

Armstrong: Hard to say bye to friends from the film industry

The cast and crew of the untitled Ramin Bahrani film have wrapped up filming. They are busy closing down their production office in DeKalb. It is truly bittersweet to see them go, but they leave behind a treasure trove of memories for many DeKalb County residents – me included.

While it was fun and exciting to have them here, the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau board never lost sight of why it worked so hard to get them to choose DeKalb County. They spent an estimated \$1.8 million in DeKalb County and Chicago combined, according to their accounting office.

They were part of our community for nearly five months. During that time they took up residence in our hotels that totaled approximately 4,800 room nights. Our thanks to all the hotels and their staff for making them feel at home during their stay. Many of the cast and crew became regulars at local restaurants, shops and pubs. They worked long and hard, most days between 12-15 hours, and enjoyed their time off frequenting local businesses.

We hope Bahrani and some of his crew return to DeKalb County in September, when the film is anticipated to be released. The DCCVB invited him back to share his stories about filming in DeKalb County. He hopes to return to do just that when they start the media junket to publicize the film. Personally, I can't wait to see the award-winning director again and his highly anticipated film.

I'm sure many of you also want another opportunity to meet Bahrani, Zac Efron, Dennis Quaid, Kim Dickens, Heather Graham and the other actors and actresses. Our streets have been filled with people waiting for that one chance to meet them. Fortunately, many of you did. All of the cast and crew were friendly and gracious whenever they were stopped and asked for a picture or an autograph.

They left a lasting impression and contributed a substantial economic impact to our hotels and local businesses. To everyone that made them feel at home and welcome, our heartfelt thanks.

Economics of tourism

DeKalb County tourism generated \$71.6 million in 2010, according to statistics released by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the Office of Tourism, a 9.6 percent increase over 2009.

The tourism dollars we generate for the state rank us 25th out of 102 counties.

A total of \$11.7 million is attributed to payroll in DeKalb County. That number includes wages and salaries paid directly to employees serving in such areas as lodging, food service, entertainment/recreation, retail and travel planning.

Total tax receipts generated by DeKalb County were \$5.6 million.

State tax receipts were reported at \$4.51 million.

Local tax receipts were \$1.15 million.

On average, the leisure traveler to Illinois spends \$106 per person, per day while visiting.

The economic impact of travel and visitor volume in Illinois increased by 5 percent in 2010. Illinois tourism generated \$27.3 billion for the economy and visitors to the state.

For a complete breakdown of 2010 DeKalb County tourism statistics, visit www.dekalbcountycvb.com/media.

Note: This information was compiled by the Northern Illinois Tourism Development Office. Information contained in 10 studies was prepared for the Illinois Office of Tourism by the U.S. Travel Data Center and U.S. Travel Association, which reviewed the Economic Impact of Travel on Illinois Counties.

• *Debbie Armstrong is executive director of the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau.*

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