



Hey dude! Surfing on dry land creates higher ROI

Special to the Connection by A.J. Boggio
President of the Harbor Country Lodging Association

Spring is in the air in Harbor Country and a business owner's heart turns to thoughts of a higher bank balance. Our winter weary senses are nourished by abundant clusters of fragrant blossoms and a kaleidoscope of brilliant pastels. Invisibly woven into the fabric of Mother Nature's annual coming-out party is a budding sense of optimism brought on by some encouraging travel industry news.

Even with our seeming lack of a sophisticated high-tech infrastructure, any business or organization, down to the struggling sole proprietor, now has access to the necessary tools that can not only lead more travelers and potential customers to the waters of Lake Michigan, but also make vacationers virtually drink and swim in them when planning a trip in their pajamas. Better yet, no need for late night sales pitches or having to worry about directionally challenged tourists finding your business in the dark.

You can even make money in your sleep! Sound too good to be true? Not if you're interested in a better bottom line and have already hung out your "e-shingle" on the World Wide Web. Amid forecasts from the Travel Industry Association of America calling for a "depressed" travel economy in 2003, the best means for surviving any hiccups or long term heartburn in the tourism industry is to heed the good advice from the knowledgeable experts at Travel Michigan who say, "Travel on the Web is booming!"

At the recent Cooperative Tourism Conference held by Lake Michigan College and sponsored by the Southwestern Michigan Tourist Council, George Zimmerman, vice president of Travel Michigan, boasted that the state's tourism website, www.michigan.org, has brought phenomenal results. In 2002, the site had 2.2 million user sessions, up 53 percent. Overall, Travel

Michigan received 95 percent of its travel inquiries through the Internet as opposed to phone calls or mailings. Those enquiring minds cruising the Internet in the middle of the night may or may not decide to include your business in their vacation plans, but your odds of success will only increase with your participation in michigan.org's free lure and link program.

And no matter where the state budget axe swings, this is one program that makes too many dollars and sense. Zimmerman and his staff at Travel Michigan are all too well accustomed with the less is more philosophy. Despite significant cuts in their promotions budget over the past four years, Travel Michigan's inquiries have shown a steady increase with an estimated projection

of just less than four million expected by the end of 2003. Yet, simultaneously, Travel Michigan is evolving into a lean, mean promoting machine as the cost per inquiry continues to drop from a high of \$5.63 in fiscal year 1999/2000, to current fiscal year 2002/2003 levels of \$1.72. Travel Michigan research credits those numbers to the tremendous growth of the online travel market and the Internet visitor's frequent reliance on state tourism sites like michigan.org.

Coming across as a mix between a pep rally and a "tough love" infomercial, the tourism conference's

underlying message was plain and simple. Those savvy business owners, who intend to ride out the storm and want to survive these recent turbulent mood swings in our economy, need to grab a hold of the 'Net and swim for the Web's safe harbor. Partnering with Travel Michigan builds a win-win marketing strategy and establishes an easy way for your website to attract more visitors who are eager to find accommodations or need ideas for things to see and do.

Continuing to invest your valuable time and money as part of the tourism industry will be a risky business for the short term, but the benefits far outweigh the risks knowing a trusty mouse and monitor could help click someone virtually right out of their pajamas and into www.yourbusiness.com.

Want more information about how Travel Michigan can
See DUDE page 4





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Being Resourceful

by Don Jackson, Chamber President



(Above) Chamber president Don Jackson welcomes Phyllis Dowsett, director of the Southwestern Michigan Tourist Council.

On Wednesday, March 19, area business leaders were able to tap into the many resources offered by county and state organizations and private companies that benefit business at the 1st Annual Resource Fair sponsored by the Harbor Country Chamber of Commerce and Berrien County Economic Development. Always a good friend to Harbor Country, Phyllis Dowsett felt that the county should plan more resource fairs throughout the area and at different times of the year. Though attendance was light for the first year, many walked away with new insights

into financing, utilizing new services, educational opportunities, and hearing that high-speed internet service could be a reality by the end of the year.

We're working out the details on how to market even more precisely to our membership. I really think that a simple reminder a day or two before an event would help. Let me know what you think? Remember, this is your chamber of commerce and the board of directors and officers hope to serve as many of your business needs as we can in any given year. Check our website calendar for coming events and meetings.

Harbor Country® Connection

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Partner with Travel Michigan or miss out!

Travel Michigan, the state's official Michigan tourism site (www.michigan.org) has invested millions of dollars in their web site, and millions more promoting it. In addition, their Michigan Beachtowns campaign for 2003, which includes Harbor Country, will be heavily promoted in major Midwestern markets via print, television and radio media. All this investment and promotion has resulted in astounding visitor traffic in the millions each month.

In a review of the Chamber's partnership with Travel Michigan, we found that Harbor Country businesses are

greatly under-represented on the Michigan.org site. Did you know that you can be listed on the Michigan.org site for free?

Did you know that a listing includes a description of your establishment and a link back to your site? Take advantage of this opportunity to list your business with Travel Michigan, and represent Harbor Country's business community. You can apply for your hyperlink listing by going to their online request form at: <http://travel.michigan.org/about/mar eq.asp> - (Note: There's a 'dot' between 'travel' and 'michigan' in this web

address). After receiving your request, Travel Michigan will send an email reply with an attached form to mail or fax back.

If you've invested in a web site, this is one opportunity that costs you nothing but a few minutes of your time to reap the rewards of visitors coming to your site. Some Internet opportunities take a little work, but we've placed this one right in your lap. The next step to your success is following this call to action and get listed at www.michigan.org - or miss out on all the action.

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help your business? Visit their official tourism industry website at travelmichigannews.org or contact Sherry Fouts, Information Specialist at Travel Michigan on how to become a Travel Michigan partner at 800-676-1743 or E-mail her at foutss@michigan.org.

The Creative Director of Perry Ballard Incorporated in St. Joseph, MI is also offering to provide free copies of his Cooperative Tourism Conference presentation, "Now that you've got it WHAT do you do with it? Getting the most marketing mileage out of your

website." Printed versions or a PowerPoint file is available. Contact the offices of Perry Ballard, Inc. at 800-800-9547 or E-mail him at pballard@perryballard.com.

bits & pieces

More than a name

The Harbor Country Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors wants it to be known that the name "Harbor Country®" is a registered trademark of this organization and as such its use is subject to strict Federal laws. Before a company uses this mark, it is recommended that they contact the chamber office for direction in licensing and/or consideration for permission to use the name.

2003 Guide Preview Party

One of the most important social events of the season seems to be the annual unveiling of the Harbor Country Guide. Like a well-oiled machine, the committee has announced the official release on Thursday, April 17, 6:30 p.m., Miller's Country House. The evening includes free hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar. It's also a time to meet the cover artist, buy a few of your favorite cover posters and meet the committee, who so diligently brought another edition to closure. Please RSVP the chamber office by Monday, April 14, 269-469-5409. Guides for distribution will be limited at the unveiling and are available on a first come, first served basis.

Take the on ramp to BeeFreeway, a free development resource

Cynthia Giese, the Director of Workforce Development of Michigan Virtual University, recently contacted the chamber offering a professional development resource for small businesses. She is responsible for Bee Freeway ([way.org\), the business education resource developed collaboratively with, and funded by, the Michigan Department of Career Development. BeeFreeway is a resource of over 1,300 self-paced training modules in Information Technology, Professional Development and Business Expertise, provided by the MDCD to Michigan's small businesses and non-profit organizations of less than 25 full-time employees at no charge.](http://www.beefree-</p>
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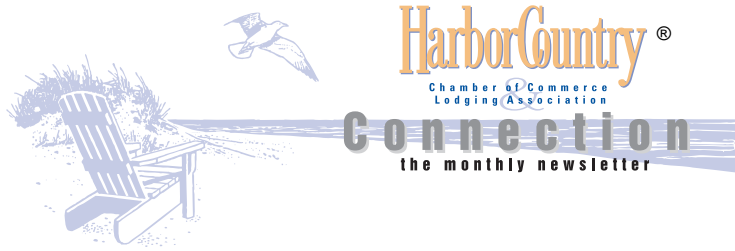
BeeFreeway is intended to support employer's needs as a professional development resource, as well as improving the skills of Michigan's workforce. They know that there are over 250,000 small businesses and organizations in Michigan that could use this resource. One of Giese's goals is to work with groups and associations like our Chamber of Commerce across the state that may be eligible for this resource and /or reach this group of Michigan's small businesses and organizations. If you are interested in these services check out their website at <http://www.beefreeway.org> or e-mail Giese at mivu_troy@mvumail.mivu.org.

new members february 2003

Shorewood by the Lake
615 N. Indian Trail Road
Sawyer, MI
Mark Kruger/Karen Richman
General Membership

A Cottage
4862 Michigan Avenue
Stevensville, MI
Mark Moreno
Out-of-Area Membership

Red Bird Cottage
8773 Elm Valley Road
Union Pier, MI
Miguel Sacarello
General Membership



BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
UNION PIER, MI
49129
PERMIT NO. 7

530 south whittaker street, suite f, new buffalo, mi 49117

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**WEB
PARTNER**

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Insurance tradition continues in Three Oaks

Greg Bubb and Jason Heckathorn have come back home to Three Oaks and invested in its future. On Dec. 20, 2002 they purchased Olson Insurance from Jerry Olson and have recently announced that they are operating the

business as Harbor Country-Olson Insurance. Bubb and Heckathorn are 1988 graduates of River Valley High School. Both sought fame and fortune in varying degrees outside of the area, and both realized that there's no place like home to stake your claim in a hometown business environment.

Though the agency has built a customer base on personal insurance, the young entrepreneurs will be seeking more commercial accounts as well. Jason Heckathorn has been specializing in commercial accounts for the past nine years at a very large agency in Florida.

Both are grateful for the personal business of their agency, but Bubb feels that the duo would be more actively selling when it comes to commercial accounts. Heckathorn looks at it as the creative aspect of the insurance business.

They recently hosted a Harbor Country Mixer with a Twist of Business. If you missed the opportunity to discuss your insurance needs drop in at 11 N. Elm, Three Oaks, MI or give them a call at 269-756-9564



Greg Bubb and Jason Heckathorn are staking their claim in the future by investing in Three Oaks. They recently purchased the Olson Insurance Agency at 11 N. Elm from area real estate agent Jerry Olson. Their new name will be Harbor Country®-Olson Insurance.

