



# NEWS

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## **SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN TOURISM GETS BOOST WITH NEW ONLINE PROGRAM**

ST. JOSEPH, MICH. — Tourism in southwest Michigan got a boost when area promoters united behind a novel online program to increase their visibility and draw more people to visit.

Marketing firm Perry Ballard Incorporated (PBI), working with several area attractions, created the Tourist Invitation Program (TIP). The program places ad space on all member Web sites and allows members to create their own ads 24 hours a day with no Web knowledge necessary. But instead of the ads appearing only on their own sites, the ads appear on all of the members' sites throughout the program. That way, when a visitor views a member site, he or she will discover other activities — under the header “While You’re Here” — that other members are offering. Also, members get a large volume of visitor data so they can track traffic to the sites since the network constitutes one of the largest data pools of online viewing behavior for tourism in southwest Michigan.

TIP members include the Southwestern Michigan Tourist Council ([www.swmichigan.org](http://www.swmichigan.org)), Silver Beach Carousel Society ([www.silverbeachcarousel.com](http://www.silverbeachcarousel.com)), Krasl Art Center ([www.krasl.org](http://www.krasl.org)), Curious Kids' Museum ([www.curiouskidsmuseum.org](http://www.curiouskidsmuseum.org)), Maud Preston Palenske Memorial Library ([www.youseemore.com/maudpreston](http://www.youseemore.com/maudpreston)), Box Factory for the Arts ([www.boxfactoryforthearts.org](http://www.boxfactoryforthearts.org)), Sarett Nature Center ([www.sarett.com](http://www.sarett.com)) and Heritage Museum and Cultural Center ([www.theheritagemcc.org](http://www.theheritagemcc.org)). Several members were already discussing coordinating their marketing efforts when PBI approached them with the idea of the program.

“Our concept was to give tourists more reasons to visit our area by exposing them to more things to do than just what they would see on any one site,” said PBI President Gary Tipton.

Members can promote events, offer coupons or advertise whatever they choose. As new members are added, the number of ads displayed will increase exponentially, giving members an economical way to gain even greater exposure. And with access to a greater volume of visitor data from all the sites, members can learn more about visitors — geography, search terms used, sites visitors viewed before a member's site — to help them make better marketing decisions.

“With print marketing and materials declining, and with people now researching their trips online, this Internet program provides us a great advantage,” said Millicent Huminsky, executive director of the Southwestern Michigan Tourist Council.

Tipton said PBI believes tourism will become more important for the area given the overall decline of Michigan's manufacturing economy. "Businesses that don't embrace that idea will get left behind by the ones that do," he said.

The program is open to any tourism-related business in southwest Michigan. Those interested in participating should call PBI's Jill Stone at (269) 983-0611 or visit [www.perryballard.com/tip](http://www.perryballard.com/tip).

Perry Ballard Incorporated provides strategic marketing and communication services and is a member of the American Association of Advertising Agencies. For information about Web site analytics, optimization, design or production services, call PBI at 1-800-800-9547 or visit [www.perryballard.com](http://www.perryballard.com).

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