

Devils Lake adapts, great visitor experiences await

The community of Devils Lake and its area attractions know well that flooding lake waters have created major challenges, dislocations and disruptions. The residents and leaders in this area have not let these burdens stop them from adapting, building and promoting their community as a wonderful place to visit and enjoy.

With a lot of new access points in place, the renowned fishing waters of Devils Lake are once again welcoming summer anglers. In addition, the Devils Lake nature attractions and retailers have plenty of new and familiar sources of enjoyment for visitors.

Suzie Kenner, executive director of the Devils Lake Convention & Visitors Bureau, wants the traveling public to know her community's attractions are ready to serve.

"We are open," Kenner says. "We are a great fishery. We are a great place for you to bring your family. There are places to stay, things to do. We have a thriving downtown community with new retail establishments opening monthly and a lot of great restaurants and steak eateries. If you've not been here in a while, you want to come back."

Fishing update

Long-respected as the largest natural body of water in North Dakota – and one of the nation's leading fisheries – too much water in recent years has hurt Devils Lake's ability to provide great fishing. Kenner says recent improvements in access and fish processing are sure to help restore quality fishing experiences.

Regarding access, Kenner says boat ramping has been

reestablished. "North Dakota Game and Fish rebuilt all of our boat ramps and put in two new boat ramps. As soon as we can get the docks in and the ice is off the water, all of our lake access points will be open this year," Kenner says. She also says N.D. Game and Fish has approved, and the community is working on a new four-seasons fish cleaning station.

Nature viewing

Kenner says a multipurpose amphitheater is a new addition to the Sully's Hill National Game Preserve. Sully's Hill, south of Devils Lake, continues to provide an abundant variety of wildlife and natural terrain for visitors to experience. Managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sully's Hill Preserve is named after General Alfred

Sully who led an expedition to the south shore of Devils Lake in 1865. It is one of the nation's 500 national wildlife refuges.

Sully's Hill is managed as a refuge and breeding ground for birds and other wildlife as well as a big game preserve. Also, Kenner says guided kayaking is now available in a small bay nearby.

Overnighting

While camping at Grahams Island State Park has been hampered in recent years because of the submerged access roads, road construction improvements are fixing this, according to Kenner. "That road should be high enough and done by the middle of the summer, weather-permitting," she says. This dependable access means that the state park will be able to resume



Fishing creates legendary moments in North Dakota.

PHOTOS COURTESY DEVILS LAKE CVB

taking reservations. More than 200 camping spots – including 50 new – will be awaiting campers.

"Our motel situation is good," Kenner adds. She says fishing visitation and road construction crews put pressure on available rooms early in the summer, but calling motels ahead of time should result in lodging.

Roads, rails, jets

The Devils Lake region is, of necessity, experiencing heavy road construction, which is a fact of life in all major North Dakota communities during the summertime. Though slowed by construction, Devils Lake visitors should take the time to soak up some of the state's best natural viewing. "You might be stuck in a little bit of road construction, but just look around you. It's truly breathtaking, being able to look at the lake," Kenner says.

National travel to and from Devils Lake has been stabilized, Kenner adds. Great Lakes Aviation, through Delta Airlines bookings,



The Devils Run Car Show draws car enthusiasts.

now operates two flights daily for Devils Lake. Amtrak passes through Devils Lake daily and Kenner says Amtrak's plans for railway improvements demonstrate a long-term commitment to this route.

For information on visiting the Devils Lake region – and to learn about this summer's Devils Run and fishing festival – go to www.devilslakend.com. ■

Plan Fort Totten, Creel Bay golf

North Dakota history and scenic golfing are also Devils Lake region attractions.

Fort Totten State Historic Site offers a unique opportunity to go back in time. Step into the new interpretive center and choose one of four historic characters and reenact a day from the 19th or 20th century. Whether a newly enlisted soldier, a young Chippewa girl, or a boarding school teacher, you'll play the part as you tour the fort's grounds and discover what life was like for the tribes who settled here.

The historic site is located on the southeastern edge of Fort Totten. It was originally set up by the military to provide protection for American Indians, and later became an Indian boarding school until 1959. It gained historic site status the following year.

The site is home to 16 original buildings renovated for tourists. The Pioneer Daughters Museum displays uniforms and artifacts from officers stationed at the

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Devils Lake waterways are very accessible.

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military post from 1867 to 1890. This month, the site will feature an Abraham Lincoln exhibit highlighting his legislation that impacted the northern Dakota Territory.

The Totten Trail Historic Inn is a Victorian bed and breakfast on the property featuring 10 rooms. There is also the Fort Totten Little Theatre where local actors perform a production on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays in July. This summer's production is "The Wizard of Oz." Due to construction at the theater property, performances will be held at Lake Region State College in Devils Lake. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the theater, so a reunion is scheduled for theater alums on July 28.

Site Supervisor Nick Gronseth said the historic site welcomes numerous bus tours, including schools groups who come for their education field day in May and an annual Living History Day in September. Gronseth joined site staff in December and seeks to offer attractions to draw additional and repeat tourists to the area.

Creel Bay Golf Course

Local flood conditions have provided an opportunity for Devils Lake's Creel Bay Golf Course

to improve itself. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' levee project sacrificed some course property but also provided funds for the golf course to start construction on a new clubhouse and four new holes.

Established in the early 1900s, the golf course is located south of Devils Lake on Country Club Road. Originally a nine-hole course, it expanded to 18 holes in the mid-1990s. Since the course is currently in the midst of construction, it is restricted to nine holes for 2012. It is a unique course with numerous tree-lined holes, but features flat terrain and only a few water hazards. But the additional four holes expected to be completed in 2013, will require golfers to contend with some open water. Upon completion, it will be a par 72, 6,500-yard, 18-hole course.

The golf season typically runs from April 1 to mid-November, but General Manager Ryan Otto said weather conditions this year allowed for a mid-March start. Creel Bay Golf Course expects completion of the clubhouse in May. It will include a pro shop with apparel and other related merchandise, and food and beverage service.

Otto returned to his hometown a year ago to manage the golf course after earning a degree in



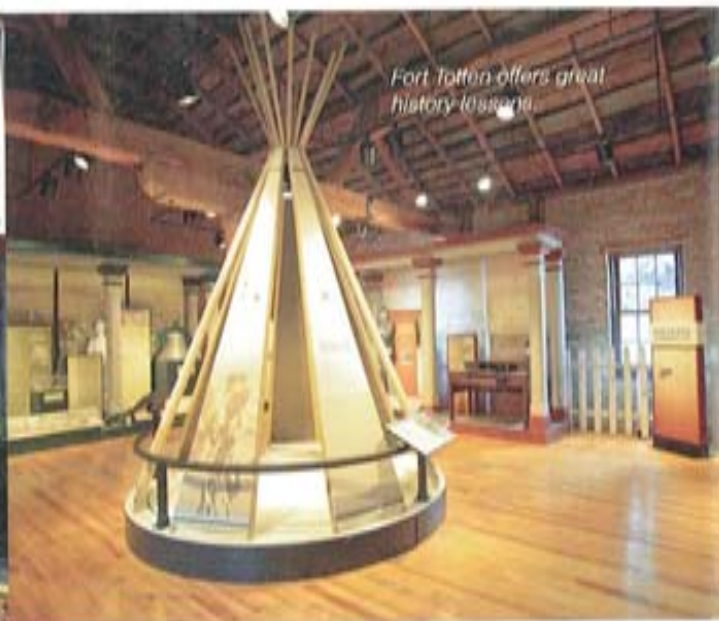
Creel Bay Golf Course is undergoing improvements.

sports and urban turf grass management at North Dakota State University. He worked in the turf business for six years.

"We've lost some trees and we've had some drainage issues," Otto said, referencing the area's rising water and water tables. But Otto said the greens are in great shape and the course is a good fit for beginners and advanced golfers. Tree-lined holes are challenging yet forgiving, so those just starting out don't struggle too much.

For more information, go to www.golfdevilslake.com. ■

Maxine Herr is a freelance writer from Bismarck. She formerly worked as a news reporter and marketing professional.



Fort Totten offers great history lessons.