

KOSCIUSKO
LEADERSHIP
ACADEMY

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WINTER TOURISM IN
KOSCIUSKO COUNTY
A POSSIBLE SOLUTION

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I. INTRODUCTION

The northern section of Kosciusko County has been well know over the years for its many and varied forms of recreation. This recreation has largely been centered around the region's many lakes and has thus been primarily limited to the summer season. The influx of people into the area in the summer has traditionally been a boom to the local economy. The major drawback, however, is the relatively short vacation season.

The purpose of this paper is to propose the Kosciusko Winter Olympics Carnival and Games to stimulate tourism during the winter season. The idea presented here is not an original one. Many communities in the "frost belt" have similar events such as the "Ice Block Days" in International Falls, Minnesota, and the "Winter Olympics" in Marquette, Michigan. In fact, the Syracuse Chamber of Commerce has sponsored the "Syracuse Winter Carnival" for the last several years. The event that is proposed here would merely take the concept of a winter carnival and expand it, hopefully, in three areas: 1) Community involvement, 2) a wider spectrum of events, and 3) increased participation from outside Kosciusko County. It is believed that if these three objectives are reached, the overall objective of stimulating local economies during the winter season would be achieved. This area has been known for tourism in the past more than in the present. It is noted that although, for instance, there is now no hotel on Lake Wawasee, at one time there were as many as 30 hotels on the lake. In recent years, however, many people have purchased property on the lakes in the area and have built permanent homes. The end

result has been that although the lake continues to provide many dollars for the communities, the dollars are not tourist's dollars, but rather, they come from the land owners.

II. CURRENT EFFECTS OF TOURISM ON THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Kosciusko County ranks 75th among the 92 counties in Indiana in terms of the dollars that are spent in the county on promotion of tourism. The 1982 total travel expenditures in the county reached \$27 million. Travel generated payroll in this county was \$3 million, which is representative of 757 county jobs. These are jobs that were created over and above the normal jobs simply because of the revenue generated by tourism dollars being spent in the county. State tax receipts total \$1.3 million. Local tax receipts total \$155,000.

These figures are generally taken to be conservative according to the Indiana State Department of Tourism Development. The reason for this is that the figures are compiled and published by the United States Travel Data Center. This national methodology relies heavily on airport data. Since there are no large airports in Kosciusko County, figures are taken to be conservative. There are other ways to consider tourism dollars. One such way is to realize that each tourism dollar spent in a given community will turn over seven times before it leaves the community. That means if a tourist comes in and spends \$1 in the local community, seven people and/or businesses will have the benefit of the dollar before it finally leaves the community. When the millions of tourism dollars spent in the county are viewed in perspective of this ripple effect, each dollar becomes much more valuable and much more important to the local community.

As was previously mentioned, many of the properties such as hotels on the lakes were primarily tourist oriented. Recently, however, as these properties become permanent residences, the dollars generated by them lost their elasticity. Specifically, what this means is that while tourism dollars turn over seven times before the leaving the community, "permanent" dollars only turn over two or three times. While it is encouraging to see more permanent residences in the area, the importance of maintaining tourist dollars cannot be overlooked.

It generally is estimated that it takes between \$30,000-\$35,000 in travel expenditures in the local community to create one job. Therefore, it is imperative to get as many tourist dollars as possible. The preferable course would seem to be by generating a higher volume of tourists rather than the questionable practice of raising prices on fewer tourists. The purpose of the Kosciusko Winter Olympics Carnival and Games is to capitalize on the area's abundant natural resources in the winter season as well as the summer season. It is this group's conviction that tourism dollars are available to be spent in the communities, but unless and until a plan is developed to specifically attract these tourists, the area will remain dormant insofar as winter tourism is concerned.

III. OBSTACLES TO THE WINTER CARNIVAL

The biggest obstacle standing in the way of attracting tourists during the winter season is housing. During the summer, many people either live in the cottages they own or they are able to rent housing on a temporary basis. However, since many of these cottages are not insulated against the weather, it would be very impractical to rely on the cottages to provide housing for the

winter season. With the cottages ruled out, there are several remaining possibilities: a) Area hotels and motels, b) state lodge, c) Epworth Forrest and Oakwood Park, and d) local homes and a hospitality committee.

Hotels and Motels

Although there are small hotels in both North Webster and Syracuse, it does not appear that these facilities would be sufficient to lodge a group of the size necessary to support such an endeavor as this. In the surrounding communities lodging is available in both Warsaw and Goshen as well as Pierceton. But these facilities present problems, mainly caused by the distance from the proposed sites of the games. Although these facilities would be available and would be necessary, it would be asking too much for them to provide all the housing necessary.

State Lodge

There is no State Lodge presently in the area, nor are there plans for a lodge to be built in the area. However, the possibility of constructing a State Lodge could conceivably be seen in at least two possible areas. The first possibility might be an addition to the Tri-State Game Preserve. It would not be necessary to develop the game preserve as it now stands, but rather to add to it and develop the entire game preserve as an area where more people would be able to enjoy the natural beauty of the game preserve because of the availability of lodging.

The second possibility for a state lodge would be either at or near the site of the old fish hatchery on the east side of Lake Wawasee. This possibility would have to be handled carefully so as to be compatible with the surrounding private property. Admittedly, this would appear at the present to be a remote possibility, nonetheless it is mentioned here as a possibility.

Epworth Forrest Park/Oakwood Park

There are facilities which are owned by religious organizations and may or may not be available or suitable for use as temporary housing for the Winter Olympics project.

Local Housing

The last possibility, which at the present time seems the most feasible, would be to organize a Hospitality Committee which would consist of members (representatives) from the local service clubs. The function of this committee would be to arrange for housing of the game participants in the homes of the people who live in the area. This would help the games in several areas. First, it would project a good image of this area as an inviting, hospitable area. Secondly, it could increase the attendance of spectators as people become interested in the events in which their guests would be involved. Finally, it could add to long-lasting relationships in many cases that would bring guests back to the community throughout all four seasons and for many years. It would seem that although housing for the participants of the games does present some obvious problems, there are solutions which are available if an effort is made to solve them.

IV. FUND RAISING

To finance a Winter Olympics and make them attractive to a large group of competitors and tourists, a major fund raising drive would be needed well in advance of winter. Coordination of the fund raising probably could be done through the local Chamber of Commerce and the Retail Merchant's Association. These organizations could then hire a full-time individual to bring together the various retailers, businesses, major corporations, and service groups to achieve the needed funding and actual organization of the events. Sources of funding:

1) Ticket sales for major events, 2) entry fees, 3) donations from local companies, both money and prizes, and 4) a "One-Hundred" Club in which a member would be entitled to discounts from area retailers and free entry to all events. A member of the "One-Hundred" Club would receive a book of coupons worth well over \$100. These books could be sold by various service groups to raise money for their own groups and for the Winter Olympics. The groups could keep, for instance, \$10 of every book sold. The goal would be to raise \$250,000 by selling 2,500 books for \$100 a piece. Retailers offering discounts would not have to donate actual cash or prizes if they so desired.

V. WINTER OLYMPIC EVENTS

Ice Fishing

At various locations throughout the lakes, villages would be set on the ice. This would be a week long event. Prizes would be based on the biggest fish caught on various lakes. Prize money would come from both entry fees and donations. As a plus to manufacturers of ice fishing equipment, they could set up a display to sell their goods if they donated a prize.

Cross County Skiing

For one week the Game Preserve would be open to cross county skiers for both recreation and for a race to be held sanctioned by some group with major prize money.

Ice Carving

This contest would be at one location with a week to prepare and with judging on the weekend. An expert of some authority on ice carving would be needed to give demonstrations and do the actual judging.

Saucer, Innertube, and Sledding Hill

At some location in the county, a major sledding and saucer run would be built with curves and jumps for everyone's enjoyment. One service group could be given the job of designing, building, and maintaining the hill during the weekend. For individuals who do not have the equipment, innertubes, saucers, and sleds could be rented. These sleds and saucers then could be given away as prizes at the end of the event.

Beard Contest

Starting on Labor Day weekend, all men could be encouraged to grow beards for the Winter Olympics. Trophies will be awarded for different types of beards (i.e. longest, strangest, most original, etc.). Olympic Committee Chairmen could judge the beards.

Basketball Tourney

All of the county's basketball leagues could take part with an All Star team representing each league. The tourney would be held each evening of the Olympics at a local gymnasium with the consolation and championship to be played on Saturday afternoon. Trophies could be awarded for first, second, and third places.

Winter Softball Tourney

Teams sponsored by local merchants could compete for first and second place trophies. Games could be played at the area ball diamonds all week long, weather permitting.

Off Road 4X4 Race

This event would be held at the Trojan Race Track in North Webster. Cash prizes could be awarded to first and second place finishers, weather permitting.

Figure Skating

This event would require the use of a rink. This could be an open even, which could be divided into both singles and pairs figure skating as well as the possibility of further dividing them into age divisions.

Down Hill Skiing

There are several events that could be conducted around the theme of down hill skiing. The most obvious location would be Mt. Wawasee to conduct a down hill skiing tournament. The second possibility would be to give skiing lessons to the novice skiers. The third possibility could involve ski demonstrations which would be presented by the professionals at Mt. Wawasee.

Cross County Skiing Events

These events could be divided into groups according to age. Suggested age groups are as follows: Twelve years and under, 13 to 19 years, 20 to 29 years, 30 to 39 years, and 40 years and over. Needed for these races would be course markers, numbered bibs, for participants (color coded to identify age groups). Also needed would be aid stations along the course to provide participants with water or juices of some kind. First aid should also be provided in case there are injuries during these events.

The 10K Cross Country Race

This race would be ten Kilometers in length going over varying terrain. The entrants would be started at timed intervals rather than a mass start. Fastest time would win.

The Biathlon

This race is not to be confused with the biathlon that is run in the Winter Olympics. This event would consist of a five kilometer ski and a five kilometer run. Best combined time would win.

The Candle Light Cross County Ski

This event would be held at night. Some form of lights would be used to aid trail makers. These would be needed most to mark turns. Racers would wear a light stick on their arm so they could be seen by other racers. The suggested length of this event is five kilometers.

Snowmobile and ATC Events

Things needed for these events are course markers, flag men, pit areas, numbers for drivers, and machines.

Snowmobile Drag Races

This event is held with a run of 800 to 1,000 feet, 800 feet being the most popular. Different classes are run according to engines. The classes might be follows: 0 to 250cc, 250 to 400cc, 400cc to 440cc, 440cc to 500cc, and 500cc and up, or open class.

The Snowmobile Enduro Race

This event is run over a course that consists of left and right hand turns. There is no set number of right and left turns. Course lengths vary also. Length generally is determined by the location of the course. The number of laps a race is run also varies according to number entrants prize money. These races can be run by classes as follows: Stock 0 to 340cc and up, modified 0 to 340cc and up.

Snowmobile Cross County Race

This race would be run from point A to point B, ranging from 100 to 500 miles in length. With a race of this type, provisions would have to be made to close some country roads temporarily or have flagmen to stop traffic when races were crossing these roads. These roads would need some snow cover to make them easier for snowmobiles to cross. This race would run class also. They might be as follows: Stock 0 to 340cc, 340cc and up, and modified 0 to 340cc and up.

Snowmobile Poker Run

This is a fun event which the whole family would enjoy together. Each entrant is given directions to all the stops (number of stop varies, as does the number of miles the course covers). Entrants are usually given a sheet with places to be stamped or marked at each stop. After making all the stops, they return to the starting point and turn in their sheets to be checked that they made all stops. They are then given a deck of cards that they shuffle and draw seven cards. They make the best hand they can out these cards. The best hand wins.

ATC Enduro

This race is run similar to the snowmobile enduro. The terrain may vary more in this race. Classes would also be run. They may look something like this: Stock 1 to 225cc and 225cc and up, Modified 0 to 224cc and 225cc and up.

ATC Cross County

This race would also run similar to the snowmobile cross country race. This race would use the same classes as the ATC enduro. These two ATC races are not dependent on snow so they are the easiest to schedule of these events.

VI. EXPECTED RESULTS AND SUMMARY

Results

Assuming that an event such as this were to happen, it is felt that the county, as well as the individual communities, would benefit. Following are listed a few of the possible benefits.

1. This could generate tourist dollars on a county wide basis, thus benefiting all the towns who chose to be involved.
2. The revenues raised could be used for such things as county road upkeep, schools, and other projects which would ultimately be to the advantage of all county residents.
3. It could be a source of entertainment for the people of the county.
4. Another possibility includes changing the image of Kosciusko County to a year around attraction, not just a summer attraction.
5. An event such as this could benefit local businesses with increased traffic. This also could lead to the possibilities of more jobs.

6. The additional revenue generated would also go into local and county tax coffers which would result in the possibility of added services for residents of the county.
7. Finally, a portion of the money could be invested back into tourism promotion, which would serve to maintain this event as well as provide a financial base for other similar events.

Summary

Kosciusko County has much to offer. The abundant natural resources provide the residents of this county with opportunities to capitalize in the area of tourism. The summer season is well known throughout the state of Indiana and the surrounding states. Additionally, the winter season also provides many opportunities which are as yet underdeveloped. The concept behind this project is to stimulate tourism during a season which has been largely overlooked. Obstacles are evident and critics possibly will be vocal, but it is believed that the benefits of such an event merits a second and third look in light of the potential benefits.

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