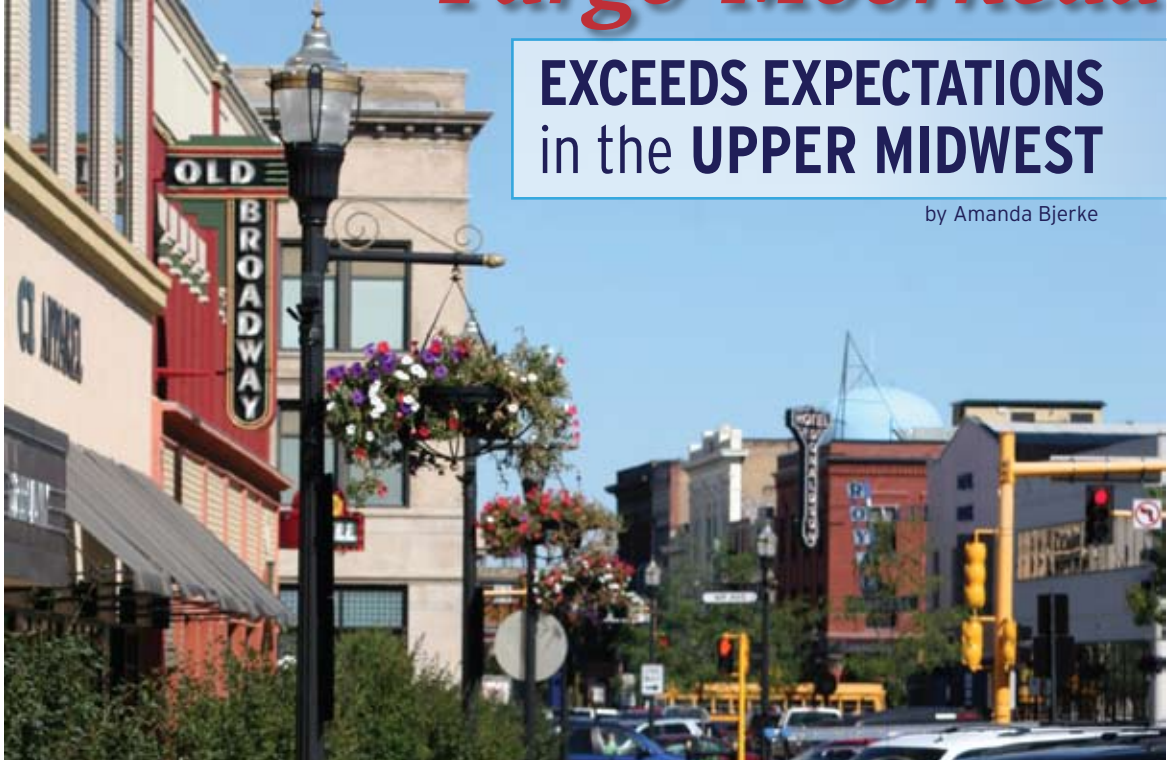


Fargo-Moorhead

EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS in the UPPER MIDWEST

by Amanda Bjerke



Fargo's vibrant downtown

When Cole Carley, executive director of the Fargo-Moorhead Convention and Visitors Bureau, shares his favorite promo line, “Come to Fargo where it’s always warm,” he’s typically met with raised eyebrows.

That’s the idea.

Part of Carley’s job is to dispel myths that depict his hometown as a difficult place to live. Sure, winters are snowy and from time to time the spring thaw raises serious concerns. But the perpetual warmth of Fargo has nothing to do with the climate, he quickly explained, “It’s the people, the friendliness, the smiles you see on their faces. We just shower visitors with attention. We know what cooperation means. Our metro area includes two cities in two counties in two states and two different federal districts. And we love the situation. We’ve got two state universities and park systems on both sides of the river. The redundancies work to our advantage because we know how to make the most of them. We understand what it takes to get along.”

There’s no denying the cooperative spirit and determination in this valley. Millions of TV viewers watched as the people of Fargo, North Dakota and Moorhead, Minnesota pulled together to fight the Red River’s floodwaters earlier this year. “That’s one thing the media got right,” Carley said. “You

could see the enthusiasm of people who looked that problem in the eye and said, ‘Baloney! Nothing’s happening to our home.’”

The Fargo-Moorhead area is easy to love, Carley continued. “I’ve traveled all over the world. We have hotels that are every bit as good as you’ll find anywhere in the country. Getting here is easy. Getting around is easy. There’s a very low crime rate. It’s just a nice place to be.”

Veronique Walters tends to agree. She grew up in Perpignan, a French Mediterranean city, met North Dakota native Brian Walters in college, fell in love and got married—with one stipulation: that he never ask her to live in his home state. However, after enduring the big-city bustle of Houston, she found North Dakota’s laid-back lifestyle appealing. When her husband was recruited to lead the area’s economic development efforts she discovered that Fargo-Moorhead presented an ideal place to raise a family.

“It is actually much more diverse here than people think, she said. There’s a group of French-speakers. We get together once a month. For the family there’s always a play or musical performance between The Fargo Theater and the three universities (North Dakota State in Fargo, and Minnesota State University and Concordia, a private school, in Moorhead.) There are many

activities for the children. We try to keep a balance of sports and the arts and that is very possible here.

“The downtown area is developing nicely. Evenings are very alive. It feels like a bigger city but there are no issues with transportation and traffic. I don’t have to plan for an hour to go somewhere. You don’t spend two hours of your day commuting. That is a big plus for me,” she concluded.

Easy commutes are among the litany of lifestyle advantages Don Morton cites when recruiting employees to Microsoft’s Fargo campus. Morton first came to the valley more than thirty years ago as an assistant football coach at North Dakota State University. He progressed to become head coach there and then left for greener playing fields, eventually leading the University of Wisconsin Badgers. When he said goodbye to the gridiron he returned to the Red River community. “Fargo,” the Michigan native said, “always felt like home.”

Morton worked for Great Plains Software, a homegrown Fargo company acquired by Microsoft. Now, he serves as the site manager for that big-name corporation’s Fargo operations. Recruiting is among his responsibilities.

“We have a good story to tell,” he said. “Our K-12 schools are exceptional and we have strong universities. Housing is affordable. People love to talk about the work ethic. The truth is we have the real metrics to back up all those [assertions]. The numbers point to exceptional productivity.”

Brian Walters of the Greater Fargo Moorhead Economic Development Corporation also cites statistics. “In February, *Moody’s Economy* released a report indicating that of the 381 metro areas in the U.S. we ranked number one in economic vitality.”

The Moody’s report gave the communities high marks for economic diversity. In addition to the universities and Microsoft with its 1,500 employees, Fargo-Moorhead is also home to a roster of technology and manufacturing firms. Moody’s said, “While the nation is in the midst of the worst recession since the Great Depression, Fargo bears little resemblance to an economy in distress.”

The foreclosure crisis sweeping America also seems to have missed the area. The Moody’s report stated that “Prudent lending practices, relatively pristine balance sheets and a well-balanced market have kept foreclosures to a minimum and price reductions from materializing.”

Not content to rest on its laurels the region continues to entice new enterprise with a



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business-friendly marketplace featuring streamlined application and regulatory processes and a beneficial tax climate. “For example, we don’t have personal property tax on inventory, machinery and equipment,” Brian Walters said. “The state of North Dakota is lowering corporate income taxes and enjoys a large surplus. So there’s a fiscally strong government. That provides a more friendly climate for business as well.”

The positive environment and access to an educated, motivated workforce impressed Microsoft. Great Plains Software employed 2,500 people globally, 850 in Fargo at the time of the acquisition. Don Moody said, “At the time it was Microsoft’s largest acquisition in terms of people. Because of all the talent available here, they made the decision not to roll the acquisition up into Redmond [Washington, Microsoft headquarters,] and to keep investing in Fargo-Moorhead instead,” he said.

“It’s a very good place to live,” Morton continued. “We are pleased to be able to tell the real Fargo story. So often people come in here with certain expectations. We always exceed those expectations—by a bunch.” ■



Hjemkomst, the last Viking ship to sail the Atlantic.

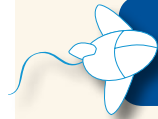
DID YOU KNOW?

1. Fargo’s Red River Zoo specializes in rare and endangered species. This is the place to encounter white-lipped deer, fluffy Bactrian Camels, Pallas Cats and Tanuki, aka the Japanese Raccoon Dog.

2. Fargo is home to the Hjemkomst, the last Viking ship to sail the Atlantic. It’s the focal point of an interpretive center that also highlights the development of the Red River Valley.

3. There are 4,000 hotel rooms in the Fargo-Moorhead metropolitan area.

4. More than 30 golf courses are within a 100-mile radius of the communities. There are four 19-hole public golf courses within the cities’ limits.



To read more Fargo-Moorhead Facts visit “communities” at: www.americasbestplaces.com.

HJEMKOMST: COURTESY FARGO-MOORHEAD CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU



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| ASPEN, COLORADO



No Bad Days

in This Rocky Mountain *Resort Community* by Anna Hobart

Resort communities, America's bastions of the good life, aren't completely immune to economic downturns. It just seems that way. Despite economic struggles stretching from Wall Street to Main Street, these glitzy playgrounds for the rich and richer continue to lure newcomers. In this edition, SkyWest Magazine looks at the Aspen attraction.

Realtor Bubba Eggleston explained that while the market has changed since the heady days of 2006 and 2007, “there are still buyers out there who want a piece of Aspen. While there have been price reductions and activity is slower than it was two years ago, there are still sales occurring.”

Eggleston understands the community's magnetism first hand. In 1993, the fresh-out-of-college Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania native came to Aspen to work on rehabilitating the local water filtration plant. “I got to live here for six weeks doing that job and then I started coming out whenever I could. In 1997 I bought my first condo. I met my wife in Aspen. We were

both out walking our dogs and now we have two children. We love it here, it's definitely a wonderful place to live.”

There is no shortage of people sharing his perspective. Even in hard times those who have money are buying resort properties Eggleston explained. “Money moves around and Aspen is still a top place to be. The wealth may have moved to a different customer, but there is still wealth. People in the energy business, for example, have had a strong few years even as other businesses have been flatter.

“Last October when the markets were most volatile and people were very unsure financially, we had a sale on a ski-in-and-ski-out

condominium on Aspen Mountain; it was around 1,300 sq. ft. It sold for full price, [more than \$2 million] and we had competing offers for it. I think that's indicative of Aspen being different than the rest of the world."

Renown as a ski resort, Aspen is a four-season destination long on scenery and outdoor recreation. "Everyone thinks of Aspen for its winter activities, but the truth is you can do something fun every day of your life here. I think a lot of people now are looking at life and saying some investments are just a piece of paper. Buying into Aspen allows you to enjoy life. There's so much going on. The climate in summer is fantastic. I know people from Texas who may only ski two weeks in the winter, but they spend two months here in summer. In any season, if you don't do something interesting with your day it's your own fault."

Those "interesting" diversions run a broad gamut. There's world-class shopping. Upscale



Aspen concert al fresco

retailers such as Gucci, Prada and Fendi all have a presence in the old mining town. Ample outdoor activities include great golf, mountain and road cycling, hiking and world-class fly-fishing. The Roaring Fork, Fryling Pan and Crystal rivers all flow nearby.

Culture junkies are not disappointed either. The Aspen Music Festival runs all summer presenting more than 300 events each season. This year marks the organization 60th anniversary. Offerings range from jazz and pop stars Al Jarreau and Natalie Cole to presentations of Puccini's *La Boheme* and a concert by opera superstar soprano Deborah Voigt. Aside from the festival's events, each Sunday brings free bluegrass concerts on Aspen Mountain. Patrons of the visual arts enjoy the internationally recognized Aspen Art Museum and Gallery. It exhibits important contemporary works from around the world and is located near the heart of the compact downtown.

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Did You Know?

There are advantages to high altitude golf. Want to drive the ball a mile? Take to the mountains. At high altitudes a golf ball travels about 10% farther.

"This is a something-for-everyone place, no matter what interests you," Eggleston said. "And everything is so convenient. The restaurant and shopping core are right at the bottom of the mountain and the Aspen Airport is literally four minutes from town. You can leave New York at six in the morning and be out enjoying the mountains by noon.

"When you think about it, the whole Roaring Fork Valley is only a 40-mile stretch and there are only about five miles in the upper valley [where the most elite properties are located]. Basically it's all built out and there's no way to make any more of it. So, there will always be a demand for Aspen," Eggleston concluded. ■



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ASPEN GOLF: ASPEN CHAMBER RESORT ASSOCIATION
BIKES ON BRIDGE: JEREMY SWANSON



Southern Oregon's *Sunny Outlook*

by Connie Naylor

Oregon's "Banana Belt" sizzles with opportunity. Josephine and Jackson Counties hug the California line and offer a viable alternative for businesses—and entrepreneurs—seeking to flee the congestion and high costs of major metro areas. When travel is necessary, Medford's regional air service makes it easy to access big cities and the world beyond.

Excellent recreational and cultural opportunities create an easy lifestyle in an area that serves as the retail and medical mecca for southern Oregon and California's far north. The Rogue River and Crater Lake are top-draws for outdoor adventure lovers. Dozens of lakes dot the surrounding countryside. Ashland, the home of Southern Oregon University, is awash in culture offering all the benefits associated with a college town. It also boasts the renowned Oregon Shakespeare Festival, a Tony Award-winning organization that presents around a dozen plays a year in repertory. Its season starts in February and runs through October. Three stages include an outdoor amphitheater, allowing patrons to enjoy the area's sunny climate. Typically the sun shines 211 days a year. (Average precipitation ranges from 18 to 32 inches.) Each summer, Jacksonville hosts the Britt Festival, among the nation's finest celebrations of music and dance. In addition to its acclaimed Classical Festival, which runs from July 31 through August

16 this year, the Britt crams the summer calendar with pop performers. More than 30 concerts include the Moody Blues, Blondie, Sheryl Crow, James Taylor, Blues Travelers and Chris Isaak among others. Jacksonville itself is a charming town. Its extensive historic district includes more than 100 buildings, many dating to the mid-19th century.

In addition to Southern Oregon's lifestyle advantages, a pro-business climate includes benefits that go straight to the bottom line. Ron Fox, executive director of Southern Oregon Regional Economic Development, Inc. said, "Oregon has the best business cost climate of any western state. The cost of electric energy in Southern Oregon is anywhere from 30% to 50% less than in adjacent states." Workers' compensation rates are among the lowest in the nation and according to a 2007 report by the independent, non-partisan Tax Foundation, Oregon benefits from the country's tenth "best" tax burden. There is no sales tax—or inventory or excise taxes either.

"All these advantages plus the quality of living that is apparent in this region make it easier for companies to attract and retain highly trained key employees," Fox continued. "We have access to unbounded natural environments and performing arts companies that are as fine as you'd find anywhere in the United States. It's an easy place to promote," Fox concluded. ■

| EUREKA, CA

GAMING Rounds Out Adventure

What was once a wild and rugged lumber town is now a well-rounded community with plenty of art, outdoor activity and gaming options.

Only a few years ago Eureka's Old Town rolled up its sidewalks by six each evening. That's hard to believe now when you see Eureka during Arts Alive! on the first Saturday of every month. Sidewalks teem with activity from 6 to 9 p.m. as thousands of visitors roam from venue to venue.

Richard Stenger, of the Humboldt County Convention and Visitor's Bureau, has called it a "mini Mardi Gras." Street musicians play everything from steel drums to punk rock. Patrons crowd into boutiques and galleries, chatting and eating hors d'oeuvres.

The magnificent Redwood forests surrounding the community have long been a tourist draw. Now, "soft adventurers" seeking to explore the Great Outdoors without sacrificing comfort have a new lodging option. The Blue Lakes Casino



recently opened a 104-room hotel, the area's first new lodging in a decade. Blue Lakes marketing manager Barrett DeFay explained that in addition to well-appointed king- and queen-sized rooms, the facility includes several posh suites providing a very comfortable option for travelers as well as casino guests. "We have a lovely location, tucked into a small valley next to the Mad River. We're only six miles from Humboldt Bay and the ocean." The casino's hotel provides a great base for day trips, according to DeFay. "There are so many options throughout the Redwood Curtain," he said, referring to California's northwest corner by its popular nickname. "There's everything from rock climbing to fishing, to wildlife viewing to seeing 2,000-year-old trees. At the end of the day, we provide a nice place to stay with several dining options, entertainment and friendly people. Our staff is among the main reasons we are regularly voted the best casino on the coast," DeFay concluded. ■

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