

Tourism group sets 'ambitious' promotion goal

By Sam Martino
Special to The Reporter

The head of the Janesville Visitors and Convention Bureau outlined an "ambitious" plan for promoting the Edgerton Tourism Area at a meeting April 20, including a blitz of information on social media, facebook and twitter.

Christine Rebout, director of the Janesville tourism entity, presented a series of campaigns to grow awareness and drive visitors to the area during the upcoming tourism season at a meeting with the Edgerton Area Tourism Commission.

Rebout has \$20,000 to use from 5 percent room tax money collected a year ago from motels in Albion, Fulton and Edgerton to kick off the campaign.

The commission has entered into a three year contract with the Janesville Visitors and Convention Bureau this year and openings for two, one-year extensions.

Future collections from the room tax would help expand the promotion effort.

Rebout said the initial goal for promoting the Edgerton area would be to boost the area's golf, boating and lake attractions, as well as such special events as Tobacco Heritage Days, Chilimania and Threshere.

Northern Illinois and Chicago area residents would be targeted mostly through promotion flyers and inserts in Northern Illinois newspapers promoting summer activities, events and attractions, Rebout said.

"I'm sure you see a lot of Illinois tourists that come over I 39/90," she said.

While their destinations may be the Wisconsin Dells and cabins in the north, Edgerton can "piggy back" on their trips, Rebout added.

An inventory of events and activities will be compiled, Rebout said, "of all things people want to come and see and spend their money."

Casey Langan, vice chairman of the committee, who initiated inviting Rebout to present a plan for boosting the Edgerton area, said he was concerned that promotions include overnight stays.

He said the motel tax from the three motels in the area is the financial source of funds to drive the tourism project.

Langan also said it was important to promote all four seasons and all events rather than just concentrating on one period.

Rebout also proposed a "fun giveaway" and sweepstakes prize to include an overnight stay for two in a Edgerton hotel.

She said travelers along the I 39/90 corridor would be asked through a communication campaign on their cell phones to receive messages about the Edgerton area.

They would be encouraged to pull off the interstate to visit or consider visiting the area.

Rebout also said Midwest Golfing Magazine, the weather channel, a newspaper insert aimed at Illinois residents along the border and a promotion flyer were among the items discussed for outreach.

A promotional flyer would be displayed at the Beloit Travel Information center on the Wisconsin-Illinois border.

Recalling Florence E. Child, noted Edgertonian

By Ruth Anderson
Special to The Reporter

To whom much is given, much is expected. Florence E. Child was raised to appreciate hard work, honesty and the New England approach to education. Her father, William Wallace Child, was New England bred and her mother's father, Samuel Harrison, was educated at Oxford University in England. It was New England's way to educate every child in a community regardless of wealth or family position.

Through her father's integrity and hard work, Florence had the means and the inclination to make a difference in her community through philanthropy. The Capital Times reported, "In August 1884, W.W. Child & Son had in their Edgerton warehouse 100,000 pounds of wool — the largest amount ever held at one time in that town." It was from the profits of this wool business that Miss Child was able to underwrite the new high school. The Child family's wealth was not just on the backs of sheep. Her father first achieved prominence as a tobacco dealer and packer. He built the first tobacco warehouse in Edgerton and in 1884, added a prominent three-story structure.

Florence supported Edgerton projects that promoted access to education. In 1905, Florence and her brother



The former Child High School as it currently stands in Edgerton.

Photo By Katie Whitten

Harold W. Child supported the new library with a \$3,500 gift.

Florence is remembered for her 'magnificent gift to the city of Edgerton.' On March 5, 1909, The Wisconsin Tobacco Reporter related, "The Edgerton high school and the 8th grade took possession of the beautiful new school building on Monday, which has just been completed, through the generosity of Miss Florence Child." The nearly fireproof Child High School claimed 23 rooms, including domestic science and manual training departments and a gymnasium with an 18-

foot tall ceiling.

Florence continued to share. On October 4, 1921, the Wisconsin State Journal reported the Fulton Lodge 69, Free and Accepted Mason's temple received a generous \$10,000 donation from Miss Florence Child, daughter of Postmaster W.W. Child. Her father had served his lodge in numerous chairs in the line and achieved that of worshipful master in 1879.

Florence was active socially in the Progressive Club and hosted numerous guests at her elegant home on Albion Street. Edgerton lost this generous lady on July 16th, 1929.



FLORENCE E. CHILD

Photo courtesy of Edgerton Public Library

SILVERWOOD PARK

so much fun, he said, that she decided to bring the whole family down from Stoughton this year.

Three years running

This is the third year the mushroom workshops have been held at Silverwood Park, said Katie Whitten, vice-president of the Friends of Silverwood Park.

"The first year we did it we had like 150 people in here—it was nuts," Whitten said. "When COVID hit, we wanted to do it, and two groups or families came in at a time. And it just worked so much better. It wasn't so hectic, so we're going to continue to do it this way."

What do logs have to do with mushrooms? Mushrooms grow on logs. Tom Northey, one of the park's volunteers, explained it all to me above the whine of the electric drill and the knocking of the hammers.

In the wild, wind-borne mushroom spores land on fallen logs and enter the wood through wounds in the bark, say where a branch has snapped off in a storm or where a woodpecker's been working. Each spore begins to grow outward, reaching toward the extending growth of its sister spores.

The spores eventually form a network, sealing the ends of the log to keep other organisms out and moisture in, and monopolizing the nutrients stored in the wood. The process is called colonization, Northey said.

"They'll take over the whole log, and when that happens, that's when you start getting your mushrooms."

Northey, who lives outside Cambridge, has been growing his own mushrooms for 20 years. It all began when his sister gave him a gift package from Field and Forest Products, a company in Peshtigo that sells mushroom farming supplies. There was

only one ingredient missing from that gift package, Northey said: patience.

"You gotta wait a year—that's a big problem. So, you do the work and then you forget about it and then all of a sudden you've got mushrooms."

Mushroom man

Northey's passion for fungiculture, the technical name for mushroom farming, is infectious.

When I first walked up to him, Northey was plucking homegrown shiitake mushrooms out of a wide-brimmed camouflaged hat. Each mushroom was the size and color of a well-done quarter-pounder hot off the grill. Some were marked with whorls and flecks that called to mind certain psychedelic album covers from the Sixties.

"They never look like this in the store," Northey said. "Never as ornate or pretty."

In the workshops, the inoculants—two-inch wooden plugs immersed in mushroom spawn, the moist material that adult mushrooms give off—took the place of the spores. The holes drilled in the logs took the place of the scars and scrapes found on fallen logs in the wild.

The spawn is grown in petri dishes in the Field and Forest Products lab. The spawn is genetically engineered to produce the type of shiitake prized by mushroom lovers, Northey said.

"This is actually cloning. We know what we like and we like it a lot, and we're propagating it and transplanting it so we know we'll get a consistent product."

Different types of mushrooms prefer different types of wood, Northey said. For instance, shiitakes grow best in red oak. All of the red oak logs used in the workshops came from trees felled inside the park. The age and quality of the wood makes a difference too.

"Greenwood harvested during the dor-

mant season is best," Northey said. "We cut in the wintertime—you minimize doing damage to the forest floor. And the tree is dormant, so it's stored its energy in the branches."

Back to the soil

Once a log has been pounded full of inoculants, each inoculant is sealed with a dollop of hot wax. The wax protects the inoculants from hungry bugs and animals.

Dan Cunningham, from Edgerton, was manning the wax station on the day I visited the park. He stood next to a cardboard box wrapped in clear plastic and being used as a table. On top of the box was a crock pot full of gooey paraffin.

Cunningham said he'd come out to the park after he read about the workshops on Facebook and decided it looked like fun.

"I'm the only one in the family that likes mushrooms, so they make me grow my own, I guess," Cunningham said with a chuckle.

Another volunteer from Edgerton, Joe Moskal, said that the workshop offered children a chance to learn what it was like to grow their own food. It also pushed them beyond their comfort zone, Moskal said, and that was a good thing.

"For me, it's nice to see people working together—kids getting an opportunity to do something probably totally outside of their experience," Moskal said. "It's a good way to learn, not only about nature, but a little about skills like hammering or using the electric drill."

More importantly, said Moskal, the workshops gave participants a chance to unplug from the digital detritus of daily life and plug into the earth.

"There's something about participating in the natural world that we don't get enough of, and this is just a tiny way to get a little bit more of it."



Building Main Street, not Wall Street

Perfect is the enemy of great!

By John A. Newby

Paul Arden summed it up best when he said, "Too many people spend too much time trying to perfect something before they actually do it. Instead of waiting for perfection, run with what you have, and fix it along the way."

Over the past few weeks, we have discussed change, we have discussed how best to achieve transformation as well as how we must be willing to move quickly and decisively to enact change and transformation. An additional element that often hinders change and transformation is the expectation of perfection. When communities, businesses and media companies embark on change, especially unknown change, they tend to measure their success based on perfection or how well they do as it relates to the original goals. Even worse, many get caught in the trap of seeking perfection and ignoring the greatness that has or is occurring right before them.

One of the greatest attributes of transformation leadership is understanding nearly every worthwhile transformation will involve pivots in new directions deviating from the original plans. Transformational leadership is truly an art.

Transformational leadership is the art of understanding when to pivot, how to pivot, where to pivot and finally, when to do it again. Time and time again, I have seen where communities and businesses have become bogged down in attempting to create the perfect model or execute the perfect plan. While we might give them an A+ for sticking to the script, they ultimately fail because they are unwilling to adjust the script. As they say, a great sailor can sail their boat in all sorts of winds by simply adjusting their sails.

A great example of being willing to adjust your sails might be Brian Chesky and Joe Gebbia. Back in 2007, they rented out air mattresses in San Francisco to conference attendees due to lack of available hotel rooms for a nearby conference. They appropriately called their business Air Bed and Breakfast. However, it wasn't very long before they realized unless there were conferences in the area, their business model wasn't sustainable. They were forced to rethink their entire business model. They made what proved to be a monumental pivot and took the concept nationwide for all travelers regardless of their circumstances. It turns out that pivot is worth about \$50 billion today and growing. Had they stuck with the original plan, they may well have given up, and AirBNB may not exist today.

I have seen entire industries, communities and businesses racked with the inability to pivot when pivoting was crucial. Group think as an industry or community can lead to the demise of entire industries and even communities.

Group think assures the group will rarely innovate or make the changes required to survive. As we have mentioned, leadership is very crucial when it comes to change and transformation. One must be able to convince others of the need to alter course and must be able to provide and instill confidence in the entire team to affect the most viable change or alterations. When the team has faith in the transformational leadership skills of their leaders, there is little that can stop the team from achieving greatness regardless of the obstacles getting in the way.

Those leaders and individuals with the ability to build community and business dreams are rare. When a community or business comes across these rare individuals, they must not hesitate to empower them and support them. Every community and business achieving greatness has done so because a dreamer believed in what that community or business could become. They have achieved their greatness behind a person or leader willing to take a chance. They have done so behind a person willing to accept greatness in lieu of any initial perfection. They have done so because they embraced what could be and did not settle for the current status-quo.

We will close this column by bringing together the message of many columns. The message of change and transformation must be coupled with communication and aggressive action. But all of it will be for naught if we only focus on perfection in lieu of accepting greatness at the beginning. Achieving greatness as a community or a business will come to those harnessing the power of change, communication, teamwork, innovation and the joy of transformation. But above all, don't let perfect be the enemy of great!

John A. Newby, author of the "Building Main Street, Not Wall Street" column dedicated to helping communities combine synergies with local media companies allowing them to not just survive, but thrive in a world where Truly Local is lost to Amazon, Wall Street chains and others. His email is: john@360MediaAlliance.net.

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