



By EARL WATT

- Leader & Times

Taking a journey down the Yellow Brick Road or flying back on historic aircraft, Liberal's tourist attractions have thrilled thousands of visitors each year.

Trying to gauge the actual effect has been difficult, but a recent study by IHS Consulting on tourism in Kansas has shed light on the impact of tourism across the Sunflower State as well as specific data for each county.

According to the study, tourists to Seward County spent \$67.6 million in 2011.

Both organizations function on shoestring budgets compared to the impact they have on the local economy.

Combined, Dorothy's House, the Land of Oz, Coronado Museum, and the Mid-America Air Museum have less than \$500,000 annual budgets.

But what they provide, along with Baker Arts Center, sporting events and more, pay huge dividends according to the study.

"People would be blown away by knowing what kind of traffic we have out here," Land of Oz Executive Director JoAnn Mansell said. "We are the first glimpse of the community our visitors see."

Mansell conducts surveys with some of the visitors to the museum, and their responses validate the survey results.



"People tell us that this is their destination," Mansell said. "More times than not, they are coming to see Dorothy."

The study

IHS Consulting conducted the Kansas study with data collected in 2011 and made the presentation in 2013.

IHS provides consulting for the US Departments of Energy, Transportation and Defense, has done work for NATO, the European Commission as well as tourism studies in 15 states, five

foreign nations and 20 major cities.

According to their data, measuring tourism is difficult because it is not a “supply side industry. Tourism is a “demand side” activity, according to the study. “The focus is on what a traveler buys before and during a trip. As a result, tourism touches many industries,” the report stated.

STATE IMPACT

Statewide, tourism brought 32 million visitors to Kansas in 2011 and accounted for \$8 billion in spending.

That number was an increase of 3.4 percent over 2010.

Tourism provides 128,648 direct jobs across the state and another 19,580 jobs indirectly, making tourism the third largest private sector employer in Kansas.

Without the impact of tourism, “each household would have to pay about \$917 more in taxes in order to maintain the current level for state and local tax receipts.”

The study also discovered that each Kansas visitor generates \$250 in expenditures, and \$69 of that goes to businesses that do not “directly touch” that visitor.

SEWARD COUNTY EFFECT

The impact in Seward County is spread around to a number of industries. The local entertainment industry received \$1.9 million in visitor spending in 2011.

Businesses that provide accommodations received \$11.82 million from visitors.

The transportation industry received \$15.34 million from visitors, and those providing food received \$17.98 million.

Shopping in Seward County received \$20.55 million from visitors. Altogether, tourists provided \$67.59 million in spending according to IHS.

Mansell was pleasantly surprised at the results of the study, but from what she heard from visitors, the numbers were in line with her own survey.

In July, Coronado Museum and Dorothy's House had 2,123 visitors from 15 different states and six foreign countries.

Of the 580 surveyed, 334 stayed the night, 277 purchased fuel, 380 ate, 345 went shopping, and for 569 of them, Dorothy's House was the destination they were seeking.

"I always knew we had a huge impact on this community and on our state," Mansell said. "This study validates it."

COMMENT CARDS

To find out what kind of experience visitors have at Dorothy's House and the Land of Oz exhibit, Mansell has the guests write a response.

"If I look at our register as to what people write out there, they write, 'Awesome,' 'Amazing,' 'No Place Like Home,' 'We love the displays,' 'We will return soon,' 'Wonderful,' 'Cool,' 'Exciting,' 'Great Dorothy's,' 'I like the girls,' she said as she read down the latest registry.

With the positive feedback, and the occasional suggestion, Mansell is able to provide the appropriate feedback to her staff of “Dorothy’s” on how to enhance the experience for guests.

ENHANCING THE EFFECT

While tourism is already having a significant impact on the community, Mansell said plans are under way to try to double the local impact by increasing the offerings at the Coronado Museum and the Land of Oz exhibit.

The Seward County Historical Society is currently planning to build an additional exhibition building that would allow traveling exhibits to come to the community. Exhibits ranging from Smithsonian, private collections, NASA, science fiction, historic and more criss cross the nation, but without an exhibition location, they can not be displayed locally.

But the Liberal Heritage Center would provide the opportunity to draw guests.

“We could double our tourism in a year,” Mansell said. “If we had a new building to our facility, we could offer more to the culture of our community. We could see surrounding areas come to take advantage of rotating exhibits.”

That would result in an even larger local economic impact.

“Our community would reap from that three fold,” Mansell said. “I don’t think it’s just twice as many, I think it is a larger number. If you have groups that come just to see a special presentation, they are more likely to go out and shop. One person may not as much, but groups multiply. Traveling exhibits usually attract groups.”

That was validated recently with the Dinosaurs exhibit at the Mid-America Air Museum. More

Statewide study shows tourism in Seward County has \$67.6 million impact

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than 20,000 visitors came to see the attraction in a five-week period. That economic impact was not included in this study, not was the Kansas Sampler since both events occurred after 2011.