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DOWNTOWN
REVITALIZATION &
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MISSOURI

DESTINATION
ASSESSMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Destination Assessment component of the Missouri DREAM Initiative provides an assessment methodology that offers an unbiased, “newcomer” point-of-view and applies this fresh perspective to a hierarchy of needs required by visitors for a fulfilling visit to Downtown Caruthersville. Caruthersville’s market positioning is discussed as is the Assessment Team’s visit to the community. The specific recommendations in this report are grouped into the categories of marketing, public improvements, retail and retail operations, events, and other. Each recommendation provides activities that the City and a newly restructured Downtown Caruthersville Association can promote, encourage, or implement. A list of the specific recommendations follows:

Marketing:

- Suggested Positioning: “Heart of the Bootheel”
- Coordinate the Positioning Statement

Public Improvements:

- Improve Signage and Wayfinding
- Improve Streetscape and Buildings
- Add Visitor Center to Downtown
- Develop a Better Link Between the Casino and Ward Street
- Expand Reynolds Park
- Provide Public Amenities to Visitors

Retail and Retail Operations:

- Lodging
- Coordinate Downtown Businesses and Area Activities
- Improve Retail Operations

Other:

- Improve Attractions for Outdoor Sportsmen

While all of the recommendations within this report will help Downtown capitalize on its tourist trade, the link between the casino and Ward Street is the most critical and most immediately beneficial, followed closely by the expansion of Reynolds Park. Numerous visitors are already coming to Caruthersville for these attractions and by making Downtown more accessible to these visitors, the City should see immediate benefits.

The City is pursuing plans to construct a River Heritage Museum. If this ambitious project should become a reality, another recommendation should be addressed immediately. Discussions with the developer should be initiated that will provide the concept for the Visitor Center to be included as a component of the Museum.

All of the recommendations in the Public Improvements category should be the community's top priority, as visitors need to be able to find Downtown, navigate within it, and feel safe and welcome while they are there. Without these aspects, other activities are ineffective.

INTRODUCTION

The DREAM Initiative concentrates efforts on downtown revitalization because the overall health of the community is greatly influenced by the vitality and viability of its downtown. Moreover, downtown reflects the unique attributes of a community—its heritage, its people and its future. While much of America becomes culturally homogenized, our downtowns should retain their unique identity and reflect the incredible diversity contained within the American story. For visitors, downtowns embody the character of the community and represent hidden treasures awaiting discovery in an atmosphere that does not exist at a large shopping center on the outskirts of town.

The DREAM Initiative recognizes that downtown exists within a larger context. Visitors may be attracted to a region for destinations outside downtown, such as a nearby natural or historic feature, but downtown should be a part of their adventure. In order for downtown to be a viable destination it must offer something to attract visitors such as unique shopping, dining, and recreational opportunities.

The Destination Assessment component of the DREAM Initiative will help Caruthersville better understand its potential to derive benefits from tourism. The assessment will help formulate a realistic vision for Caruthersville to implement improvements to its unique tourist activity. Recommendations will address potential synergies among existing features to capitalize on Downtown Caruthersville and surrounding assets. This assessment is meant to identify the conditions that Caruthersville stakeholders need to address, not provide a marketing piece that presents only the best side of the City.

The “Destination Assessment Team” is a collaboration of representatives of PGAV, the Missouri Division of Tourism, and the Missouri Arts Council. The findings and recommendations contained within this document, while primarily prepared by PGAV, represent a coordinated effort to address the “tourist” or “visitor” experience from independent consultants and key State agencies involved in tourism and the arts. It is anticipated that the Missouri Division of Tourism and the Missouri Arts Council will play an ongoing role in providing technical and financial resources, as applicable.



Downtown Caruthersville

THE IMPORTANCE OF TOURISM

A vibrant tourism trade offers many potential benefits to a community. Tourism can help enhance the image of an area, increase local pride, and improve quality of life. As an industry, tourism is recognized as an important component of a diverse economy providing employment, redevelopment, and investment opportunities. Tourism can help build a distinctive, unique, and productive community.

The economic benefits of tourism include job creation, as well as increased retail sales generation, essentially bringing new money into the community. The potential new retail sales from tourism can help to counter the changing nature of the retail environment. The attraction of new money to the community through tourism can be an effective economic development strategy. Additionally, many existing retailers can benefit from understanding their market may extend beyond the limits of their community, utilizing marketing techniques for targeted visitor profiles, or expanding hours and services specifically for visitors.

The local residents will benefit from added visitor services as well. A thriving tourist trade will cause greater money circulation throughout the community and improved services and necessary infrastructure enhancements will benefit everyone. Increased economic activity will bring new employment and entrepreneurial opportunities and enhanced shopping convenience, choice, and competitiveness. A well-balanced mix of retail and related services will make Downtown Caruthersville attractive to residents, visitors, and investors.

These positive effects of a successful tourism industry can resonate through many business sectors, including non-tourism related businesses. In light of the far-reaching impacts of a successful tourism industry, and the size of the local industry, tourism should be viewed as a strategic sector in Caruthersville's economic future. Any economic development strategy for Caruthersville should specifically address the tourism industry and its importance to the local economy.



Existing lighting in General John Riggs Veteran's Park

ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

The Destination Assessment provides a snapshot of the tourism industry operating community-wide, with a focus on Downtown. The “rapid assessment” process employed consists of reviewing data, marketing materials, visiting the community and its key features, and meeting with community tourism leaders. This report and the recommendations contained herein should serve as a foundation, providing strategic direction as the community moves through the subsequent steps of planning and design on their way toward destination success. Understanding the framework used to evaluate destinations will provide context for the recommendations and suggestions for improvement.

Development of a tourism enhancement strategy, just as any business or product development strategy, begins with an evaluation of the relationship between product and customer in a competitive marketplace. The analysis of this relationship results in the development or identification of an aspect of the product that will make it a more attractive choice over other, similar products. This feature is called a competitive advantage and will give a community an edge over its rivals and an ability to generate greater success. The more sustainable the competitive advantage, the more difficult it is for competitors to neutralize the advantage. Competitors in this scenario are other communities that are attempting to attract in whole, or large part, the same target market.

Product

Downtown Caruthersville and all of its amenities: businesses, restaurants, infrastructure, people, streets, sidewalks, parks, events, and many other attractions create the product. The City should constantly strive for a competitive advantage for its product, assessing ways to improve in areas such as cost, operating efficiency, or uniqueness.

Customer

The customer, in this evaluation, is the visitor or patron including residents of the community, neighboring areas, traditional tourists, etc. The community must understand who their current customers are, who is currently visiting Downtown and why, as well as who they might be able to target and how. To understand and target customers, it is helpful to categorize visitors. A common categorization of visitors is by the reason for their visit:

Business Travelers—Most likely to travel during the week, driven by businesses, primarily basic needs of lodging, restaurants, services, gift shopping, and evening entertainment, potential to impress and return for pleasure.

Family Travelers—Most likely to travel during the weekend, driven by relatives, less likely to need lodging, potential needs of services and restaurants, general shopping.

Ethnic and Cultural Seekers—Looking for exposure to new experiences, development, and education. Interested in the areas “way of life” and people. Adventurous and looking for more than basic needs. Museums, galleries,

concerts, festivals, and performances. Likely to shop for unique items.

Heritage and Passive Recreation Enthusiasts—This visitor enjoys the scenery and feel of the area more than the interaction with the people. They are more inwardly focused and reflective. Their needs are similar to the culture seeker, but they are just as likely to enjoy a drive through town to look at architecture or a walk in the local parks.

Active Outdoor Adventurers—Intense enjoyers of the parks and natural areas. These sportsmen enjoy a wide variety of recreational opportunities. Outdoorsmen, boaters, hikers, or golfers; they are on the move. They are devoted and spend money on their chosen sport.

Urban Entertainment—The shoppers, team sport spectators, college visitors, night owls, or amusement park attendees. They tend to travel in groups and have a higher expendable income. Internet connectivity and cell phone access is important to them.

Market Positioning and Brand

Once an understanding is reached on exactly what the product is and who the customers or target markets are, the focus turns to identifying the market positioning; the way the product is viewed by the overall marketplace. Effective positioning is an important component of a competitive advantage. The community must determine a distinct market position and brand—something that draws on the strengths of the destination, its authenticity, and leverages customers' desire for unique experiences.

It is essential to understand how customers currently perceive the destination, especially relative to its competitors. This perception is the community's image or brand. The destination must craft a strategy that builds on the positive aspects of its current image and, if necessary, repositions it to a more advantageous and competitive position. Repositioning takes time, patience and persistence as it typically involves modifying long-held preconceptions about the destination.

If marketing is successful in reaching the intended visitors, they will carry with them the desired preconceived idea of the community's brand. The destination's brand is important as it is essentially a promise to provide a product or service in a consistent way.

Destination brands produce a distinct image in the mind of the customer. Each of the “realms” listed below represents an opportunity to differentiate from the competition and offer a unique consumer benefit. Destinations reach their maximum potential when they leverage all four. A description of these four realms excerpted from the October 2007 edition of *Destinology*; published by PGAV, follows:

REALM ONE—PLACE:

If you visit the Empire State Building, you go to a building with the city surrounding it. Up at the observation tower, the **place** becomes an oasis high above bustling Manhattan. What benefits does the place provide for the guest? Some people like the high energy feeling of being in the city, but they may also like taking a break from the intensity. People go to a destination. It exists in a physical place. A destination should try to get the most out of the power of its place.

REALM TWO—EXPERIENCE:

Hike in the canyon. Ride the coaster. Attend a show. People want to *do* something at a destination—something unique, something to brag about, or something to share. The experience of a destination can provide key benefits to guests and a fundamental part of its brand. A destination can reach its full potential when it promotes the benefits of a unique experience and delivers.

REALM THREE—MINDSET:

Sometimes a destination epitomizes or evokes an attitude, value, or mindset that has meaning beyond the physical limits of the site. Colonial Williamsburg set out to “own” the concept of Colonial America, and people might feel more patriotic just thinking about it. When a destination can symbolize an aspirational concept, it can form a powerful connection with its guests. The destination becomes a touchstone for the concept and people return to renew their connection with it.

REALM FOUR—ORGANIZATION:

What role does the organization behind the destination play in the brand? The Niagara Parks emblem conveys tremendous trust among regional guests who want to spend their money with the organization that helps preserve the nature and heritage of Niagara Falls. The organizational dimension of a destination may also make a big difference to future employees, donors, business partners, granting agencies, or other organizations. People want to associate with a cause or organization they feel good about, one that expresses their own values and aspirations.

When people think of Caruthersville as a destination, do they long to be in the place, get excited by the experience, aspire to the values represented, and trust the organization behind it? When the answer is “yes” to all four, people will attribute a high value to visiting Caruthersville, which relates directly to attendance and financial success.

HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

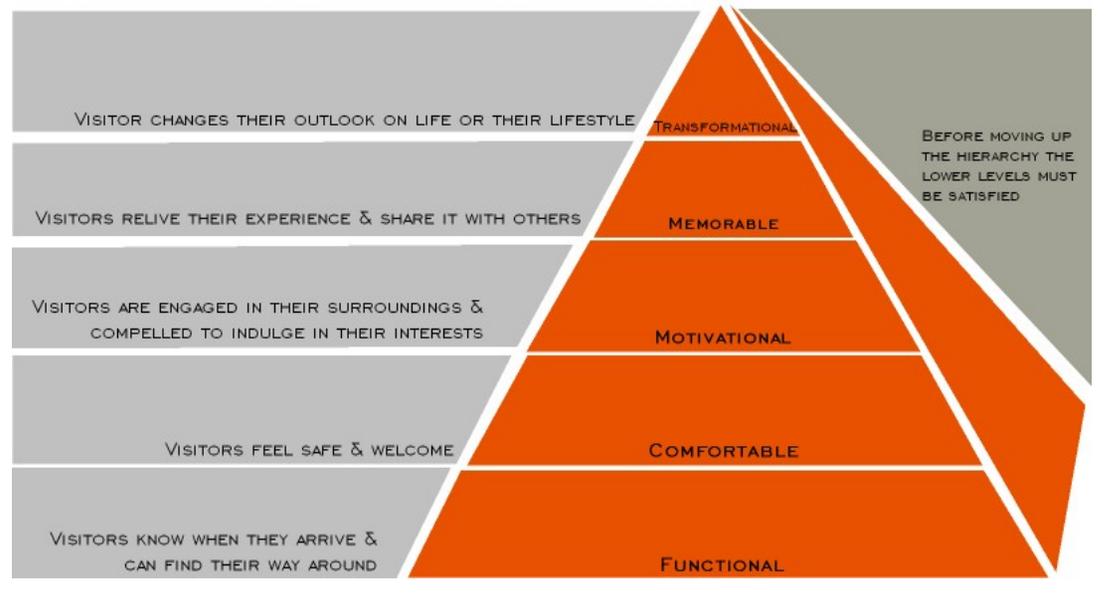
Destinations and, in a larger sense, downtowns are basically customer-oriented businesses and therefore should always take the customer point-of-view. When destinations conduct product development and determine marketing decisions they must address what the customer wants and needs. During the Destination Assessment Kick-Off Meeting, the Destination Assessment Team introduced the concept of a destination consumer “Hierarchy of Needs,” which hypothesizes that customers must have their most basic needs met before they can attain higher levels of fulfillment. This customer-focused theme will recur throughout the recommendations for Caruthersville.

For the purposes of this Destination Assessment, PGAV uses the hierarchical scheme shown here, listed from bottom to top, to illustrate and describe the motivations of the typical, “downtown” Missouri tourist.

There are a great number of reasons or desires that drive an individual consumer’s decision to travel and their choice of destination. The “Hierarchy of Needs” describes the requirements of a typical visitor in order for them to have a fulfilling destination experience. Questions a destination community may ask themselves regarding whether or not their community’s destination assets meet these needs are:

1. Functional: Does the City provide adequate wayfinding to make travel throughout the area easy and somewhat intuitive? Do visitors know when they have “arrived”? Does the City adequately provide basic comforts, such as parking, bathrooms, and a place to rest? Is information about destinations and events easily obtainable?
2. Comfortable: Is Downtown Caruthersville pedestrian friendly and well lit? Are the building facades and streetscape designs aesthetically pleasing? Are numerous lodging and dining options present throughout the municipality? Does Downtown provide adequate comforts so that the visitor can relax while away from home?

DREAM DESTINATION ASSESSMENT HIERARCHY OF NEEDS



3. Motivational: Does Downtown provide visitors with activities in which to participate? What will move the visitor to get out of their car and get involved? Does Downtown provide a chance to learn, interact with others, and an opportunity for adventure or escape?
4. Memorable: Does Downtown leave the visitor with positive memories? Do visitors repeatedly return to Downtown? Do visitors recommend a visit to Downtown to others? Is there positive word-of-mouth about Downtown?
5. Transformational: If the City meets the aforementioned needs, then they've created a fulfilling experience to the visitor, which will, hopefully, imbue the visitor with not only a valuable rejuvenative experience, but also a new and positive outlook on life. The visitor will want to return to and reconnect with the destination to renew that positive outlook in the future. The visitor will actively seek to bring others and share the rejuvenative experience.

In the case of a visit to a destination like a resort, zoo, or theme park, a single organization manages the tourist experience to ensure a “seamless” experience; one that flows smoothly and consistently from parking and restrooms to attractions, food and shopping without breaks in the brand. People have come to expect this level of product and service. Destination communities would benefit from emulating this model to the degree they can considering the complexity of their destination environment (i.e. multiple tourism product owners and interests). For example, Destination communities can develop organizational structures that support a coordinated aesthetic presentation of Downtown; manage a consistent and unified marketing plan; administer special event planning; and guide businesses toward consistent business standards (e.g. uniform business hours).

Although Destination Assessment focuses on tourism, many of the recommendations promise to improve quality of life for both visitors and residents. Conversely, many of the recommendations in other parts of the overall DREAM Initiative, such as streetscape improvements and traffic management will provide essential infrastructure to support tourism. This synergy of benefits illustrates the key strategy of the Initiative—that an integrated approach to planning and implementation will achieve the best results for Caruthersville.



3rd Street approach to Lady Luck Casino

CURRENT ENVIRONMENT AND ASSESSMENT EXPERIENCE

ASSESSMENT VISIT EXPERIENCE

In September of 2008, the Destination Assessment Team visited Caruthersville, toured the area, visited various attractions, and held a Kick-off Meeting with tourism stakeholders and City officials. The initial reviews were conducted free of influence and without any local representative input. After the first impressions were documented, local opinions were solicited. The Team enjoyed lunch and dinner at local establishments, and then stayed overnight at the Country Hearth hotel near Lady Luck Casino. After the visit, additional research was conducted as the assessment was compiled.

Caruthersville is located in the Bootheel of Missouri in the far southeastern point of the State along the Mississippi River. The agricultural nature of the region is very evident and noticeable after exiting Interstate 55 on State Highway 84 East. This geographic location also makes Caruthersville a short trip from areas such as Dyersburg, Tennessee or Blytheville, Arkansas. The approach to Caruthersville includes expansive views of farms, cotton fields, grain silos, and some Pemiscot Port District buildings along the river corridor to the north.

The approach along State Highway 84 is likely more traveled and leads visitors on a four lane road into the heart of Caruthersville, past a mix of businesses and residential areas. The Destination Assessment Team arrived from the North and had no trouble finding where to exit Interstate 55; in large part because of the Lady Luck Casino billboards that ensure a basic awareness of Caruthersville.

As the Team approached the fork of Highway 84 at 3rd Street, also the point where Highway 84 merges with Truman Boulevard, the feel is distinctly agricultural with large equipment lining the highway across from a Wal-Mart store. The Team was able to follow 3rd Street through the intersection, however, a directional sign at this location would have made the Team more confident that it was headed for Downtown. This intersection is a key decision point for visitors and should project an inviting, easy to navigate image. The first impression a visitor has of a destination is typically a lasting impression, and Downtown Caruthersville's image begins at this point.



Once on 3rd Street there is a short stretch past the car dealer and Armory where there is no confirmation or demarcation that the driver is headed in the right direction. Until the streetscape elements of the trees, brick pavers, and lighting takes shape, the approaching visitor likely thinks they are headed for a more industrialized area as the buildings in this area tend to be larger, farther from the street, and of low quality. Reassuring signage should exist all along this route. The impression of Caruthersville along the 3rd Street approach is a little rough around the edges before reaching the streetscape area.

The Team continued along 3rd Street, past the handsome General John Riggs Veteran's Park and Monument and through the intersection with Ward Street. Eventually the team reached the casino and hotel. There was no real sense of when the team was in the center of Downtown. Ward and 3rd Street is a key intersection, yet there is no real gathering place or public parking area. There is some signage indicating the Mississippi River accessibility, but overall the streetscape features beckon the visitor onward to the casino, although it is located well East of the Downtown core.

The Destination Assessment Team left the casino and drove back toward Downtown, noticing the potential of the riverfront park area. As the Team enjoyed a short drive through Reynolds Park, it noted that it was mostly empty and appeared unused by the community. Yet this park provides better recreational access to the Mississippi River than most other communities in the State enjoy.

The grain elevator makes a big visual statement on the riverfront and Downtown. While the drying fans can be quite loud, overall the Team saw the location of the elevator as a positive that communicated part of the story and heritage of Caruthersville; almost like a monument. This raised questions as to how this facility could be used to attract and serve visitors.

As the Destination Assessment Team continued to explore, they noted there were signs of streetscape improvements and building renovations, although there were many empty storefronts, deteriorated side and rear facades, and boarded-up buildings. Existing streetscape improvements were poorly maintained and the surrounding residential buildings were greatly deteriorated overall.

Sparse activity was noted on the streets of Downtown. The area has an open feeling with much of the main building stock, and therefore the activity, located to the South along Ward Street nearer the Pemiscot County Courthouse. There were not many places where visitors can rest and buy general goods or obtain tourist information about Caruthersville. Making these amenities available is a basic need for all visitors.



Reynolds Park & Mississippi River Access

Caruthersville has local events that may appeal to visitors. The Meat on the Mississippi BBQ Contest provides a wider regional draw in the summer months. This event is sanctioned by the Kansas City Barbecue Society and promoted nationally. Meat on the Mississippi also attracts BBQ fans and cooks to the region, drawing from nearby Memphis, Tennessee. The “Memphis in May International Festival World Championship Barbecue Cooking Contest” attracts fans to the region and Caruthersville’s festival benefits from this attention.

Seeking local flavor the Destination Assessment Team found a satisfying lunch and friendly atmosphere, albeit outside of the DREAM Study Area boundary, at the Roundhouse. The presence of police cars in front helped make this decision as one supported by locals “in-the-know”. There is a limited variety of shops and restaurants in Downtown Caruthersville, although the merchants that are there are quite friendly. Most establishments seem to be service oriented and there is a sizeable, prominent outdoor recreation store called “The Grizzly Jig”. This store impressed the Team as a unique anchor shopping destination for men that creates a more broadly appealing Downtown retail environment.

The tour of the City revealed considerable damage still existing from the 2006 tornado, including the high school, middle school, and many homes and businesses. Along with the abandoned FEMA site South of the casino, visitors to the City and Downtown would see many problems and potentially develop negative opinions. However, not all ills can be blamed on the devastating 2006 storm as much of the deterioration noted appears to have been occurring over many years.



Meat on the Mississippi BBQ Contest



Grizzly Jig

The Lady Luck Casino provides games of chance, a restaurant, and an RV park and is the only casino between St. Louis, Missouri and Tunica, Mississippi. An afternoon visit to the Casino found quite a few patrons, demonstrating the importance of the attraction as a driver of Downtown activity. The Casino, coupled with the nearby Country Hearth Inn, provides an attractive, safe, setting for gamers.



The only adequate lodging option in Caruthersville appears to be the locally owned, Country Hearth Inn. Discussions with the friendly hotel staff were lively and extremely helpful. Hotel staff indicated that they felt there were many travelers who stopped in Caruthersville on the way to or from St. Louis and that, while they didn't come to Caruthersville for the Casino, most of the hotel guests did use the Casino or its restaurant once they were there.

The Team felt that the hotel itself was lacking in finer amenities, but that Downtown lodging was a real asset for the community. The walk into Downtown from the Casino area was only a few blocks, but either required a walk through vacant property to reach the Riverfront Trail or a walk past dilapidated structures and vacant lots to reach Ward Street.



Lady Luck Casino

There are other buildings in the City that appear to have once been hotels but are now severely dilapidated. There were no obvious bed and breakfasts, but one was rumored soon to be opening along 3rd Street.

The tour of the City concluded with a review of the Interstate Highways surrounding and approaching Caruthersville. From all directions the Team saw little if any signage directing visitors to the Downtown. In addition, each of the three main routes felt industrial or residential and lacked a vibrant, welcoming retail feel that a visitor would be seeking.



Country Hearth Inn

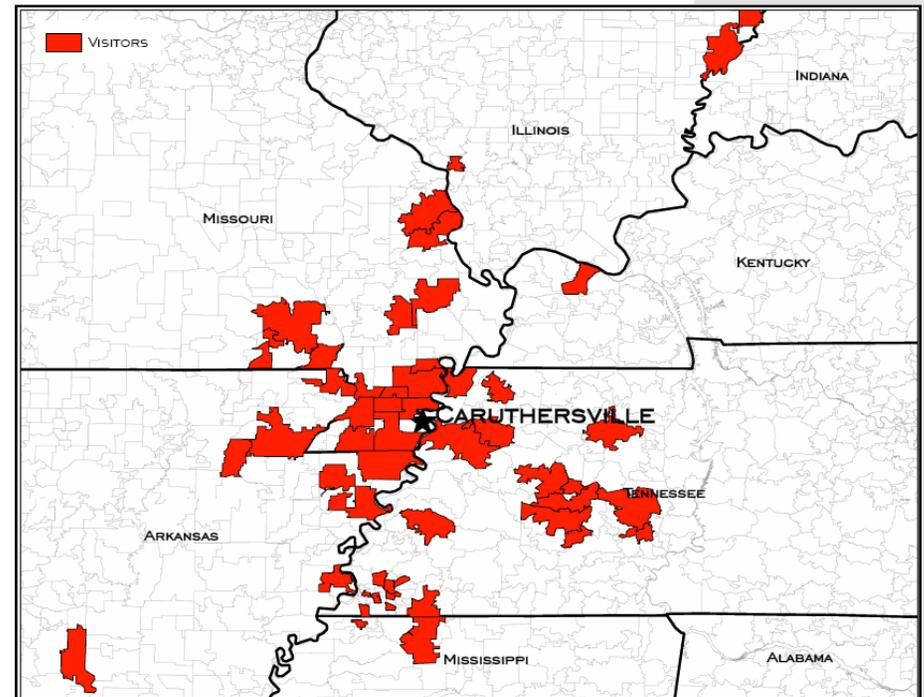
VISITOR PROFILE

In the summer, fall, and winter of 2008, UNICOM-ARC coordinated with the City of Caruthersville to conduct a visitor's survey in Downtown Caruthersville using volunteers to conduct the survey. The results of this survey are available as a full report as specified by the DREAM Initiative.

Two-hundred and six, (206), interviews were completed by visitors from various zip codes surrounding Caruthersville. Caruthersville residents were excluded from taking the survey as this was to be a visitor's survey. **Figure 1** demonstrates the geographic location of the respondents. The following overview provides some of the survey information to help identify Caruthersville visitor trends.

- 77.6% of the respondents indicated they were staying overnight in Caruthersville
 - ◊ 47.8% were staying in a hotel/motel/bed & breakfast in Caruthersville
 - ◊ 32.6% were staying with family or friends
 - ◊ 19.6% were staying at a campground/RV park
- 86.8% had visited Downtown Caruthersville before
- About 57% of respondents indicated they visit Downtown Caruthersville more than once a month
- Respondents indicated they most often visit Downtown for:
 - ◊ A special event (48%)
 - ◊ Casino (39.8%)
 - ◊ Nightlife/entertainment (20.4%)
- Only 8.3% of respondents indicated they most often visit Downtown for dining
- 94.1% found it easy to find their way around Downtown Caruthersville.
- 70.4% found the Downtown parking convenient.

**Figure 1: Visitor Survey
Respondent Zip Code Map**



- 41.8% found the Downtown business hours inconvenient, and 26.9% found the hours very inconvenient.
- 8.5% of the respondents felt unsafe during the day, and 26% of the respondents felt unsafe at night.
- The top kinds of businesses that respondents indicated would make them more likely to visit Downtown are:
 - ◇ 64.1% - Chose a restaurant option (Family, Fine, Outdoor)
 - ◇ 41.3% - Chose an event option (Special, Arts, Children's, Family, Teens, Music)
 - ◇ 26.7% - Bars/nightlife
- The other kinds of businesses that respondents said might make them more likely to visit Downtown are:
 - ◇ 45.1% - More retail shops
 - ◇ 36.9% - A specialty food store (soda fountain/ice cream, coffee shop, bakery, tea room)
 - ◇ 19.4% - Clothing stores
 - ◇ 12.1% - Book store
 - ◇ 11.2% - Gift shop
- The top responses for physical improvements respondents think would make Downtown more appealing are:
 - ◇ 45.1% - Better maintained buildings
 - ◇ 32% - Cleaner
 - ◇ 26.2% - Renovation of historic buildings
 - ◇ 18.9% - Benches/more green space
 - ◇ 14.1% - More/better lighting

REACHING DESTINATION POTENTIAL

Downtown Caruthersville faces many challenges, in addition to those related to reaching its potential as a destination. The community is still recovering from the 2006 tornado and has pressing issues in the areas of educational services and residential quality. The City and other leadership is working diligently to address these concerns and continues to provide the residents of Caruthersville adequate services. As all services improve, the City can build on its key destination assets of the casino, a solid corridor of historic buildings, and a large, accessible riverfront park.

Caruthersville can reach its destination potential by implementing a number of strategic improvements recommended in this report. Addressing basic needs of visitors (Functional and Comfortable) and coordinating existing resources can help Downtown Caruthersville reassert its position as the center of local and regional life for surrounding residents.

The goal of an effective tourism strategy is to develop compelling attractions that will draw visitors from far enough away that they will stay overnight in the community. This distance is typically 50 miles. The overnight visitor will generally spend more money than other types of visitors. The strategies noted below were developed through the contemplation of an overnight visitor's point-of-view.

MARKETING

SUGGESTED POSITIONING: "Heart of the Bootheel"

Caruthersville leaders admit that there has been no concentrated marketing effort for the City or Downtown. A old slogan branded Caruthersville as the "Birthplace of the Bootheel". This statement is still used, although the Team could only find one example. The historical accuracy conveyed by this statement is important as Caruthersville is where much of the shipments of timber originated when the Missouri Bootheel was cleared and drained.

Caruthersville would benefit from developing a clear positioning statement that includes the Bootheel history and can serve as the foundation for destination marketing, product development, and overall economic development. The current City website includes the following statement, "Caruthersville is a small community with a big heart." The idea of a big heart reflects the community's ability to endure for more than 170 years, despite natural



Downtown Caruthersville

disasters. The concept of “heart” speaks to the warm, caring nature of the City’s residents. And arguably, with its location at the intersection of I-55 and the I-155 connection to Tennessee, Caruthersville lies at the heart of the Bootheel. “Heart” is often used in community slogans, but in Caruthersville’s case the community is more than prepared to back-up that marketing promise.

As such, Caruthersville should consider a positioning such as *“Heart of the Bootheel.”* The concept speaks to the various meanings of the word “heart” and reinforces the DREAM premise of reestablishing Downtowns as the focal point of the community. If Downtown is the heart, even visitors to surrounding attractions and natural areas would have a reason to visit. Caruthersville could use the phrase as marketing slogan, guidepost for planning and development, and as a rallying cry for citizens and destination stakeholders.

The City will need to make investments Downtown in enhancements such as the streetscape, park development, and wayfinding, as well as encourage or ensure that underused buildings are maintained if not occupied, dilapidated buildings are removed, and existing residents and businesses maintain their property. As Downtown Caruthersville gradually grows more ready to meet the needs of visitors, the slogan can support a strategy that communicates unique benefits and Downtown will be ready to deliver on its marketing promise.



COORDINATE THE POSITIONING STATEMENT

Caruthersville could begin using the *“Heart of the Bootheel”* slogan immediately to establish it in the minds of the community, but it is not currently in a position to market its Downtown as a destination to the region. The Lady Luck Casino has its own marketing program and attracts significant visitation. The Country Hearth Inn, with its own marketing, complements the casino and attracts visitors in its own right for family reunions and other activities. Therefore, initial Downtown marketing efforts should focus on capturing some of the visitors to these attractions through on-site signage and wayfinding. Caruthersville, working with the casino and hotel, should develop a coordinated marketing effort that is integrated across all communications such as the website and advertising. Funding for marketing can come from lodging and gaming taxes collected and may be applicable to the salary of a new marketing person. In addition, the hotel and casino should be encouraged to include the civic brand in their marketing materials.

Missouri has several agencies that could potentially help Caruthersville achieve its goals. The Division of Tourism can provide technical assistance with the website. Missouri Arts Council can advise on development and promotion of Arts-based programs. Missouri Department of Conservation could assist in development of programs to encourage participation in hunting and fishing.

PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS

IMPROVE SIGNAGE AND WAYFINDING

It is important that Caruthersville establish a sense of place, define the Downtown boundaries, and differentiate the Caruthersville brand from other cities. Caruthersville could achieve this by communicating simple, clear signage and wayfinding, which is a basic functional need that will provide direction to the Downtown and featured attractions, events, and amenities. A coordinated system can improve communication and eliminate confusing visual clutter of non-coordinated signs. Signage also reinforces a sense of place and brand once visitors arrive in the Downtown. The visual style of the graphics can project an attitude that reflects the aspirations of the community.

In addition to attractive signage leading to Downtown, a wayfinding signage system should be incorporated within Downtown to allow easy navigation among major Downtown attractions. Major visual and environmental elements already exist such as the water tower, river, and casino that aid in navigation. Additional wayfinding should be flexible and modular in design to allow for modifications and ease of maintenance. The system should also incorporate elements of the civic brand *"Heart of the Bootheel."* and extend this concept from the interstate into and through Downtown.

IMPROVE STREETScape AND BUILDINGS

First impressions make for lasting impressions, and the first impression of Downtown will be the streetscape and buildings. There are several building and infrastructure projects currently occurring in Downtown and these efforts should be encouraged and expanded to provide visitors and residents with a more pleasant experience.

The existing streetscape should be improved and attention paid to wayfinding, sidewalk repair, benches, lighting, and landscaping; all of which must also be maintained properly. Improving these elements of comfort will enhance a visitor's first impression as well as the



Wayfinding Signage
(Webster Groves, Missouri)

whole Downtown experience for visitors and residents. Caruthersville has begun to expand the existing streetscape improvements along Ward Avenue and should continue this effort with a concerted effort to maintain the appearance. This public investment, if properly maintained, will send a message of encouragement to potential private investors and create an increasingly more desirable destination.

Caruthersville's historic architecture is an important asset and the City should make every effort to protect the character of Downtown. An existing revolving loan fund program can be used to assist property owners in improving their façades and the City should search for other avenues to supplement this effort. Additionally, empty storefronts should be filled with civic displays, merchandise, or art. Efforts to acquire dilapidated buildings in the area either for restoration or, in extreme cases, demolition should be pursued.

ADD VISITOR CENTER TO DOWNTOWN

Given its history and the challenges its residents have overcome, Caruthersville has many compelling survival stories to tell. These stories can be a verbal memorial told in the residents own words that can capture the imaginations of visitors and instill pride in the City's residents. The telling of a human story during a catastrophic event, similar to recent national exhibits concerning the passengers of the Titanic, can connect with a visitor in a very emotional way. A Visitor Center located within walking distance of the riverfront, casino, and hotel could become the foundation of a very meaningful visitor experience that revolves around the stories of the residents of Caruthersville.

The high-level of visibility of the Exchange Building at 3rd and Ward Streets could make it an ideal site for a Visitor Center, which could include exhibits that tell the stories of Caruthersville. This location is at a transition from the Downtown to the riverfront park and the casino.

Nearby the Exchange Building is a site where a potential River Heritage Museum project may be developed. The museum, should it be established, may be another location for a Visitor Center, but it should be well-marked and separated from the operations of the museum. This combination could be very effective in telling the stories of the City and how the river shaped the heritage of Caruthersville. Exhibits, theatres, and live interpretations could describe the link between the City and the river and outside exhibits could include references to the grain elevator and port district. Other stories could



Existing Streetscape in Downtown Caruthersville



Potential Visitor Center: Exchange Building

revolved around cotton, catfish, riverboats, early settlers, and the natural histories of the New Madrid Fault, tornados, and floods.

The Visitor Center, whether housed in the Museum or on its own, should provide meeting space and both indoor and outdoor activities. Caruthersville is known for its outdoor recreational opportunities and this center could become an important place for visitors to meet and launch their hunting or camping expeditions. In addition, information from the Visitor Center should be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week with brochures made available outside the Center when it is closed.

DEVELOP A BETTER LINK BETWEEN THE CASINO AND WARD STREET

The casino and hotel attract many visitors to the City, but the current condition of the three blocks between the casino and Ward Street do not create an inviting linkage to entice guests to walk from one attraction to the other. Pedestrian friendliness is one of the key benefits a Downtown can offer when compared to other types of shopping. The possibilities to create this linkage exist along 3rd Street and as an extension of the river walk trail that winds through Reynolds Park.

Most of the property on the river side of 3rd Street is vacant and what residences remain are in poor condition. Removal or improvement of these residences can greatly enhance the appeal of the corridor. Utilizing the Exchange Building as a Visitor Center would begin the process of linking the casino to Downtown Caruthersville. The open areas remaining are prime for development, but should be more fully utilized and presented as park land. Currently, they provide a “vacant” feel, which is just as uninviting as a dilapidated building. The City should create picnic areas, pavilions, a band stand, and an inviting area for families to play and relax.

The south side of 3rd Street has many houses that make a good impression and reinforce the small-town character of Caruthersville. The City should encourage and work with property owners to maintain and improve these properties as ambassadors of the community. An alternative use of these homes could include “Bed and Breakfast” lodging or boutique retail—adaptive re-use with preservation of the small-town character.

EXPAND REYNOLDS PARK

Reynolds Park provides access to the Mississippi River and the ability to accommodate events. The park contains a walking trail, but expanding that trail to the casino and through the Downtown could provide a scenic pedestrian connection for visitors. A trail route can be



Walking Trail in Reynolds Park

developed Downtown, in conjunction with the Visitor Center and/or River Heritage Museum, by the addition of clear signage or painted trail elements that pedestrians can identify with the “river route” as they stroll through the streets. Such an expansion might also allow for biking and other outdoor recreational activities to occur both within the park and throughout Downtown.

The addition of historical and educational exhibit markers within Reynolds Park could illustrate the history and events surrounding the Mississippi River. The Park is an ideal location to foster growth in outdoor activities and experiences through the use of interactive exhibits, storytellers, or performers. The Mississippi River provides a unique opportunity to demonstrate activities that were important to Caruthersville’s heritage. These markers and exhibits could line the walking trail. In addition, exhibits like a small-scale replica of a riverboat in the park could give visitors and children a unique setting for play and relaxation.

A prominent feature of the riverfront area is the grain elevator, located on the northern edge of Reynolds Park. This installation cannot be overlooked as it is visible throughout Downtown. The grain elevator stands as a dramatic monument to Caruthersville’s heritage as a city of river commerce. The exhibits in Reynolds Park that face the grain elevator facility should discuss the process by which grain is received, held, dried, and disbursed by the elevator. A smaller scale elevator might become a playground attraction in the park. The management of the elevator could be approached to assist with developing the Park exhibits and perhaps asked to provide tours around the grounds by appointment.

PROVIDE PUBLIC AMENITIES FOR VISITORS

Access to public restrooms is a basic need and important to creating a seamless experience. This is particularly important when the City holds events in nearby venues such as Reynolds Park or General John Riggs Veteran’s Park. Visitors to special events and festivals require public restroom access in order for the festivals to be successful. Public restrooms can be located in conjunction with the Visitor Center, Future Museum, or a public market. Furthermore, the facilities will provide shelter, a place to rest, and possibly the opportunity to purchase simple conveniences.



Grain Elevator in Downtown Caruthersville

RETAIL AND RETAIL OPERATIONS

LODGING

Caruthersville is fortunate to have a hotel—the Country Hearth Inn—in the Downtown area. The hotel and casino attract visitors and create an opportunity for other businesses. However, some visitors may prefer another lodging option, such as a Bed and Breakfast, that leverages the small-town qualities of the community. The City can encourage investment in alternative lodging by maintaining safe and well-groomed streets and a strong sense of place via visual identity through wayfinding and signage.

COORDINATE DOWNTOWN BUSINESSES AND AREA ACTIVITIES

Caruthersville has the start of a diverse mix of attractions and character that make it a unique destination; however these attractions must work in concert in order to be successful. A simple way to improve the integration is through increased coordination of visitor-oriented retailers, service providers, attractions, and event activities. It is important that all businesses in Caruthersville work together to provide visitors with a seamless experience. Improved communication and coordination can help retailers and attractions develop similar hours of operation to encourage visitors to extend their stay, while better meeting visitors' needs.

IMPROVE RETAIL OPERATIONS

Retailers should modify or expand their product offerings to address the needs of visitors, taking into account both basic needs and higher needs. Particular attention should be paid to the specific visitor type being targeted and their corresponding needs. Additionally, providing attractive displays and coordinating themes and hours of operation will help create a positive shopping experience. Merchants should also attempt to stay open later than 5:00 p.m. With the business travelers likely at work and other visitors exploring the surrounding environs, there is truly little for visitors to do in Caruthersville after daylight hours. The coordination of the variety of activities, shops, and restaurants will help to create a critical mass of activities and encourage more visitors to come Downtown.

OTHER

IMPROVE ATTRACTIONS FOR OUTDOOR SPORTSMEN

Caruthersville can leverage its topography and reputation by promoting its superior opportunities for duck and waterfowl hunting. The area is already known for hunting and fishing opportunities. Coordination with local property

owners, investment in facilities, and proper promotion of outdoor opportunities could generate a thriving industry for sportsmen such as members of the national "Ducks Unlimited" waterfowl group. Similar efforts could promote Mississippi River fishing.

If Downtown can attract more businesses such as The Grizzly Jig and other places for sportsmen to eat, the synergy between these types of businesses and the existing hotel and casino can create an atmosphere which satisfies many visitor needs at different times of the day. Although outdoor recreational activities do not directly drive Downtown visitation, they can attract new visitors to the area and provide opportunities for Downtown restaurants, shops, and lodging.

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APPENDIX A
INVENTORY OF ATTRACTIONS

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Inventory of Attractions - Caruthersville		
Type of Attraction	Name of Attraction	Comments
Parks and Recreation	Caruthersville Recreation Center	A 38,000 square foot structure. Houses an indoor Olympic-size swimming pool, gymnasium, two racquetball courts, weight room, indoor track, locker rooms, sauna, activity room, meeting room and kitchen.
	Caruthersville Sports Complex	Consists of 4 baseball fields, a batting cage, and a large concession area in the center of the complex. It is used for a variety of activities throughout the year. The complex hosts 3 tournaments a year, and has a pitching machine, a minor league, and a little league tournament. When baseball and softball seasons are over the Sports Complex is used for soccer.
	Swimming Pools	Caruthersville Country Club (Private)
		Neptune Club (Private)
		Caruthersville Recreation Center (Public)
	French Park	Located on the east side of town. Park has playground equipment, a softball field, picnic tables, basketball courts, covered picnic pavilion, and a walking track.
	England Park	Dedicated to Col. John England, World War II Ace of Caruthersville. Located on Hwy U on the west side of town. The park has playground equipment, a picnic pavilion, a public 9-hole golf course, and Kiwanis baseball field.
	Reynolds Park	Located on the Mississippi River. Park has picnic tables with plenty of shade for an afternoon picnic. A river access boat ramp is also available for launching pleasure boats.
	General John Riggs Veterans Park	Located west of City Hall on Third Street. Named in honor of a local resident who joined the Army after completing Caruthersville High School in 1964. Purpose of this park is to provide a place where residents and tourists can visit to show appreciation, gratitude and respect for those who served and continue to serve in the Armed Forces of the United States of America during times of war and peace. A Huey helicopter is located in the center of the park surrounded by benches commemorating various wars and branches of service. Monuments in the rear of park honor Veterans of all branches of service.
	Riverwalk	This one-mile walking trail links Reynolds Park, the Historic Water Tower and Veterans Park. Walkway is well-lit with benches and river viewing areas.

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Inventory of Attractions - Caruthersville

Type of Attraction	Name of Attraction	Comments
Golf Course	Caruthersville Golf Association	Public; 9-hole
Arts & Entertainment	Casino Lady Luck	Riverboat gaming with over 600 slot machines, a variety of table games and poker tables. Host to numerous live entertainment acts. Also home to a restaurant and several bars. The only casino between St. Louis, MO and Tunica, MS.
	Little Prairie Players	Theatre troupe providing live performances at the Armory.
	Acting Out Childrens Theatre	Provides childrens theatre performances at the Armory.

Inventory of Attractions		
Type of Attraction	Name of Attraction	Comments
PEMISCOT COUNTY ATTRACTIONS		
Scenic Wilderness	Black Island Conservation Area	Located in Pemiscot County. This 2,086-acre area is enrolled in the Wetland Reserve Program and wetland development will occur within the next two years. Fishing and waterfowl hunting by boat only when the Mississippi River water level is at or above 30 feet on the Caruthersville Gauge.
	Gayoso Bend Conservation Area	Located in Pemiscot County north of Caruthersville. It encompasses 968 acres of forestland, including 125 acres of wooded sloughs. Area may be accessed by Mississippi River. Fishing opportunities for catfish, crappie, carp, buffalo, white bass and sauger. Hunting opportunities include deer, waterfowl and some small game. Camping permitted
	John L. and Georgia Girvin Conservation Area	Located in Pemiscot and New Madrid east of Portageville. This 747-acre forested conservation area is accessible by boat from the Mississippi River. Walk-in and backpack camping permitted. Fishing opportunities include catfish, crappie, carp, buffalo, white bass and sauger. Hunting opportunities include deer, rabbit, waterfowl, turkey and small game.
	Little River Conservation Area	Located in Pemiscot and Dunklin Counties, 4 miles east of Kennett. This 1,013-acre area consists of wetlands, croplands, the Jerry P. Combs Lake and grassland. Boat ramp and dock available. Fishing opportunities include bass, catfish, crappie, sunfish and carp. Hunting opportunities include dove, quail, rabbit, and waterfowl.
	Triangle Boat Club Access	Located in Pemiscot County. Boat ramp access to Boat Club Chute and the Mississippi River. Fishing opportunities include catfish, crappie, buffalo, carp, white bass and sauger.
	Twin Borrow Pits Conservation Area	Located in Pemiscot County 1 mile west of the Mississippi River. The area contains 2, small, fishable lakes (10 acres total). Fishing opportunities include catfish, crappie, carp, and buffalo. Waterfowl hunting is permitted.
	Wolf Bayou Conservation Area	Located in Pemiscot County. The 276-acre area primarily consists of bottomland forest. Facilities and features include a boat ramp, Wolf Bayou (45 fishable acres) and Wolf Bayou Natural area. Good place to canoe. Fishing opportunities include bass, catfish, crappie, carp and buffalo. Archery deer and waterfowl hunting permitted.

Inventory of Attractions		
Type of Attraction	Name of Attraction	Comments
PEMISCOT COUNTY ATTRACTIONS		
Rivers and Lakes		Pemiscot County offers many fishing and recreational opportunities through the following water areas:
		· Big Lake
		· Half Moon Lake
		· Pemiscot Bayou Lake
		· Cushion Lake
		· Robinson Lake
	· Williams Chute	
Family Entertainment	Movie Gallery	Caruthersville
	The Money Ball	Arcade games and Pool.
Higher Education Centers	Pemiscot County Vocational School (Hayti, MO)	School will prepare the student for an entry level position in a technical career. Class offerings include Automotive Technology, Agriculture Management and Business, Culinary Arts/Institutional, Health Occupations (CNA), Industrial Electronics and Cisco Networking Academy, Welding Technology and the Pemiscot County Vocational School of Practical Nursing (LPN).

Inventory of Attractions		
Type of Attraction	Name of Attraction	Comments
BOOTHEEL MISSOURI ATTRACTIONS		
Scenic Wilderness	Morris State Park	The 161-acre park is a feature along Crowley's Ridge Parkway, a scenic byway consisting of a 42-mile route that starts at the Dunklin-Stoddard County line on Highway 25 and runs south to Malden. The park offers a two-mile loop trail that extends through a large portion of Crowley's Ridge, taking visitors to the lowest point of the park. The trail also passes near the park's predominant geologic feature, a very large soil exposure, which depicts the natural erosion of the alluvial soil. A restroom, parking area and interpretive kiosks are available at the park.
Rivers and Lakes	Reelfoot Lake (Lake County, TN)	Reelfoot Lake located just 30 minutes away offers some of the finest crappie fishing in the world.
	St. Francis River	Originates in St. Francois County Missouri and flows down through the Mark Twain National Forest and through several counties before leaving Missouri. Perfect for those with intermediate or higher level whitewater skills. Runs can be made year-round in canoes, kayaks and rafts, weather permitting.
	Lake Wappapello	Over 44,000 acres of public lands and water, which welcome hunting, fishing, swimming, boating, camping and picnicking. Host to several annual special events, as well as trails, Visitor Center exhibits and various programs.
Higher Education Centers	Cotton Boll Vocational and Technical School (Burdette, AR)	Vocational training center offering a variety of programs including Licensed Practical/ Vocational Nurse Training.
	Kennett Area Vocational Technical School (Kennett, MO)	Vocational training center for secondary, adults, and post-secondary students. Includes The Kennett School of Practical Nursing.

Inventory of Events		
Annual Events	Name of Event	Date
	Chamber of Commerce Annual Awards Banquet	February
	Arts Council Membership Drive	February
	Caruthersville High School Cotton Blossom	March
	Caruthersville Nutrition Center Chili Supper	March
	Healthy Heart A Thon Health & Safety Day	March
	RSVP Auction	April
	White Glove Gala Ladies Night Out Special Auction with a Twist	April
	Relay for Life	May
	Post 88 Recognition of WW II , Korean War and Vietnam Vets	May
	Saturday in the Park	May
	B & I Golf Tournament	May
	Meat on the Mississippi	June
	American Legion Post 88 American Red Cross Blood Drive	August
	Chili Cook-off	October
	Chamber of Commerce Membership Drive	November
	Christmas Parade	December
	Kiwanis Chili Day	December
	Arts Council's Tour of Homes	December