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Tourism Economic Impact & Hope for the Future

(Spooner, WI) May 7, 2021 – National Travel & Tourism Week brings along with it an excitement for the accomplishments of the past year. This year it certainly has a different feel for those in the tourism industry. But there is one common thread, hope. Hope for adventures with old friends. Hope for bustling downtowns. Hope for favorite events to return. Hope for a great summer. The team at Washburn County Tourism Association (WCTA) shares that hope. As requests from visitors for travel information pick up and the website traffic increases, the team at Tourism is ready to serve travelers to the area with all the enthusiasm their Northwoods hospitality has to offer.

According to research from Tourism Economics, released by the Wisconsin Department of Tourism, even amidst a global pandemic, tourism in Washburn County had an economic impact of \$38.7 Million in Total Business Sales. While down nearly 20% from previous years, it's important to see how the businesses in Washburn County pivoted to ensure a strong future for not only their business, but our entire area. "I couldn't be prouder of our business community and how they responded to the continuous change over the past year," said Michelle Martin, Executive Director of Washburn County Tourism Assn. "Between the curbside pickup, delivery, online shopping and dedication to serving their customers, our businesses did a phenomenal job of reaching their guests and keeping our area top of mind." When the Washburn County Tourism Assn. team was working from home, they reached out consistently to businesses to ensure that they were promoting to the local market to the best of their abilities. This local, grassroots marketing approach continued through much of 2020 and brought fresh ideas and energy to the tourism industry, resulting in an expanded public relations plan for the organization.

While many organizations were at a stand-still, WCTA recognized the opportunity to re-focus and build for the future. Some of the exciting projects that were accomplished include an organization strategic planning which wrapped up this spring, renovations at the Washburn County Visitor Center, expansion of a 24/7 outdoor literature rack with remote assistance, and the installation of a new annually rotating attraction display. The new display, completed just this week, is titled "Tribute to the Lakes" and includes information on the Governor Tommy G. Thompson Fish Hatchery, Lake Plant and Animal Life, Shell Lake & Peterson Boat Companies, tons of great lake facts, and a super fun photo opp for visitors (and locals) to enjoy. "We wanted to keep our visitors' and locals' experiences front of mind as we began our discussion on how to better utilize our beautiful visitor center," said Kaitlin Hanson, Visitor Experience & Outreach Director for Washburn County Tourism Assn. "Offering a year-round attraction and expanding visitor access to literature seemed like the perfect way to increase our level of service and enhance our visitors' experiences."

As the team at Tourism is gearing up for a busy summer season, they're looking at how to expand their reach and share with everyone who will listen, how amazing the Washburn County area is. For more information on Washburn County Tourism Association, stop into the Washburn County Visitor Center (122 N. River Street in Spooner) and chat with a staff member.

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Images attached:

IMG_0542 – Sign advertising the new information kiosk at the Washburn County Visitor Center

IMG_0539 – The new kiosk offers expanded visitor information and the ability for visitors to communicate with Visitor Experience Representatives even when the center is closed.

IMG_0550 – WCTA team members pose with their new photo opp