



Great Rivers & Routes Bureau Highlights Accomplishments And Goals At 2022 Annual Summit

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ALTON - Tourism investment is key to economic development and growth in southwest Illinois during 2022.

Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau President & CEO drove that message home during the bureau's Annual Tourism Summit held Thursday, Jan. 27 at the Gateway Convention Center in Collinsville. More than 240 people were in attendance including elected officials, community partners and regional business leaders.

"Tourism is the economic engine of the post pandemic world," Jobe said. "It is a green economy with nature-based tourism and outdoor recreation as our welcome mat to the 25 million people who live within a three-hour drive of southwest Illinois. We have the character to be a regional destination that we can all be proud of. That businesses can thrive in. That neighborhoods can embrace."

Southwest Illinois is home to key tourism drivers that can't be replicated anywhere else, Jobe noted. It is home to the confluence of the nation's three great rivers – the Mississippi, Illinois and Missouri. It is also home to two national byways – The Meeting of the Great Rivers National Scenic Byway and Illinois Route 66. All are key draws for increased tourism in southwest Illinois.

"Embracing a regional approach in developing a regional destination is key creating a livable future for entrepreneurs, retirees and young families," Jobe pointed out.

"Tourism is an investment – not an expense. For every dollar we spend in destination marketing, the region receives \$9 in economic spending – a 9 to 1 ratio. That's a solid investment."

Featured Speaker Cathy Ritter, former Illinois and Colorado Office of Tourism State Travel Director and the founder of Better Destinations LLC, echoed Jobe's remarks.

"The keys to a successful destination lies in the community – in the hearts and minds of the residents," Ritter noted. "Tourism has to start with an authentic expression of what the destination is. We need to make our communities the places people not only want to visit but where people want to live."

During the Summit, Jobe pointed out the Tourism Bureau's 2021 accomplishments created a strong foundation for 2022 economic growth in the region. Those accomplishments included:

- A 240 percent increase in Group Travel specifically in motor coach travel with 4,451 delegates visiting and regional sporting events which brought in 18,992 delegates.
- A surge in Mississippi River cruise ship dockings in Alton resulting in an anticipated 60-plus cruise ships using Alton as their port in 2022

- A 92 percent increase in paid media with a focus on digital media generating 30 million impressions with an 8.8 percent click through rate
- A 24 percent increase in visits to the RiversandRoutes.com website
- A 450 percent increase in earned media
- The debut of Epic Food Weeks which involved over 100 different businesses throughout the region and everyone enjoying a summer of food fun.
- Fireworks each Thursday night along the Great River Road from June through September resulted in a 30 percent increase in sales and hotel/motel tax revenues
- Partnered with Zartico, a visitor intelligence platform, which identifies industry impacts on jobs, tax revenues, hotel stays and the visitor economy in the region

Looking ahead to growth in 2022, Jobe noted the addition of a new entertainment development in downtown Collinsville, the new Aerie's Alpine Coaster, the NASCAR Cup Series race at World Wide Technology Raceway, a new Fall Colors Shuttle Tour, the reopening of Doc's Soda Fountain and Pharmacy Lounge off Route 66 in Girard, a new food truck experience in Alton when the new Flock Food Truck Park opens in the spring, the addition of a new monster slide at Raging Rivers Water Park in Grafton and the planning for the Centennial celebration of Route 66 will all help create a must-see destination among travelers.

“At the end of the day, we have a once in a generation opportunity to be transformational in our planning and thinking to build the destination we want which embraces the outdoor recreation industry for the future,” Jobe said.

The annual summit was sponsored by Alton Works, Carrollton Bank, the City of Collinsville and Phillips 66 Wood River Refinery.

(The Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau is a certified Destination Marketing Organization serving Madison, Jersey, Calhoun, Macoupin, Montgomery and Greene counties. The bureau is dedicated to educating visitors about the region by providing information regarding the area's history, unique landmarks, recreational opportunities, leisure attractions, special events and scenic marvels.)