

CONTACT INFORMATION

Jed Wagner / Executive Director
Nemaha County Development Alliance (NCDA)
Phone/fax: (402) 274-3985
Email: NCDA@alltel.net

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Three Pages

**Nemaha County Receives Outstanding
Tourism Web Site Award**

Nemaha County figured prominently in statewide tourism development achievements recognized at the 2002 Travel Conference in South Sioux City on October 23. Governor Mike Johanns presented the Nemaha County Development Alliance (NCDA) with the 2002 Outstanding Web Site Award. The award is given each year to communities or non-profit organizations in recognition of the importance of a Web presence in generating interest in Nebraska tourist destinations. This site can be found on the Web at visitnemahacounty.org.

The ease of navigation through the site, student involvement in the project, development and distribution of an accompanying CD-ROM, and the inclusion of all communities in Nemaha County on the site impressed judges who were scoring numerous nominations for this award. In attendance at the Travel Conference to receive the award was Harold Davis of Brownville who serves as the NCDA Tourism and Recreation Task Force Chairman.

The NCDA undertook the challenge of creating a countywide tourism Web site over one year ago with a grant from the State of Nebraska. It was clear to the NCDA that Nemaha County offers unique travel experiences worthy of a significant countywide marketing effort. True gems such as Nebraska's first town (Brownville) and first college (Peru State College), Coryell Park, the Steamboat Trace, and Indian Cave State Park, to name just a few, are major attractions the organization knows are marketable.

With over \$2.8 billion in spending across the state each year, tourism activities are Nebraska's third leading industry. According to the Travel Industry Association of America, nearly 60 million online travelers use the Internet to plan travel and about 25 million purchased or reserved travel products and services online in 2000.

The Nebraska Division of Travel and Tourism conducted a Survey of Web Consumers in 2001. The following facts are based on this survey:

- More than 80% of respondents plan at least half of their travel on the Web and 60% plan most or all of their travel on the Web.
- Over 65% of respondents traveled to at least one Nebraska destination in 2000.
- The top expenditure categories for people traveling to Nebraska destinations were lodging accommodations, eating and drinking establishments, shopping and recreation services.
- The average travel party for respondents who visited Nebraska destinations consisted of 3.2 people who stayed more than five nights and spent an average of \$659 per trip.

Several key people played vital roles in the development of Nemaha County's new Web site. These people include Harold Davis of Brownville, Steve Hassler of Peru, and Mary Beth Kernes of Julian. In addition, many more community leaders assisted by providing content for the site. The Webmaster responsible for the award winning design work is Pat Scheele, owner of Nebraska Rural Web. "Without help from many people here in the county, and without the expert design guidance of Pat Scheele, this project would not have been possible" said NCDA task force chairman Harold Davis.

Another important component of this project was involvement from Auburn High School and Johnson-Brock High School students. A key contribution was significant time given by a number of students in brainstorming design elements of the site. Organizers were very impressed with the unique ideas offered by students that give the site a flavor of Nemaha County's youth. The NCDA believes that youth involvement in every element of rural development is critical to the long-term survival of each Nemaha County community.

"I am pleased that Jed Wagner and the NCDA Tourism and Recreation Task Force brought together our county's youth to help us design this award winning site," said Steve Hassler of Peru. "I find it very exciting to discover significant landmarks, events, people and amenities all over Nemaha County and to bring them all together in this Web site that will benefit all residents of our county. The world needs to know what Nemaha County has to offer visitors," added Hassler.

The NCDA believes that this Web site is a work in progress. Plans are already underway to improve the site over time. To be included in the future will be a virtual shopping mall that will be made available to all Nemaha County businesses, a page highlighting Nemaha County's agricultural industry, and ongoing contributions by Nemaha County's youth.

For more information concerning this project, or to offer ideas for the site, contact NCDA executive director Jed Wagner at 274-3985 or at NCDA@alltel.net.