



## Tourism promotion is important to us

### EYE ON TOURISM,

In recent weeks, there has been a great deal of buzz about tourism promotion - both on the state level and here locally in Glenwood Springs.

The most exciting development in years with state tourism promotion comes in the form of House Bill 1201, which will secure approximately \$19 million in funding for Colorado tourism promotion efforts. After much lobbying by tourism professionals and legislators throughout the state, the bill was finally signed into law by Gov. Owens on June 5. For Colorado, this increase in funding will allow the state to position itself in the eyes of potential visitors along with other destination heavy-hitters such as Florida and Hawaii.

In the early 1990s, the state of Colorado lost its funding for tourism promotion. This resulted in an immediate drop in tourism. In fact, a more than 30 percent drop occurred in 1993-96. According to Colorado's Office of Economic Development, the state lost \$160 million in state and local taxes and \$2.3 billion in revenue.

How does the increased funding on the state level impact Glenwood Springs? While the community of Glenwood Springs won't receive any direct funding from the state tourism coffers, we should expect to see an indirect impact, as any publicity for the state will likely mean more promotional opportunities and awareness for resort destinations like Glenwood Springs.

On the local level, our tourism promotional efforts continue to be funded by the city's lodging and accommodations tax. The current tax of 2.5 percent has been in effect since 2000, when voters agreed that a tax on lodging within the city limits of Glenwood Springs was a wise decision, provided the funds only be used for promoting tourism, and not be part of the general fund or other city budget items.

Currently, the city of Glenwood Springs contracts with the Chamber Resort Association to conduct tourism marketing for the community. In turn, the Chamber created a tourism board in June 2005 to oversee that contract, and to make all decisions regarding tourism-marketing efforts. The tourism board consists of 11 owners or general managers of tourism-related businesses, such as lodging, restaurants, activities and retail. The tourism board, tourism marketing director and City Council work closely together with one ultimate goal: to enhance the economic growth of Glenwood Springs through the advancement of tourism.

The current marketing plan allocates the annual budget of the tourism promotion fund among various promotional efforts, including advertising, public relations, internet marketing, trade shows and special events. In addition, the tourism promotion fund operates the visitor center and helps with downtown beautification projects, such as lighting during the holidays.

The effects of Sept. 11 and the fires in 2002 had a negative impact on tourism in Colorado. However, tourism in Glenwood Springs has been steadily on the rise since 2004, with a significant increase in the lodging tax of 10.5 percent in 2005. For 2006, January through April has shown an increase of 20 percent over last year. Tourism projections for resort towns throughout the state look very good for the remainder of 2006. However, despite promising projections, it's important our community not halt tourism promotion efforts, and risk a similar scenario that the state experienced in the early 1990s, as tourism is integral for Glenwood Springs' sales tax and economic prosperity.

Stephanie Keister is director of tourism marketing for the Glenwood Springs Chamber Resort Association.

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