



Wednesday
March 10, 2004
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Knight stands to lose \$1 million a year if buyer interest wanes in Martha Stewart's popular Everyday line, sold exclusively at the chain. 10B

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Giving visitors a dose of feel-good



HERSCHELD FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT

The roller coaster at Celebration City is among the attractions promoters hope will bring tourists to Branson.

Branson's family-friendly atmosphere is a key selling point, marketer says.

By Kathryn Buckstaff
NEWS-LEADER

BRANSON — Growing national attention on wholesome entertainment offers Branson a chance to strut its stuff, says a marketing specialist.

The city has a product that can't be found anywhere else in the country, and it's especially attractive in the current climate, said Tom Kalahar, president of Camelot Communications. The Dallas media buyer — whose customers include Southwest Airlines — has been contracted by the Branson/Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce to find the best rates for Branson's ads.

"There's a feel in the air, a sense of people who are friendly and caring here," Kalahar told a rapt audience of about 100 people attending Tuesday's annual chamber marketing meeting.

"People now want to be invited into that kind of atmosphere," Kalahar said. "This is the emotional fabric around which we should place all our products."

While business was down last year in many tourism destinations, because of the Iraq war and severe winter weather, Branson officials were grateful the city's revenue here saw a 1.4 percent gain. But statistics also show Branson needs new customers to replace an older generation no

See **Branson**, Page 9B

Public forums held to explain financial straits

Deliver schools pushing

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Far fewer visitors are first-timers now

BRANSON, from Page 1B

longer traveling, said Jerry Henry, director of research for Herschend Family Entertainment Corp.

In 1993, half of visitors to Branson were first-timers, Henry said. Last year, that was down to 21 percent. The average age of Branson visitors is now 57. The target is people ages 35 to 54.

Marketing must focus on people who like live entertainment and outdoor activities and are within a convenient drive of Branson — from Chicago to Dallas, Kalahar said. The Christmas season draws the highest proportion of first-time visitors.

"You just can't go other places and get the experience you have here at Christmas," Kalahar said. "You can't get it in Dallas, but we don't tell anyone in Dallas about it."

This year's TV ads already running in several cable markets are geared for young families.

The ad shows a thirtysomething mom and dad with a son and daughter. Dad says that the family's doctor diagnosed spring fever and recommended Branson as the cure.

"He said, 'Take in some shows, hike a trail, hit the shops, catch a fish, ride a duck, horse around and have a blast,'" the dad says. Up-tempo music backs quick shots of attractions and natural beauty.

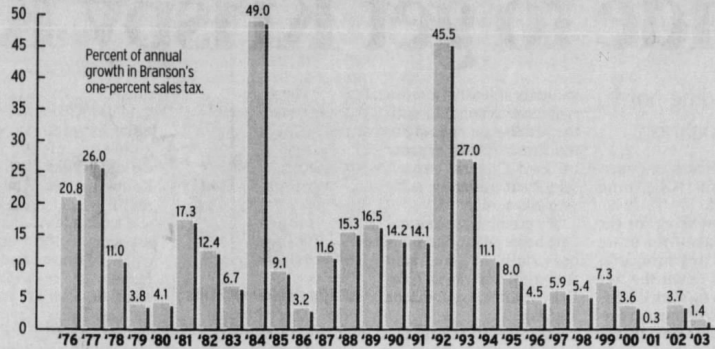
"We feel better in Branson," the family says at the end.

Local business owners say they're seeing signs of a good season. And they've invested in that prospect.

"We've already been real busy this year," said Frank Hirahara, owner of Gaar's Gas, Goodies

Branson sales tax growth

Branson's one-percent sales tax revenue grew only 1.4 percent in 2003, the second lowest since 1976. Still, city officials and business leaders were pleased with the positive number, noting other tourism destinations fared worse.



SOURCE: HERSCHEID FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT CORP.'S RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

NEWS-LEADER

and Groceries on Missouri 76. The Forsyth native who spent many years raising produce in northern California returned to Branson in 1993 and leased the store. He and his wife bought the business in December. Their sons Kyle, 19, and Frank Jr., 23, also work at the store.

This winter, they had new gasoline storage tanks installed, added diesel fuel and expanded the store. Frank Hirahara said he thinks gasoline prices may rise to \$2 a gallon, but tourists will still come.

"People have to travel," he said. "We've been getting away with cheap gas for a long time."

At the Grand Palace, calls about "Magic & Beyond" starring Brett Daniels "have surpassed my expectations," said Scott Hall of Sincor Entertainment, owner of the 4,000-seat theater.

Daniels — voted "Magician of

the Year" last year in Las Vegas — arrived with five semi-trucks of equipment for the show that runs through Oct. 31.

The Grand Palace also has booked concerts from rock bands to country stars, including Jars of Clay, Kenny Rogers and Bob Newhart.

"Sincor Entertainment has always been looking ahead at non-traditional entertainment for this marketplace," Hall said.

At Celebration City, Herschend Family Entertainment Corp. spent more than \$800,000 on new rides for its year-old amusement park. The Chaos puts riders in cars suspended on a platform twirling and tilting at a 60-degree angle. On the Flying Circus, riders control the climb or dive of circus-themed gondolas swinging 80 feet above the ground.

In its first year, the park

reached the goal of attracting 500,000 people, including new visitors and families, said spokeswoman Lisa Rau.

Traditional values are still strong in the country, she said and Branson offers a destination that responds to those.

"Events culminating in what happened at the Super Bowl pushed America to a tipping point, and they said, 'Enough!'" Rau said. "Now there's a new wave of excitement with not only our visitors but our community respecting the true value of Branson. This just helps us celebrate who we really are."

Contact Kathryn Buckstaff at kbuckstaff@springfi.gannett.com.

Branson Today

Showtimes
Fridays in Weekend.

NEWS-LEADER

Volunteers sought for vaccine trial

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ST. LOUIS — Researchers at Saint Louis University are seeking 90 volunteers for a trial for a potential new smallpox vaccine.

Two investigational vaccines

factured by Massachusetts-based Acambis Inc. and will be compared with the existing smallpox vaccine, known as Dryvax.

The Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist at-

"Although there has not been a case of smallpox in the United States since 1949, the U.S. government has determined that it is necessary to keep smallpox vaccine available in

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