

Softball marketing is a hit

North Mankato partnership with Sports Institute is going well

By Dan Linehan

dlinehan@mankatofreepress.com

MANKATO — The first seven months or so of North Mankato's experimental partnership with a sports firm to market its softball field appears to be going well, the parties report.

The Sports Institute secured three softball tournaments for Caswell Park — one in 2010 and two in 2011 — at a November conference of the American Softball Association in Reno.

The Mankato-based institute, owned by Shane Bowyer, markets North Mankato using room taxes from the city's sole hotel, Best Western. The institute's primary business is developing speed, power and agility in youth athletes but also does events such as the Vikings Training Camp.

Formerly, marketing was provided to the city of North Mankato by the Greater Mankato Convention and Visitors Bureau. But the City Council didn't believe it was getting its money's worth and terminated the agreement.

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Shane Bowyer is head of the Sports Institute.

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Arlene Herzberg, general manager of the Best Western, said the hotel is "very happy" with the new agreement.

Given the difficult economy for hotels all over the region, it's difficult to discern the effects of the marketing, but "we're moving in the right direction."

Tournaments at Caswell benefit the whole area, she said.

In August, North Mankato City Administrator Wendell Sande said the contract broke new ground for the city, calling it "experimental."

Bowyer said the marketing mainly consists of placing bids for tournaments. For larger tournaments, this sometimes consists of a cash payment to the national group.

The best tournaments to get are girls softball, Bowyer said, because studies have shown more family members travel with female players than with adults or boys.

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