

Burnsville bureau gets word out to vacationers

Attractions cited as lure to tourists

By David Chanen
Staff Writer

During the past year, thousands of people from the Midwest have been sent information about an unusual place to take their next vacation. It's not the Bahamas or Europe, but Burnsville.

Yes, Burnsville — as in Minnesota.

With the creation of the Burnsville Convention and Tourism Bureau in 1987, people from Des Moines, Iowa, to Eau Claire, Wis., have been offered information about Burnsville and its attractions.

"Before the existence of the bureau, Burnsville wasn't getting a lot of exposure outside the Twin Cities area," said Carrie Kruse, executive director of the bureau. "The reaction has been tremendous."

The bureau was developed in response to increased requests from various groups for information about Burnsville's lodging and special attractions.

"When we started the bureau, we had to ask ourselves the legitimate question of what we had to work with in Burnsville," said Rick Hemmingsen, president of the Burnsville chamber of commerce.

Bureau members decided a key marketing strategy would be to promote Burnsville as a city "Just Close Enough," meaning it's only 20 minutes from downtown Minneapolis and near places such as Valleyfair, Canterbury Downs and the Minnesota Zoo.

"Burnsville's location is great. There is easy access by freeway, free parking at shopping centers," said Hemmingsen.

The next step for the bureau was to reach its targeted visitors' market, which members felt was the Upper Midwest states. Travel packets about Burnsville were sent to 150,000 people in southern Minnesota, a toll-free Burnsville hotline was set up, ads were placed in newspapers and magazines and a 23-page visitors' guide was published.

Has all the publicity paid off? Burnsville will be the site of the 100-team Minnesota Jaycee Softball Tournament at the end of the month and the Minnesota Star of the North Games next year.

"Although the city itself has some tourist draws like Buck Hill, Beaver Mountain Waterslide and Burnsville

Burnsville continued on page 10Y

Burnsville

Continued from page 1Y

Shopping Center which help get conventions and events, we still want to attract day travelers and families," said Hemmingsen.

Burnsville is one of several cities to develop a convention and tourism bureau since a state law was changed in 1983, allowing individual communities to levy a tax to help support tourism bureaus under home rule.

With the approval of the seven hotels and the City Council, a 3 percent tax is charged by area hotels. The money raised is designated as the bureau's budget.

"It's instrumental that all the hotels were behind the bureau," said Hemmingsen. "They seemed pleased with their decision."

Kruse said the Burnsville bureau has remained competitive with those of other cities and recently hired an assistant. She said the bureau has plans to develop group tours and coordinate a regional package with other cities in the Burnsville area.

"Like everybody else, we are pulling for a piece of the pie," said Kruse.