

## Executive Director's Message

### Chamber website in top listings and looks to further improve service to Hot Springs visitors

The other day I typed in "Hot Springs" on Google and to my surprise, unlike as in the past, our chamber website came up on the first page of entries. We have usually been buried a couple of pages back. Because the internet is an important part of marketing our community, this was some unexpected very good news and clearly points out that our chamber website is serving the community well.

Having said that, I believe that we can improve our website to serve Hot Springs even better. At our last Board of Directors meeting, we asked Ross Johnson, our web designer, to upgrade our website. The Board agreed that we need to focus our landing page to be more tourism friendly. So in the next few weeks, we will focus on how best to do this. I anticipate that our Tourism Committee will take the lead on this effort.

We are looking to have a landing page that makes it easy for our visitor to see that their three major needs can be met in Hot Springs. First, we need to show them that there are things to do in our area. We need to have a convenient link that takes people to an "attractions page" that shows all of our activities and allows the visitor to link quickly to that attraction.

Secondly, we need to show people where they can stay. Again all of our lodging facilities must be quickly and attractively displayed. The "lodging page" must also have an ability to quickly link to a booking engine that will allow the visitor to book their rooms quickly through our website.

Finally, visitors need a place to eat. Again we can display our restaurants prominently on our website. Individual establishments may want to display their menu electronically along with their hours. Once visitors know that all of their basic travel needs can be met here in Hot Springs, they are more likely to stay with us. An updated website can be a useful tool in conveying this valuable information.

As you know our chamber has been a part of the Black Hills Digital Strategy effort this past year. We have used the top internet marketing experts in our state to assist us in attracting visitors to the Black Hills and Hot Springs. Our website was evaluated as a part of the program and is the only website in our area that did not require any upgrades.

In addition, through Black Hills Digital Strategy, we were able to buy key search words at a fraction of the cost that we could have on our own. In addition, we have used targeted emails that are sent monthly to individuals who have expressed an interest in the Black Hills. Several of these travel nuggets have specifically highlighted attractions and events here in Hot Springs.

Black Hills Digital Strategy has also focused on the rising popularity of social media such as Facebook and Twitter along with hosting a Black Hills Travel Blog. These tweets and blogs are creating a bit of buzz on the net about the Black Hills. The SD Department of Tourism is a part of the program and issues major press releases for major events, furthering our visibility.

But the most important facet of Black Hills Digital Strategy has been the focus on making the sale. We have installed a common booking engine on all of the member websites, and SD Tourism is planning to unveil a major digital program next month to further enhance these efforts.

Hopefully with an upgraded chamber website, continued participation with Black Hills Digital Strategy and the new state digital program, we will see that the best is yet to come for Hot Springs.



**George Kotti**  
Executive Director