

Good news from the State of Illinois: Tourism numbers are up in the Riverbend

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
July 19 2018 2:04 PM



GRAFTON – Illinois Office of Tourism Director Cory Jobe visited the Riverbend Thursday morning to announce 2017's tourism numbers, and they are great for this area.

Tourism in the Great Rivers and Routes Tourism Bureau, which is one of 39 bureaus in the state and includes the counties of: Calhoun, Jersey, Madison and Macoupin, increased by six percent from 2016. This significant increase places this area within the top five in the state for growth, Jobe said, and one of the leaders in the Southern half of the state. These figures equate to an increase of as much as \$30.3 million in tourism spending in this area from 2016, making a 2017 sum of as much as \$538.8 million. This number breaks down to tax receipts of as much as \$15.79 million for 2017, which is considerably higher than the 2016 figure of \$14.98 million.

When asked why this area of Illinois is among the state's most popular destinations, Jobe credited the culture of small businesses and great rivers.

“I think a lot of what this area has is the river, as well as its many small businesses,” he said. “I think tourism is growing, and people want to go somewhere that feels authentic. They want to live like the locals do, and small businesses are a big part of that, and this area has plenty of them. I am a coffee guy, and I went to Germania and The Post Commons this morning. I live in Chicago, and the Post Commons especially, is something you couldn't easily find up there. It's really a testament to the strong small business culture in this area.”

The entire State of Illinois reported domestic and international traveler spending at \$39.5 billion across the state in 2017, according to a release from the Alton Regional Visitors and Convention Bureau. This is an increase of \$1.1 billion since 2016, which is an overall increase of 3.3 percent.

These increases also equate to jobs in Illinois. The tourism industry in the state has created as many as 6,000 jobs in the state for 2017, the release stated. In the Riverbend region, this trend continued within Madison and Jersey Counties, which saw a “slight uptick” in new jobs, according to the release. Overall job growth in the Riverbend increased by as much as four percent.

“These numbers are encouraging and show how vital tourism is to the local economy,” Alton Regional Conventions and Visitors Bureau President and CEO Brett Stawar said in the release. “Our regional tourism industry is key to the continued economic growth of our region. The growth also shows the razor-sharp focus of the Great Rivers and Routes Tourism Bureau!”



These numbers were released to the public at a 10:30 a.m. press conference at Grafton Winery and Brewhaus Thursday. Alongside the numbers reveal was the inauguration of Kruta Bakery of Collinsville into the Illinois Made program.

“The Illinois Made program promotes authentic travel experiences throughout the state,” Jobe said in a release from the Illinois Office of Tourism. “By expanding this successful program, we’re encouraging visitors to discover more hidden gems and travel to places off the beaten path. Not only does the program boost visitor spending and tax revenue for our communities, it builds awareness of everything our great state has to offer.”

Grafton Winery and Brewhaus was added to the Illinois Made list in January 2018, so it was chosen as the venue to host Thursday's event bringing Kruta Bakery into the fold. The bakery had several pastries for the public to enjoy during the press conference.