

"The Big Picture"

German-Russian Country

Wishek 29 June 2010

The situation: Ole & Sven in the hay-hauling business

The answer: not radical change, but incremental improvements that let us be who we are and turn the assets we have to advantage

A new element in the economy and society of the northern plains: heritage tourism, or cultural tourism

An Excess of History

We have become thin on the land

We have more history than we have people

The infrastructure, and the traditions, of history become a burden

Can we convert these burdens into assets?

A New Generation of Travelers

Maturation of baby boomers - it's not about kids anymore. So what is it about?

Real things in real places. Not excitement, but experiencing and appreciating people and things that are real.

Characteristics of the new travelers:

- High disposable income
- Computer and technology literate
- Independence: personal vehicles or at least options
- Where they get their information
 - The Internet
 - Local sources - signage and, especially, native guides
- Love of discovery - off the beaten path is a virtue

Definition of a Destination

Various ways of defining destinations, which may overlap one another: recreational opportunities, scenic wonders, entertainment, and so on - but culture and heritage are viable ways to define a destination area for the long haul

Communities do this (such as Lindsborg), and regions do this (such as Amish country)

Germans from Russia - the most ethnically persistent, the most numerous immigrant culture on the northern plains. Settlement era during the 1880s. The region may be more German-Russian now than it was then, because GfRs persist on the land.

Far from the action? No, this is the center - of a culture region awaiting branding, full of heritage resources awaiting capitalization

The Proposition

1. Define German-Russian Country as a heritage tourism destination

2. Inventory the heritage resources of the region
3. Capitalize these resources, which means two things: figure out how to use them to attract visitors, and figure out how to harvest revenue from the visitors who come
4. Put in place the infrastructure required, both material and human
5. Develop the brand, which involves consciousness-raising at home and promotion abroad
6. Assess, revise, roll with new opportunities

What Might Some of This Look Like?

- A massive and interactive web presence whereby people stumble into or are referred into German-Russian Country
- Signage and interpretation that is pervasive - marked locations, coherent exhibit panels in cultural institutions, consciousness-raising exhibits in commercial locations
- Citizens prepared to welcome and guide travelers, with pride in their cultural resources - librarians, coffee klatchers, bartenders, priests
- German-Russian cuisine available regularly not only for local people but also for the traveling public
- An efflorescence of events and activities drawing drive-in visitors - new generations getting to know the Belzenickel and the Christkindel, learning to research their German-Russian ancestry, learning to cook German-Russian dishes

Desirable Effects

1. Revenue streams, not life-changing perhaps, not get-rich-quick, but the margin that makes community life sustainable
2. Renewal in community and cultural spirit, because this they way to profit is by being who we are and being proud of it

Coming Up

I will return to inventory heritage resources to be capitalized

Now - a report on an initial enterprise that shows the potential public interest in German-Russian Country as a destination

THANKS!