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Section A

# VILAS COUNTY NEWS-REVIEW

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## Tourism spending again breaks records

BY MICHELLE DREW  
EDITOR

After another busy Fourth of July week in the North Woods, it's evident that tourism business is alive and well, and figures have been made available to back that up.

The Wisconsin Department of Tourism data shows that locally and across the state, visitor spending has had another record year, with visitors spending more than \$566 million in Vilas and Oneida counties. This is up from last year's \$522 million direct spending in the two counties.

In Vilas County, more than \$288 million was spent in 2022, marking a 7.3% increase from 2021 spending of \$268 million, while Oneida

County saw a 9.5% jump from \$254 million to \$278 million.

Both counties saw more than \$20 million in growth in just one year and outpaced previous record spending seen in 2021.

According to Collette Sorgel, the new Director of Vilas County Tourism and Publicity, tourism is Vilas County's largest industry, supporting 2,109 jobs in 2022. She added that county businesses benefited from total business sales just shy of \$363 million, up 7.3% from 2021.

Visitor spending in the county accounted for \$24.9 million in state and local taxes last year alone.

"We are thrilled to see families returning generation after generation, as well as so many new folks exploring our

area for the first time," Sorgel said. "In fact, my husband, who is now a North Woods resident, is a third generation traveler to the area."

Sorgel credited the county's tourism boost to its many businesses and organizations working together.

"Thanks to our strong partnerships with Vilas County communities, businesses, and trail clubs, and the hard work of all the people who work to welcome visitors, we are stronger than ever," she said.

"We outperformed our best year by \$20 million — a success story we're so proud of and grateful for. Every dollar spent directly improves the lives of everyone who lives and works in Vilas County," Sorgel added.

While no official num-

bers are available yet for this summer season, Eagle River Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Kim Emerson said she thinks the number of visitors this year are the same or even slightly higher than last year.

"Downtown has been packed. Having a full lineup of different businesses has really made it worth their time to head down there, and the addition of the Rotary Square pocket park has encouraged people to stick around longer downtown as well," she said.

"People are grabbing a bite to eat at local restaurants and eating at the park, or dads can take their kids there to play while mom shops. It's been a great addition to the area."

Referencing the massive

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Collette Sorgel, Vilas County's new tourism director, recently started working at the courthouse in Eagle River. —Photo by Ken Anderson

### Sayner woman dies in one-car accident

A 33-year-old female from Sayner died in a one-vehicle car accident in the early hours of July 3.

According to a release from the Vilas County Sheriff's Office, a 911 call came in at approximately 12:50 a.m. regarding a vehicle that had crashed into trees on Highway 155 near South Lost Lake Drive.

Officers determined the vehicle left the roadway, missed the corner, and struck trees. First responders indicated that the driver, Brittany Johnston, was deceased. No one else was in the vehicle at that time.

Responding to the accident were personnel from Vilas County Sheriff's Office, St. Germain Rescue and Fire Department, Plum Lake Fire Department, Oneida County Ambulance MED5, Arbor Vitae Fire Department, and the Oneida County Medical Examiners Office.



MASSIVE — An often-seen albino buck in Three Lakes is growing big antlers. Drivers beware, as he hangs out near Highway 45 South. —Staff Photo By KURT KRUEGER

## Gov. Evers signs '23-'25 budget with modifications

BY MICHELLE DREW  
EDITOR

Gov. Tony Evers enacted the 2023-'25 biennial budget July 5, making changes to the budget sent by the Legislature by using his broad, constitutional veto authority.

The budget provides a historic increase in support to local communities for the first time in a decade: investing more than \$1 billion in public education, making one of the largest state investments in workforce housing, investing in infrastructure, supporting Wisconsin farmers, and providing tax relief to working families, among several other critical priorities.

In doing so, Evers said he also gave the Legislature a "second chance" to complete its work on the biennial bud-

get, calling the Legislature's final budget that was sent back to the governor "imperfect and incomplete" for failing to meaningfully address the state's ongoing workforce challenges, including an impending fiscal cliff for the state's child care industry, even as the state has the largest surplus in state history.

"We have gotten to work these last four years making smart, strategic investments — and our economy shows it. So, we began this biennial budget process with historic opportunity, and with it, historic responsibility — not to be careless or reckless, but to save where we can and stay

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## Lakes meeting planned Friday at Nicolet College

Lake group leaders and members from six northern Wisconsin counties will convene for a discussion of the environmental impacts of wake boats, lead poisoning of loons, aquatic invasive species prevention, and other issues at a special meeting this Friday in Rhinelander.

The annual North Woods Six-County Lakes Meeting is scheduled for July 14, from 9 a.m. to noon at Nicolet College.

The meeting will include an overview of water-resource-related policy issues at the state level, and exhibits from area educational and nonprofit organizations. Attendees are expected from Oneida, Vilas, Forest, Langlade, Lincoln, and Iron counties.

In addition to expert briefings on timely subject areas by distinguished presenters, the meeting will have a moderated panel to discuss the law enforcement challenges stemming from enhanced wake

boats and other watercrafts, short-term vacation rentals issues, zoning violations, and other areas that impact the health and enjoyment of North Woods lakes and rivers.

Eric Olson, director of UW-Extension Lakes, will open and moderate the workshop and panel.

Organizers expect the meeting to be a great event involving a prominent group of speakers, to kick off meaningful dialogue about issues local lake communities deeply care about in the North Woods.

The event is jointly sponsored by the Oneida County Lakes and Rivers Association and the Vilas County Lakes and Rivers Association. More information on these associations can be found at oclra.org or vlra.org, respectively.

For more information, contact Ted Rulseh at 920-242-8671 or trulseh@tjrcommunications.com, or Tom Ewing at 630-985-8472 or president@vlra.org.

## Million Penny Parade slated this Saturday in Woodruff

BY STEPHANIE DYE  
LIFESTYLE EDITOR

The Dr. Kate Museum board of directors will recreate the 1953 Million Penny fundraising parade Saturday, July 15, in honor of the 70th anniversary of the event.

The original parade kick-started fundraising for a new hospital in Woodruff, headed by Dr. Kate Pelham Newcomb, and this year's celebration will support the Million Penny fundraising drive by the Dr. Kate Museum to construct an addition to the museum.

"The addition is badly needed, as the current structure space is completely used up with hundreds more artifacts being stored in the basement waiting for a home," said Barb Maines, who volunteers at the museum.



The upcoming Dr. Kate Museum 70th anniversary Million Penny Parade was well-represented during the St. Germain Fourth of July parade. The event will be held Saturday, July 15, in Woodruff. —Staff Photo By MICHELLE DREW

Kicking off the day-long celebration will be a pancake breakfast served from 7:30 to 10:30 a.m. at the Woodruff Town Hall.

Music provided by Life

on the Island begins at 10 a.m. at a field behind the World's Largest Penny, which stands one block west of Highway 51, and will be followed by "The

Star-Spangled Banner" by the Celebration Brass Quartet.

Attendees will be wel-

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