive industry outreach and support including partnerships with the Nebraska Hotel Motel Association, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Nebraska Department of Roads, Nebraska Restaurant Association, Nebraska Educational Television, and many more industry supported activities.
- With support from the Nebraska Legislature, the Commission was able to increase promotional grants for communities to attract major events to their area.

As we look to the future, we are thankful for 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 also thankful for the passion and support of state’s tourism industry stakeholders. We will continue working hard, believing in our product and building up an industry that has so much potential because we are better together.

Kathy McKillip, MPA,MS,CDME
Director, Nebraska Tourism Commission
Financial Report

The Nebraska Tourism Commission's (NTC) budget is approximately $4.5 million, in which $500,000 is appropriated from the state 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. In 2013, NTC was appropriated just under $4 million in cash funds from the State Lodging Tax for operations including salaries.

- Between 2003 and October 2013, Nebraska Tourism has collected a total of $38,450,843 in lodging tax.
- Between 2003 and 2012, lodging tax revenue increased by $1,692,979, an increase of 65 percent.
- Based upon projections, the total amount of lodging tax revenue collected in 2013 is expected to be 8.2 percent more than was collected in 2012, which was up by 6 percent over 2011.
- Total lodging tax revenue collected in 2013 will be available in February 2014.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Lodging Tax Revenue Collected</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>$3,976,771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>$4,312,178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013*</td>
<td>$4,292,038</td>
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</tbody>
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*As of November 30, 2013

The NTC recently endorsed the Best Practices and Guiding Principles for allocation 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. The recommendations were presented at the 2013 Nebraska Association of County Officials (NACO) Conference. For a copy of Best Practices and Guiding Principles contact the Commission at (402)471-3796 or go to VisitNebraska.com.

Brand Research

In the fourth quarter of 2013, the Commission set out to find out what Nebraskans, past visitors, potential visitors and stakeholders really thought about the state. This took place in the form of three branding surveys. The Commission worked with Bailey Lauerman and Believable Brands to conduct the research.

At the close of 2013 the survey’s analytical information was in the hands of the statisticians for evaluation and the commission is planning to release the results in the first quarter of 2014. More than 7,000 respondents participated in the survey of three key constituent groups:

- Visitors/Potential Visitors
- Residents
- Community and Industry Stakeholders

* Data was also gathered through direct involvement of some 550 persons based on personal interviews, group meetings and webinar attendance
Nebraska Passport Program 2013

The Passport Program, sponsored by the Nebraska Tourism Commission, encourages travelers to explore Nebraska and take home great prizes. The 2013 Passport featured 80 attractions and events on 10 themed tours throughout Nebraska. The program encourages locals and visitors to get out and explore; 97 percent of participants reported that they visited sites they never knew existed.

Travelers visited participating locations over the summer and collected stamps that could be redeemed for prizes. Participants could win t-shirts, digital cameras, Nebraska Lottery Scratch Coupons or the grand prize of an iPad Mini.

2013 Passport Program Statistics:

- More than 19,208 travelers participated in the program
- The average number of stops completed was 27.93
- The average age of the participant was 55
- 89 percent of participating stops stated that the program increased awareness and generated additional sales; some experienced more than a 200 percent increase in sales revenue
- Participants from out of state included Minnesota, Wyoming, Iowa, South Dakota, Arizona, Florida, New York and Washington
- 20 participants completed ALL 80 stops
- 132 participants completed 40 or more
- 264 participants completed 20 or more
- 416 participants sent in booklets to collect prizes
- Many small businesses had to increase their hours and hire additional staff to keep up with increased traffic

Most popular tours:
- Tap Into It Brewery Tour
- Wrangle the West
- Seeing is Believing
- Play Outside

David Hughes of West Point, Nebraska won the grand-prize in the 2013 Nebraska Passport program. Hughes received an Apple® iPad Mini.

Hughes and his wife Kristen didn’t hear about the 2012 Passport Program until mid-summer so they only had time to get to about a third of the stops. They enjoyed it so much that they made it their mission to get a quick start in 2013 and see all 80 stops -- and they did it!

When the Hughes’ were all done with their tour David wrote about their journey on the Nebraska Passport Program’s website, commenting, “What a wonderful and beautiful state we live in! East to West, North to South. Our favorite place to visit was High Plains Homestead outside of Crawford. They introduced us to the Passport Adventure last year! It really was so amazing to meet such friendly people everywhere we went.”
Public Relations

Our public relations strategy includes several keep components:

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

The 2013 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 2014.

At the end of 2013 NTC had completed 5 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 84,188,810 potential visitors have been exposed to this coverage. If this editorial coverage had been purchased as paid advertising it would have cost $1,864,057. National and in-state tourism sponsors have provided more than $160,630 in goods and services including air transportation, lodging, meals and activities to support the media tour program.

Some 124 journalists have visited Nebraska as a result of media tours, resulting in more than 150 articles or broadcast segments which have appeared in media outlets including Midwest Living, Saveur, American Cowboy, Huffington Post, Group Tour, Canadian World Traveler, Philadelphia Sun, National Public Radio, Orlando Sentinel, 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.

In addition to press communication, we provide information to hundreds of thousands of travelers each year at our visitor centers, over the phone and on the Internet. In 2013, NTC hired 27 travel counselors in 13 rest areas and visitor centers across the state from May 17-September 30. All travel counselors passed NTC’s 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 to November 30, 2013, the Tourism Commission's toll-free, in-bound call center received 7,764 phone calls inquiring about the state and 15,095 requests for brochures via Internet inquires thought www.VisitNebraska.com.
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 assessable and relevant online travel information.

Our Website
As of December 26, 2013, the VisitNebraska Website had 643,050 visits in 2013, up 76 percent from 491,615 in the same period last year.

Travel Guide Downloads
Electronic versions of the 2013 Travel Guide were downloaded using Zinio more than 2,700 times.

Destination Nebraska
Every year, more than 540,000 subscribers receive 12 issues of this free e-newsletter listing statewide Nebraska events and attractions.

Photo Gallery
In the NTC photo gallery, media and tourism professionals can now access more than 4,000 high resolution photos by location and category. This is a free service provided to anyone with access to this site.

Social Media
NTC increased its presence on social media in 2013, adopting new platforms to promote attractions, programs and events. An Instagram account was created to let visitors share their photos from around the state. The commission hopes to expand the account in the next year to create a “go to” place for Nebraska visitors to share their travel photos.

This accompanied the growing Twitter and Facebook accounts created in the last few years. In 2013 @NebraskaTourism on Twitter expanded to have 6,347 followers. The account continued to consistently tweet information about upcoming events and retweet visitor’s photos and comments. On Facebook, the VisitNebraska account focused on engagement with followers. While still promoting events and attractions, the account created discussion with questions about visitor’s favorite restaurants and holiday activities. The account increased its followers to 5,918 in 2013.

2012 Followers
2013 Followers
Traditional Advertising

In 2013, 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
- Great Escapes
- Better Homes & Gardens
- History Channel
- Endless Vacation

Along with special placements in the 2013 Men’s College World Series program and Husker game programs.

The commission partnered with NET, NTV Kearney, Husker Sports and RFD-TV for special coverage and event sponsorships like Husker volleyball and football pre-game shows, the making of NET’s Capital Masterpieces and more. In addition, Director Kathy McKillip and Tourism Commission staff did more than 50 TV and radio interviews throughout the year to promote Nebraska tourism.

Brochures & Publications

Each January, large deliveries of new Nebraska Travel Guides are arranged to a number of tourism facilities and welcome centers. During January 2-4 of 2013, more than 70,000 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.

In 2013, NTC distributed more than 2,320 Nebraska Golf Maps and 32,787 Nebraska Highway Road Maps via mail, trade shows and visitor centers.

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 leads program advertiser, participants have their own opt-in box on the VisitNebraska.com page where visitors go to request their free Nebraska Travel Guide. When they choose to receive additional information by checking that location's box, their postal and email addresses are forwarded directly to the organization for follow-up. Last year’s participants averaged 50–150 new leads each week.
Building Relationships

Tourism Marketing Grant Program
In March 2013, the Nebraska Tourism Commission awarded 23 tourism marketing grants totaling nearly $125,000 for entities across the state. Grant funds are used to promote attractions and activities in Nebraska. Proposals came from 68 applicants requesting nearly $500,000 in funding.

Community Impact Grant Program
In August of 2013, the NTC announced the awardees of the first round FY 2013-2014 Community Impact Grant program totaling $109,500 for tourism promotional groups to secure national events, increasing national exposure for Nebraska through promotional efforts. A second round of grant applications for additional funds will occur in the first quarter of 2014.

Group Tours
NTC attended five group travel conventions in 2013 and met one-on-one with 85 operators from across the U.S. and Canada. These conventions were American Bus Association (Charlotte NC), National Tour Association (Orlando FL), Bank Travel (Virginia Beach VA), Travel Alliance Partners (Norfolk VA), and International POW WOW (Las Vegas NV). Pursuing group travel business will continue to be a strong focus for the NTC in 2014.

NEBTour listserv
NEBTour is the email listserv setup exclusively for the Nebraska tourism industry. The number of subscribers to the listserv now totals over 2,700 tourism industry members. The listserv provides a fast, efficient and effective way for Nebraska tourism professionals to communicate through email concerning tourism issues.

Agri-Eco Tourism Workshop
Nebraska’s rural areas are full of tourism potential. Agri/Eco-Tourism provides the public with an opportunity to experience Nebraska’s rural areas and way of life 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 8th annual Nebraska Agri/Eco-Tourism workshop in North Platte with 150 attendees.

Industry Conferences
The 2013 Nebraska Travel Conference was held in Norfolk, October 23-24. Experts spoke on a variety of topics, including sessions on how to create experiences for travelers, determine return on investment, increase customer service levels, conduct marketing and visitor research, and capitalize on Internet search engines to drive visitors to attractions. North Platte will host the 2014 Nebraska Travel Conference.

Free Tourism Facility Listings
Facility listings in Nebraska Travel Guide and VisitNebraska.com promote nearly 400 campgrounds, parks and recreation areas, 700 lodging facilities, 200 public golf courses, 800 attractions and outfitters and 1,000 events and activities.
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. During the fall semester, the Tourism Think Tank added five new members: Mary Cate Chilton, Jen Bramhall, Katie Curatola, Brandon Hile and Blayke Johnson. The returning members are: Megan Lehl, Kayla Busboom, and Amber Maasen.

In November, the members participated in a focus group with Bailey Lauerman with the goal of enhancing the Visitnebraska.com website from a college student/young adult’s point of view. The group members also created a mission statement, which is as follows: To promote exploration through adventure and increase awareness of Nebraska tourism for young adults. The 3T team has been working on a few different projects that will be carried out in 2014. The members will be going on a three day excursion across Nebraska in which they will be documenting their travel adventures through photos, videos and tweets shared through social media platforms. The other project to be implemented will be a career conference targeted towards the Hospitality, Restaurant and Tourism Management students at UNL. This event will be held at UNL’s East Campus.

Events
Nebraska Tourism sponsored two fall events in Omaha. The NORCECA Continental Championships came to Omaha in September showcasing world-class volleyball at the Ralston Arena. There were over 10,000 people who came to the event and the final game was broadcast live in Japan and over the Internet. Nebraska Tourism's sponsorship included a booth that allowed visitors from across the United States and North America to receive travel guides and maps from commission staff. A commercial featuring Nebraska Volleyball coach John Cook ran throughout the event promoting Nebraska Tourism to all that attended.

Nebraska Tourism was also a key sponsor the 2013 NACO (Nebraska Association of County Officials) Conference at the CenturyLink Center in Omaha. The three-day event brought officials from across the state to Omaha. Nebraska Tourism welcomed them with a booth featuring marketing materials they could take back to their respective counties and provide dialogue regarding NTC’s newly endorsed Best Practices and Guiding Principles. Tourism staff networked with attendees throughout the conference.

Special Projects
The Skyworks Project included filming some spectacular high-definition aerial footage of Nebraska’s diverse landscapes, monuments, people and attractions. Highlights of the footage went viral on YouTube, where it has been viewed more than 160,000 times. The footage was shot using a low-flying helicopter July 3-10. We partnered with NET, UNL and Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to work with Skyworks to acquire the image collection. In addition to having highlights of this footage available on YouTube to generate interest and enthusiasm about Nebraska’s amenities, the Commission received 40 hours of footage which is being used in NTC’s marketing strategies.

NTC partnered with NET Television’s “Nebraska Capitol Masterpiece.” Nebraska’s State Capitol is a popular tourist attraction and a masterpiece of art and architecture. The program does a great job of helping to educate the public about its history. The building and its artwork were explored in detail in this documentary that highlighted the building’s deep significance for Nebraskans.
Greetings and a Happy 2014! As I reflect back on 2013 and the tremendous progress the Tourism Commission has made in our first 18 months, I would like to share a few thoughts. First of all, a huge thank you to all of you involved in the tourism industry. Without your passion and support for our industry we could not have taken the great strides forward. The amazing diversity and quality of our attractions, events, and facilities are a true testament to your commitment to Nebraska tourism.

As a Commission, we were presented with a Strategic Plan with 12 key objectives. I am proud to say we have addressed and/or accomplished 10 of the 12 objectives in just a short time. By no means are we finished with these objectives. Some of these challenges have been met, while others will continue to be developed. Other objectives have helped us to have better processes in place for measuring ROI, marketing and development.

The Commission's success has not been limited to the Strategic Plan. Thanks to our tourism partners the media tours throughout Nebraska in 2013 have paid huge dividends. Our increased involvement in the National Western Stock Show and marketing in the Denver area has increased awareness of what we have to offer. The Skyworks project has provided us great images to help market our state. There are many other projects that I don't have the space to write about here. The Commission very much appreciates everyone that participated in the Branding surveys this fall. We look forward to evaluating the results in the coming weeks.

I would like to recognize Kathy McKillip and our staff that have done a tremendous job with the limited resources we have. Also I would like to thank the Tourism Commission members who have given their time and talents to serve on the Board.

Please be proud of Nebraska tourism, but remember that we still have challenges ahead.

1) **Funding** - Continue to look for different funding mechanisms to help drive our marketing efforts.
2) **Marketing** - Develop new and measurable opportunities.
3) **Focus** - Take advantage of the synergy that comes when all of our diversified tourism partners are on point and working towards our common goals.

Thank you and have a great 2014.
Commission Chair
Jeff Boeka, North Platte, Nebraska Hotel & Motel Association (NHMA)