

## Your Town A Destination

### The 25 Immutable Rules of Successful Tourism, Roger A. Brooks & Maury Forman

#### Rule #13, Insanity has its Own Rewards

How would you like to spend some time at the annual Mike the Headless Chicken festival in Fruita, Colorado? Or browsing in the gift shop inside a four-story high Brontosaurus near Palm Springs? Or how about attending the National Lentil Festival in the Palouse Region of Washington and Idaho?

They May not sound like the most exciting places to visit, yet tens of thousands of people flock to these communities every year to celebrate lentils and a chicken that supposedly lived for years without his head. People come from all over the world to shop inside a giant dinosaur's belly, feast on the largest pot of lentil soup, or participate in a great game of chicken Bingo (the numbers are chosen by where the chick droppings fall on a numbered grid.) What may seem rather insane to you means hundreds of thousands of dollars to the communities that came up with these zany ideas. For many people, being part of such silly fun is just too big an attraction to miss.

Coming up with an insane or unique idea does not mean that you have to be half-cocked in its development. It takes a great deal of planning and consensus in order to turn an idea into the theme that sets our town apart and makes visiting it worth a special trip. Your town's uniqueness may emerge in a variety of ways, such as architectural, event, or marketing themes.

A good way to start the insanity bandwagon is to look at the ideas of other communities. Don't copy them, but use them to inspire your own creative imagination. Let's say you start with Mike the Headless Chicken. WE can agree that headless chickens are out - been there, done that. But maybe your community is the rubber chicken capital of the world... or is rumored to have been the inspiration for the The Headless Horseman ... or there was that flying pick incident back in the 1920's.

Riverside, Iowa, proclaimed itself the future birthplace of Captain James T. Kirk of Star Trek and began holding annual Trek-Fests. Hollywood and William Shatner played a practical joke on the whole town as a consequence, pretending to film a new movie there, and the town ended up with lots of publicity and a short series on Spike TV. Riverside's fame game and it's become a destination for Star Trek fans from as far away as Finland.

Along the Historic National Road in Illinois, travelers can gape at a 170 foot tall bottle of catsup, which is now in the Guinness Book of World Records. The City of Metropolis Ohio, self-proclaimed hometown of Superman, boasts a 15 foot bronze statue of the hero, to the delight of thousands of comic book fans.

Americans may find comfort in the familiarity of a McDonald's on every corner, but they will seek out that which is truly unique. Sometimes it is as close as the nearest garage. A gentleman in St. Maries, Idaho has collected every model Corvette ever manufactured, plus Corvette Indy pace cars. St. Maries has a timber heritage, but can you imagine the attraction if the whole town adopted a Corvette theme, with every store or restaurant adopting a model year, and, room permitting, place one of the cars inside the store? Can you imagine the number of Corvette clubs, rallies, and classic car events that would gravitate to scenic St. Maries? Once there, Visitors could learn more about St. Maries, including its timber heritage. The Corvette theme would be a powerful magnet. Much more so than, say, a timber museum.

A car museum is rather ordinary, but having the whole town adopt a Corvette theme with Corvettes in nearly every shop, would make St. Maries extraordinary.

In order to be successful in tourism a town must set itself apart from everyone else. If your community offers the same thing a visitor can get close to home, then why should they make a special trip to visit your town? There really is no such thing as an insane idea. One man's headless chicken is another community's golden goose egg.

#### **Questions for Success:**

- ⇒ What does your community have that makes visitors want to make a special trip, and that they can't get closer to home?
- ⇒ What assets does your town have that could become the lure for visitors?