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**on the cover** It's that time of year when Mother Earth bangs out some natural sculptures to remind us that all Door County seasons have the power to astonish. Paul Haan took this photo at Northport.

## Lodging Revenue Up \$38 Million in 2021

**Room-tax returns up 41% over 2019**

by MYLES DANNHAUSEN JR.  
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**W**ith December's room-tax report now in, the growth of tourism in 2021 can only be described as explosive.

Lodging revenues for the year were up a staggering \$38.7 million over 2019, the last full year prior to COVID-19 restrictions. Hotels, inns and vacation rentals pulled in \$133.3 million, compared to \$94.7 million in 2019. Revenue was buoyed by a 17% increase in the average daily room rate, skewed to a degree by the increase in the popularity of vacation-home rentals.

But the gross number of lodging nights filled also boomed by 20%: an increase of 112,055 nights filled over 2019, despite the number of nights available growing by just 5,562.

"We're still not sure how much of it is lag from 2020 from people who didn't get out and wanted to travel in 2021, versus more permanent change," said Juliana Behme, Door County Tourism Zone administrator.

Those numbers will only increase as receipts from late-reporting properties come in. Behme said

there are reports outstanding from 92 properties for the year.

Total room-tax collections for the year grew from \$5.1 million to more than \$7.3 million. Thirty percent of that revenue - \$2.18 million - goes into the coffers of local municipalities. That's \$640,262 more going back to the 19 villages, towns and cities that make up the Door County Tourism Zone, allocated based on collections in each community. Four percent of returns goes to the Tourism Zone, and 66% goes to Destination Door County for tourism promotion and development.

Sister Bay leapfrogged Sturgeon Bay to move into second place in room-tax revenue behind the Town of Gibraltar, which has led the county in room-tax returns since the Tourism Zone was created in 2007. Much of Sister Bay's growth can be traced to the opening of the 47-room Dörr Hotel in May 2021 and the expansion of Open Hearth Lodge.

It's conceivable that once late reports come in, the Town of Gibraltar will surpass \$1 million in returns, making it the first time an individual community has surpassed \$1 million in room-tax revenue. The Town of Baileys Harbor moved into sixth in revenue, surpassing the Village of Egg Harbor.

**Room Tax** *continued on page 4*

## Judge Doesn't Budge on \$250K Cash Bail

by DEBRA FITZGERALD  
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**F**ormal charges were filed Monday against the man accused of starting the fire that destroyed Butch's Bar, causing two deaths and endangering the lives of tenants.

Anthony Gonzalez, who'll turn 58 on April 13, has been charged with two counts of second-degree reckless homicide, five counts of second-degree recklessly endangering safety and one count of negligent handling of burning material. The first seven charges are felonies and the eighth a misdemeanor, but all carry a repeater enhancer that increases the penalty if he's convicted.

Gonzalez is considered a repeat criminal offender because he has previously been convicted of felony charges of manufacturing/delivering THC, and possession with intent to deliver THC. Other charges that remain outstanding include bail jumping, charged in November 2021, and the manufacture and delivery of less than three grams of amphetamine, charged in 2020.

Gonzalez made his first appearance in Door County Circuit Court, appearing via Zoom from the Door County Jail while his attorney, Public Defender Aileen Henry, argued for leniency, also via Zoom, on the \$250,000 cash bond that

Judge Todd Ehlers set during the Feb. 25 bond hearing.

Henry framed the charges as having stemmed from an accidental fire that the defendant tried to put out. She said he tried to warn residents and remained on the scene during and after the fire, fully cooperating with the investigation.

"If he is convicted of any [of these charges], he'll spend a significant amount of time in prison," she said. "But still, he did not flee. He's not a flight risk."

She said he had a criminal history, but no convictions of violence or missing court appearances. He was making \$15 an hour working 30 hours a week at McDonald's and had been displaced by the fire, losing all his possessions.

"I'm asking you to look at the totality of the circumstances and set a reasonable bond," she said, favoring a low cash bond.

Door County District Attorney Colleen Nordin argued that Gonzalez didn't flee and was available for questioning, but he wasn't aware that criminal charges were being investigated, so his "failure to flee during that time is insignificant."

In addition, there's a charge from last year of bail jumping that's still pending.

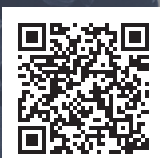
"I think there's a high risk of flight," she said, asking the judge to keep the \$250,000 cash bail in place,

**Butch's Bar** *continued on page 4*

# DOOR COUNTY

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# MAY 7, 2022

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