



Executive Director's Message

S.D. Tourism approves Chamber's Distinctive Destination grant request

It has been a very busy spring around your Hot Springs Area Chamber of Commerce, and many of you have been caught up in the excitement and activity. I am not complaining because a busy chamber is a happy chamber!

Our annual Spring Fling Home and Garden Show was a huge success. We estimate that over 750 people attended the event, and we had 43 vendors present. A special thanks to Kim and Cathy and the cast of volunteers who assisted in so many different ways. Events like the Spring Fling are important to our community because they allow our residents to see what is available for them in our community, along with providing an opportunity for our local businesses to get needed visibility. The Spring Fling also serves as a social event that is important in helping build a sense of community.

The chamber is busily preparing for a busy summer season here in Hot Springs. I remain cautiously optimistic that we will have a good summer tourist season. Thus far inquiries have been ahead of last year, but we need to convert those inquiries into travelers. The chamber serves as the fulfillment center for sending out the Southern Hills Vacation Guides. So far, we have distributed almost 10,000 guides with over 83% of the direct leads coming from Hot Springs' advertising. I believe that our marketing efforts are a big benefit to our membership and the community.

For those of you that may not have heard the good news, our application for an additional \$25,000 in marketing Hot Springs as a "Distinctive Destination" was approved by the Office of Tourism. As a part of the governor's Million Dollar Challenge, we will use this money to accomplish needed items like produce a Hot Springs video for various websites, host media and travel writer's familiarization tours, buy ads in magazines and on the internet and update some billboards. Again, we have only one chance to capitalize on becoming a "Distinctive Destination" so we better take advantage of it. Our goal with this marketing effort is to increase visitor spending in Hot Springs by \$1 million this summer.

We have also joined the American Bus Association, which is the nation's largest group of tour operators. We want more tour busses to come to Hot Springs this summer and in the future. This is already paying dividends as American Bus Association is featuring Hot Springs in their association magazine this summer.

As we gear up for the summer, I am really excited about the possibility of opening another Visitor Center at Maverick Junction. Many businesses have followed the lead of Steve and Carla Simunek, who donated the kiosk, and are donating funds and services to the cause. Our goal is to capture travelers on US 385/18 and SD 79 and turn them into Hot Springs. We are operating this as an unbudgeted item and are counting on volunteers and donations to make it happen. The Depot will remain open as usual to provide information for our in-town guests.

There is a lot happening in Hot Springs. Where the negative news grabs the headlines, the steady teamwork of your chamber often goes unnoticed. Community building is hard work and noisy obstacles often attempt to block progress. But as the noise diminishes, the positive accomplishments are a testimony of what working together can accomplish. Thank you all for what you do to make Hot Springs such a special place and remember the best is yet to come for all of us!



George Kotti
Executive Director