

RETAIL & HOSPITALITY

Bureau looking to make civic center

BIGGER & BETTER

Developing area's rich history with Native Americans, Betsy-Tacy Society

By Tim Krohn

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Anna Thill really, really, really wants Brett Favre to come back for another season with the Vikings.

It's not that she's a crazed fan, it's just that it would be real good for the group she runs — Greater Mankato Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"I think we're going to see a boost in the Vikings training camp this summer. They had a great season and all the interest around Brett Favre," Thill said.

"That would be candy having Brett Favre show up. That would be outstanding."

Thill and her staff are responsible for drawing people to Mankato for everything from business conventions to festivals and trying to make sure they have a good time while they're here.

She said the city is well poised to draw those visitors, thanks to the civic center, downtown hotels, a vibrant entertainment district in the city center, the university and other amenities.

The one thing she and other civic leaders are hoping most for is state funding support to build a performing arts center next to the civic center.

"Getting that is huge. We're losing out to a lot of our competitors now."

Thill said those looking for places to hold conventions want more meeting breakout areas and a place to have a larger opening session or guest speaker event — things that would work well in a performing arts center.

The civic center arena can work for some of those bigger sessions, but it is too big for most sessions and there are often conflicts with hockey or other events.

"They've estimated we're losing \$3.7 million in economic impact (annually) because meeting planners say we don't have quite enough breakout-session space." And, she said, a performing arts center would allow for booking more concerts and shows.

The biggest project on the CVB's agenda this year is preparing for Mankato's new fall marathon. A firm to help promote and operate the marathon has been hired and the course for the marathon and a half marathon were set recently. Interest from marathoners has been even stronger than planners had initially hoped.

"The big thing we're all dealing with is the marathon. It's a real highlight — everyone is talking about it," Thill said.

Thill said her goal is to work more closely with groups like the Betsy-Tacy Society, fans of Little House on the Prairie and Native American groups to promote more events.

"There are a lot of things with the Native Americans going on, a rich history.

We'd like to partner with them," Thill said. "The Betsy-Tacy and Little House books, there are people all over the world interested in that. I think there's more we can do there."

Another, longer-term, goal is to create some type of sports commission that could coordinate and put on sports events, from baseball tournaments to bike races.

“ They make money on the events and use it to get more events in the community. I'm hoping, in a few years, to have a fully functioning sports commission here.”



John Cross

Kyle Bohks uses winter to make repairs on the equipment he uses at Minneopa Golf Course. Please see story on Page [C2](#).



John Cross

Doug and Pam DeMarce, in the smaller of two bowling areas in the WOW! Zone, opened their ambitious family entertainment center just as the nation's economy was hitting the bottom of the worst recession since the 1930s. Please see story on Page [C5](#).



John Cross

Anna Thill leads the Greater Mankato Convention & Visitors Bureau, working to attract conventions, meetings, sporting events and tourism.

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