

Tourism Bureau Expands Sports Tourism Efforts

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ALTON - Expanding sports tourism in southwest Illinois is a priority in 2023 for the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau.

That's why it has hired Huddle Up Group, an Arizona-based organization which specializes in sports tourism strategic plans.

"Every year we see the economic impact of sports tourism on our region and know we can do better," said Cory Jobe, President and CEO of the tourism bureau. "Growing sports events in our region will bring in more overnight stays, increase local tax revenues and we anticipate businesses will see an increase in sales. It's a win-win for everyone."

Huddle Up will help identify, grow, develop and service the region's sports tourism efforts to ensure a positive economic impact. That work would ultimately lead to the development of a long-range strategic plan for the growth of sports in Madison County. Huddle Up will conduct a market needs assessment on sports participation trends; do a regional facility audit including identifying existing public and private sports facilities, recommend needed upgrades and evaluate existing community needs; and create a comparative market analysis and market demand report. The market analysis report would include a comparison of the Great Rivers & Routes sports tourism market to at least three similar cities; include community input and participation; and recommend opportunities to advance sports tourism with current facilities and natural resources available.

Madison County ARPA funds secured by the bureau for sports tourism efforts will be used to fund the growth project.

“Our team at Huddle Up Group is honored to have been chosen to lead such an important project for the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau,” said Founder and CEO Jon Schmieder. “This is a watershed moment for the destination for both sports tourism and their community user groups. We look forward to engaging with the key stakeholders to deliver a solid strategic plan which will enhance the communities through sports in the years to come.

Huddle Up is expected to conduct an analysis of sports events in the region, assess local athletic facilities and events potential and provide other key data reports. Huddle Up will also do on-site visits and interview key athletic representatives in the area.

“We are looking forward to gaining a more comprehensive understanding of how we can impact sports tourism in southwest Illinois,” Jobe noted. “This is just the first step in a process that will bring sustained economic growth to the region.”