

The economic development impact tourism can have in Nemaha County can be greatly increased, with the enthusiasm and promotion of county residents, Mary Kruger told the Nemaha County Commissioners Wednesday, Jan. 23.

Kruger, chairman of the Nemaha County Lodging Tax Committee, presented the committee's annual report. Other committee members are Mary Lauber, Janice Boden, TO Davison and Sondra Westenberg.

"The more families we can attract to restaurants, motels and retail businesses, the better. We need to educate the local people how important it is to have tourists in the area," Kruger said. The lodging tax committee has been involved in projects for the support of attracting tourists to Nemaha County. Kruger said each traveling party to the county is estimated to stay 2.2 nights and spend \$435. The lodging tax collected generates about \$20,000 each year by visitors who stay in recreational vehicle parks and motels/hotels. The lodging tax represents a charge of 4 percent, split between capital outlay and promotion funds.

The committee, however, cannot receive lodging tax dollars from anyone who stays more than 30 days, such as those who come to work during the outages at Cooper Nuclear Station, Kruger said.

"However, the Cooper shutdown helps Nemaha County and the surrounding area in other ways. There are brochure racks at the [Nebraska Public Power District] Training Center. I've had to restock them. Many of them [outage workers] wanted to know where to go. There's more awareness of our attractions," she said.

2012 Capital Outlay Fund Projects

Billboards along Interstate 29 on the north and south approaches to Brownville were completed for \$8,500. The billboards promote the village's attractions. Their installation was delayed because of the Missouri River flood and a few other barriers, Kruger said.

Camping shelters and fire pits at the Steamboat Trace Trail trailhead at Peru were built for \$7,500. An Eagle Scout project spun off from that project resulted in the installation of an air compressor at the site. Some of that work was spread out in payment over several years, because time and weather on such large projects cannot always be completed on a short time frame, she said.

Future plans include installation of a playground and small recreational vehicle park at the Peru trailhead. The Duck and Buck Creek facilities will be a great asset to that development, Kruger said.

"The Nemaha Natural Resources District has been a great support for us. We will need their help in installing the playground. The facilities should help Peru a lot," she said.

The Brownville Village Theatre restrooms were renovated for \$16,000, funded by the capital outlay fund through the lodging tax, Kruger said.

2012 Promotional Fund Projects

In 2012, the committee funded \$2,500 for postage for the Brownville Concert Series; \$789.94 in brochures for the Nemaha Valley Museum; \$308.50 for postage for Brownville Village Theatre brochures; \$1,000 for the Brownville spring flea market; \$500 for the classic car show; \$300 for

Didier Cabin brochures; \$350 to the Johnson Chamber of Commerce and \$4,774 postage for the Brownville Concert Series.

There is a \$7,409 carryover for the Steamboat Trace Trail. Kruger said the expense will be directed to QR coding and historical markers to be placed along the trail.

"We hope to have them in place this spring. The Nemaha NRD has been a big help on the historical aspect. We're proud of that being possibly brought in," she said.

2013 Capital Outlay Fund Projects

A \$2,000 application was approved for renovating a bridge at Coryell Park near Brock. Kruger said Brownville Village Theatre officials applied for funding for a handicapped accessibility ramp into the theater. Bob Hutton, commissioners chairman, said he was approached by BVT officials about improving the bridge from the theatre to the trail. Kruger said those involved need to find out who owns the bridge and then urged that party to file an application.

2013 Possible funding includes:

–purchase of a Nebraska historical marker for the Auburn post office site, depicting the mural in the lobby. The mural is featured on the cover of a recent Nebraska State Historical Society book.

Kruger said Stephanie Hackett, Auburn postmaster, was excited about placing a marker at the post office.

–a Nebraska historical marker installed at Auburn Legion Memorial Park. There is a small plaque at the entry way which designates the park as a national historic site.

–Nebraska State Historical Society officials have documented information for two Underground Railroad sites in the county.

Kruger said the committee would like to do follow-up for the permits and purchase state historical signage. Sara Crook, Peru State College professor, has helped on that project, she said.

Many buildings in Nemaha County have met the criteria for state historical designation, but follow-up and paperwork need completion, Kruger said.

County Attractions Promoted in Publications

The chairman said the committee paid \$100 dues to both the Scenic By-Way Highway 136 and Southeast Nebraska Tourism Council, and \$200 to the Nebraska Tourism Council.

The committee spends about \$4,000 on advertisements promoting Nemaha County in the annual Southeast Nebraska Visitor's Guide and the semiannual Missouri River Valley Explorer visitor's guide. Kruger said she made sure that websites and telephone numbers have not changed. The Missouri Valley Explorer does as much to promote Nemaha County as any visitor's guide, Kruger said.

The 2013 Southeast Nebraska Visitor's Guide is the 25th anniversary edition. Kruger is Nemaha County representative to the Southeast Nebraska Tourism Council, which includes Nemaha and 11 other counties, all counties in the southeast quadrant except Lancaster. There are 40,000 guides available for distribution. Besides the area covered, travel guides are placed at stops along Interstates 29, 70 and 80 and at several Midwest trade shows.

The council's goal is to attract more tourists to Southeast Nebraska, lengthen their stay and increase their spending.

Kruger said the committee does not do much with the Nebraska Travel Guide because of more stringent regulations.

All three tourism guides and Nemaha County tourism brochures are distributed at 12 brochure

racks, mostly in the county. This amounts to about 5,000 to 6,000 pieces. There is a rack at Black Iron Grill along Interstate 29. Brochures are displayed on such attractions as Indian Cave State Park, the Steamboat Trace Trail, Whiskey Creek Run Vineyard & Winery, Brownville events, Coryell Park, Nemaha Valley Museum and seasonal events. Kruger said the committee is trying to get Coryell Park officials to print brochures.

Kruger said she would like to get Nemaha County rack cards designed to be distributed in other counties.

Active in Forming Four-State Organization

Kruger said she was actively involved in formation of the Missouri Iowa Nebraska Kansas (MINK) Corridor. The focus of the organization is to develop the Missouri River Corridor from Omaha to Kansas City, Mo., about one county either side of the river. The organization is becoming legally organized. It started in the economic development area and to help receive grants. Tourism is the driving force which officials realized highly impacted economic development. Many small businesses were impacted negatively by the 2011 Missouri River flood. Unfortunately, there was little funding available for them and many will not recover, she said.

The organization has started at Plattsmouth and covered such attractions as Indian Cave State Park, Waubonsie State Park in southwest Iowa and Squaw Creek National Wildlife Center in northwest Missouri.

Kruger was elected second vice president of the organization.

She said Bill Sapp contributed the time and legal expense of his attorney to get the organization off the ground as articles of incorporation and bylaws have been written. She said Maxine Moul, U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development for Nebraska has also been a driving force to accomplish the barrier of crossing state lines for funding.

Getting officials from four states to work together and enable a way to finance the crossing of state lines was a huge task, she said.

Kruger said state departments of economic development cannot help with efforts in other states. However, resource conservation and development organizations can cross state lines.

The four-state organization will make an impact, Kruger said.

"I firmly believe the possibilities of this organization in future development of our local side of the river will be dramatic," she said.

MINK Corridor representatives have met several times over the past few years. It is starting to solicit membership. The next meeting will be in February in Kansas.

Kruger thanked the commissioners for their time.