*Great catch, Lake Geneva, with Donald Driver*

**By Bill Barth and Stephanie Klett**

The tired but true saying about running a business – “If you’re not going forward, you’re going backward” – applies for tourism, too.

The numbers tell a solid story. Since the sharp declines in visitors and tourism-related revenues at the height of the pandemic, Lake Geneva and the region have rebounded with alacrity.

Anyone frequenting prime destinations this summer knows the crowds are large and the enthusiasm is contagious.

Understandably, then, there could be temptation to rest on those laurels.

But the better enterprising strategy is always to be looking over the next horizon for new opportunities to grow and add to the prosperity of our businesses and citizens.

So, let’s talk about Donald Driver.

For those who may just be emerging from a pandemic-induced cave retreat, Donald Driver is the all-time leading receiver for Wisconsin’s beloved Green Bay Packers. He has a Super Bowl ring. He showcased his fancy footwork by winning the Dancing With the Stars competition. He’s a best-selling author, certified by the New York Times. He’s one of America’s leaders in commercial endorsements and personal appearances, with segments on Good Morning America, the Oprah Winfrey Network and others.

Better yet, he’s the star of a new marketing program for Lake Geneva.

We would be remiss in not mentioning the history between Donald Driver and Stephanie. During her tenure as Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Tourism, Stephanie harnessed the power of celebrity to promote vacationing all across this beautiful state. Various campaigns included partnerships with luminaries like Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Robert Hayes, the Zucker brothers, Tony Shaloub and Jordy Nelson.

Winners all.

But Donald Driver became Steph’s go-to celebrity, not just because of his fame and proven likeability as an endorser, but even more so because of how genuinely he relates to people.

“Donald is an absolute gem as a person,” Stephanie said. “Everybody sees that million-dollar smile. Behind that is a man who cares deeply about people and always has time for everyone he meets. On the job for a commercial, he’s focused and committed to getting it just right.

What’s really amazing, though, is how quick he is to embrace the people he meets, to go above and beyond to greet fans and take time to give them attention and exchange a word. You can’t fake that. It’s why Donald was Visit Lake Geneva’s first choice to anchor our new marketing campaign.”

Donald was in Lake Geneva for one hard day’s work and an overnight. Details of the plan, though, were months in the making.

“There are so many moving parts to produce a creative and effective commercial,” Stephanie said. “From negotiating the deal, to scheduling the right production crew and meeting their needs, to coordinating with our local partners involved in the shoot, to arranging accommodations for Donald and so much more, it takes months to mount the total effort. We are extremely grateful for the cooperation received from everyone involved.”

While in Lake Geneva, Donald filmed at Safari Lake Geneva where owner Jungle Jay Christie had him feeding giraffes and camels; at Tristan Crist Magic Theatre, where the award-winning magician worked Donald into the show; at Habberdapper men’s clothing with owner Steve Monticello; at The Riviera and Riviera Beach, where Donald enjoyed a non-alcoholic pineapple drink courtesy of Going Bananas.

Perhaps the highlight of the day featured Donald demonstrating his athletic prowess as a mailboat jumper on the tour with the Lake Geneva Cruise Line. Social media fans likely have seen the footage of Donald taking a tumble leaping from the dock back onto the boat after making his mail delivery. The smile never left his face.

The ad buy includes Spectrum News One statewide for 3,600 commercial spots in Green Bay, Madison, Milwaukee, La Crosse and Wausau. It also will air on the popular Inside the Huddle show. There will be digital video boards in key Wisconsin markets, along with streaming television, search engine marketing and Google video ads.

“The marketing strategy is evident,” Stephanie said. “We are leaning on a true Wisconsin icon to reach out across important markets in the state, encouraging Wisconsin visitors to put Lake Geneva into their vacation plans. Lake Geneva loves its visitors from all across the Midwest and beyond, but our Wisconsin visitors are always special. Donald will help us remind Wisconsin residents of all the fun that awaits them in Lake Geneva.”

We can’t resist closing on this note:

Landing Donald Driver is a great catch.

*Bill Barth is the former Editor of the Beloit Daily News, and a member of the Wisconsin Newspaper Hall of Fame. His wife, Stephanie Klett, is the President and CEO of Visit Lake Geneva, and the former Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Tourism.*