

February 16, 2009

## **As spring nears, tourism-related businesses in Brainerd won't let the economy dampen area's summer fun**

BRAINERD, Minn. – As snow begins to melt and the lakes open up, the Brainerd Lakes Area starts its annual transformation into one of the Upper Midwest's top vacation destinations, which is no easy feat at a time when a dismal economy is causing families to cut back on travel costs.

Brainerd Lakes Area lodging properties and other businesses that rely on tourism are heading into this vacation season optimistic that they'll benefit from a national trend that shows families vacationing closer to home in these uncertain economic times. "Staycations" are becoming more commonplace, making areas like Brainerd more attractive and affordable for families in the five-state region.

For the cost-conscious traveler, springtime is an excellent time to vacation in the Brainerd Lakes Area. Resorts, shops and other tourism-dependant businesses that go dormant in the winter come to life in the spring as the entire area begins to gear up for the summer tourism season by passing along springtime savings to early birds.

Spring visitors get a jump on the activities and recreational features that are opening for the season. For example, the area's golf courses open in April and reward golfers with discounted early-season green fees. Springtime is the optimal time for birding, where it's not unusual to identify 70-90 birds a day. Bike trails open up for those who want to take advantage of cool temperatures while enjoying the sites, sounds and smells of spring. Anglers can enjoy excellent fishing for panfish or take advantage of the walleye opener in May. And as the lakes open, canoeing, kayaking and boating opportunities become available.

"Springtime is a great time in the Brainerd Lakes Area," Tourism Director Gretchen Ennis said. "The area is busy in the winter, but it really picks up in the spring as businesses open and everyone is excited to welcome guests to the area. And we firmly believe that we'll have another great summer, even with an unfavorable economy. People are changing how and where they're vacationing, but they're still vacationing."

Ennis says the Brainerd Lakes Area has become a very popular stop for group tours because of the diverse selection of attractions and activities that can suit just about any group's demographic, interest and spending limits. "Area adventures" are pre-planned trips based on specific themes or interests such as the Need for Speed Tour, Going Green Tour, Creative with Crafts Tour and Find Paul Tour. They are great ways to experience the area with groups of any size and for any duration.

Groups or families can find that the Brainerd Lakes Chamber is an excellent resource for planning a family vacation, group tour or area adventure. Contact the Chamber first at 1-800-450-2838 or [www.explorebrainerdlakes.com](http://www.explorebrainerdlakes.com). The new 2009 Visitors Guide is now available as well.

Below are some of the Brainerd Lakes Area's spring events and activities:

- **Gull Lake Frozen Fore**, Feb. 28-Mar. 1 – Nine Gull Lake resorts and restaurants team up to test participants’ winter golfing skills as they host one of the nine holes in this crazy winter fundraiser. Each business hosts a single hole, which may or may not even resemble golfing. In the past, some more closely resembled hockey, bowling and even basketball. It’s great fun for the whole family, which can drive or snowmobile between holes or take a free shuttle.
  
- **Polar Bear Plunge**, March 7, Breezy Point Resort – This Special Olympics fundraiser brings out the zany side of more than 200 crazies who are willing to don wacky outfits and jump into frozen Pelican Lake. It’s a fantastic cause and a great spectator event (free).
  
- **9<sup>th</sup> Annual Downtown Brainerd St. Patrick’s Day Parade**, March 14 – Everyone’s Irish on St. Patrick’s Day in downtown Brainerd. This annual tradition includes a parade, costume contest, a medallion hunt, lots of food and fun. A great family event.
  
- **35<sup>th</sup> Annual St. Patrick’s Day Parade & Celebration**, March 14 – Crosslake’s annual St. Patrick’s Day celebration includes a parade, treasure hunt and lots of reasons to be Irish for the day. A great family event.
  
- **Birding** – Many bird species are migrating in May, making for prime bird watching in the Lakes Area, which is one of the top birding destinations in the country. Home to 313 regular species of birds and six of the top 12 most coveted species by bird watchers, this area attracts bird watchers from throughout the world. It’s not unusual for them to identify 70-90 species in a day.
  
- **Fishing** – With 465 clear, hard-bottomed lakes with very healthy fish populations, the Brainerd Lakes Area is a popular destination among anglers of all ages in the spring. The May walleye opener is a rite of passage for many families, with traditions that can span many generations. After ice-out, panfish and crappies are very active.

A comprehensive list of activities and events is available by visiting the Brainerd Lakes Chamber Web site. Lodging and golf specials and packages are available on the property’s or golf course’s individual Web site; some are featured on the chamber’s Web site as well.

**Note: Contact PR Coordinator Geoff Gorvin at 218-821-9513 or 218-829-2838 for more information or photos.**