

## OUR VIEW

# REGIONAL COOPERATION MAKES SENSE IN SPORTS EVENTS

A recent report on the Mankato region's efforts to attract sports tournaments should raise a red flag to community leaders that all is not well in this regard.

The report showed the region has a number of assets that help draw tournaments, but also may be hampered by the lack of cooperation between regional partners. That lack of cooperation can result in difficulty in scheduling tournaments, conflicts and generally bad public relations that could hurt the region's brand as a tourist destination.

The Greater Mankato Convention and Visitors Bureau hired consultants Event Partners Inc. to analyze the assets of the region for attracting sports tournaments.

The group determined the positives included good facilities, central location, solid population base and general interest in sports, and adequate tourism infrastructure like hotels.

On the negative side, the consultants pointed out that Mankato and North Mankato have separate marketing efforts on securing tournaments, with North Mankato focusing on its facilities. The region, according to the consultants, may be losing ground to other regions like Rochester who have strong facilities and strong marketing arms to promote those facilities.

North Mankato pulled its participation and support of the Greater Mankato CVB when its leaders felt they were not getting adequate representation for their interests. They've set up their own marketing program and are funding it with receipts from the lodging tax on North Mankato hotels only.

Of course, it seems that regional tourism would be best served by having one, unified marketing voice. But that isn't happening, and the political realities do not seem to be suggesting otherwise, unless there is a change in leadership after this year's elections.

In the meantime, we hope that North Mankato can see the benefits of the CVB acting on their behalf when potential tournaments call and North Mankato facilities are offered as one of many options. This courtesy on the part of the CVB is exceptional and appreciated by the community as a whole. One would hope North Mankato is offering its contacts the same courtesy when it comes to providing a list of options for potential clients.

If North Mankato begins to compete in ways that are unfairly detrimental to Mankato, one would be hardpressed to blame Mankato for developing competing sites.

And while competition may be great to bring about the best customer service in private business, competing to build duplicative services or facilities with taxpayer money would not serve the same customer well.

At the same time, as the cities compete against each other, the region as a whole may lose business to other cities that have their act together, that have a unified sports commission, as in the case of Rochester.

Finally, there's a bigger picture to be considered.

Mankato and North Mankato clearly have assets for hosting sports tournaments, but leaders of the tourism effort should consider a larger "brand" for the region that not only capitalizes on our enthusiasm for sports but also the outdoor activities like biking, hiking, skiing and snowshoeing as well as canoeing and rafting on our many rivers.

We hope the attitude on tourism can be: When one city wins, we all win.

Why it matters

The Mankato region risks losing tourism dollars with a fractured marketing effort.

