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CUSTER COUNTRY

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E-Newsletter October 2008

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Review & Trip Planner



CUSTER COUNTRY IN FOCUS
WORLD CHAMPIONS TO HEADLINE PRCA RODEO

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JIM GOES TO WASHINGTON

Despite the possibility that I could have started an international incident, I was pleased to be included in a delegation of representatives from the Montana tourism industry who attended the Travel Industry Association's (TIA) Leadership Conference in Washington, D.C. recently. Others who attended were: Betsy Baumgart, Administrator of the Promotion Division of the Montana Department of Commerce; John Brewer of the Billings Chamber and CVB; Robin Hoover, Executive Director of Yellowstone Country; Barb Reiter, President of Gold West Country; Cyndy Andrus, Executive Director of the Bozeman CVB and a member of Montana's Tourism Advisory Council; and Racene Friede, Executive Director of Glacier Country.



*Custer Country
Executive Director
Jim Schaefer*

Story and photos courtesy of Northern International Livestock Exposition

The NILE PRCA Rodeo will once again be produced by the great stock contracting company, Sankey ProRodeo. Ike Sankey and his family have been in the rodeo business for 30 years, from both the competitive and production sides of the arena. They are noted for having one of the best rodeo stock breeding programs in the business. Some of their more notable bucking horses include Broadway, Surprise Party, Wild Card, William and Skitso. Wild Card, Skitso and Surprise Party have all held the title of World Champion, with the grey mare Skitso having claimed it twice.

The NILE Rodeo is one of the last big rodeos before the National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas, Nevada. The top cowboys and cowgirls will be on hand as they get their last practices in before the Finals.

To add to the thrills watching the rough stock, tough cowboys and fast cowgirls, this year's rodeo will feature the talents of the 8-time PRCA Specialty Act Of The Year, "The One Armed Bandit." John Payne and his crew of wild and wooly animals will dazzle the crowd with unbelievable stunts that require man and beast to completely trust one another.

There will be four performances of the PRCA Rodeo: October 15th, 16th, 17th and 18th. Make sure to wear pink for Friday night's performance as the NILE pays tribute to breast cancer survivors and to those who have lost the battle, during the Tough Enough To Wear Pink performance. Tickets for all the performances are available by contacting the MetraPark Box Office, 1-800-366-8538 or 406-256-2422.

For more information please contact

Address : PO Box 1981, Billings, MT 59103

Tel : 406-256-2495

Fax : 406-256-2494

website : www.thenile.org

Our mission was to meet and discuss national and international issues of concern to the travel industry, including: over-snow use of Yellowstone Park; National Park Funding; fee structures at certain Federal properties; rail service in northern and southern Montana; the importance of safe, secure but also efficient and friendly entry systems for our international residents wishing to visit America and Montana; passage of the Travel Promotions Act and other issues, including the effects on tourism of the current financial crisis.

It was a busy time in Washington, not only because Congress was scheduled to adjourn right after we were there, but more so due to the so-called "bail out" of Wall Street. Despite everything that was going on, we were gratified to have a few minutes of face time with both Senators Max Baucus and Jon Tester and with Representative Denny Rehberg. We found all three of them to be acutely aware of the economic importance of tourism to Montana and America.

The main thrust of the TIA conference was passage of the Tourism Promotions Act (TPA), which would provide funding for promotion of travel to America by foreign tourists who are eager to visit our country and our state, but who sometimes find the requirements for obtaining permission to enter the country cumbersome and time-consuming (up to three months in many cases). If there is an upside to the weakening of the U.S dollar, it is that it is very affordable for foreign travelers to visit the U. S. Considering that travel is up world-wide, but down 12% in the U.S, it's important that we make it easier for visitors from Asia and Europe to come here. When you consider that each visitor spends \$4000 per person per trip while they're here and that Custer Country and Montana offer them the types of travel they are looking for, it's easy to see that we are getting substantial economic benefits when they visit. We found that all three Congressional delegates were amenable to our request for passage of the bills in their respective houses, and were hopeful that differences in the two bills could be worked out for quick passage. One important provision of the TPA's passage would be the ability of the U.S. travel industry to work on improving the image of America as a place that's not only unique and economical to visit, but also friendly and open to visitors. Studies have shown that foreign visitors overwhelmingly go home and talk about the great people and places they encountered during their visit. The attractiveness of the TPA is that it wouldn't cost the U.S. taxpayer anything because any dollars spent on promoting travel in the world would be returned several-fold.

Everyone in the Montana delegation was pleased that Representative Rehberg and Senators Tester and Baucus were so well-versed on travel issues and that their staffs were very willing to do whatever they could to help us promote more national and international travel to Montana.

Baumgart said, "I'm really pleased with the trip. I believe we made an impression on our Congressional delegates and their staffs. I don't know that Montana's travel industry was able to

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discuss important issues with them until we started making a personal visit.” This is the third time some of the participants had visited D.C. in such a capacity, but Baumgart believes it’s important to continue the efforts to make Montana one of the top vacation destinations in America and the world.

From a personal standpoint, I can also say that I was glad not to have been arrested for attempting to take a picture of the Pentagon and will never forget my brief, unintentional foray into a neighborhood that taught me that basketball is a “blood sport” some places. I also was humbled and moved by my much-too-brief visit to the American Holocaust Museum. Overall, it was a very educational and meaningful trip and I hope to get the opportunity to go again. I appreciate Custer Country’s marketing committee giving me permission to go.