

Economic Development Insight

Goose Pond Stimulates Tourism

This week, I enjoyed the excitement of a number of news reporters from Indianapolis television stations being drawn to the Goose Pond to cover the recent sightings of the delightful pink Roseate Spoonbill.

At the first hint of an unusual sighting, birdwatchers from throughout Indiana and nearby states dropped everything they were doing and hurriedly made their way to Goose Pond before the bird flew off. This kind of news will pique the interest of birdwatchers nationwide and internationally. These hobbyists typically spend more per capita when they travel than many other kinds of tourists, so it's the kind of visitor we want to attract and encourage to stay as long as possible in Greene County.

It seems that some residents, especially those who have seen the Goose Pond evolve from wetlands into farmland and then restored back to wetlands again, don't seem to appreciate how valuable a feature it is. Although there are now a couple of larger wetlands in other states, when the restoration of Goose Pond was started, it was the largest and most ambitious to date.

I remember standing in the Northwest section of the Goose Pond with Brad Feaster, Biologist and Goose Pond Property Manager, Indiana Department of Natural Resources, and Dr. Lee Sterrenburg, frequently referred to as "birdwatcher extraordinaire," some time in the Spring of 2008. We had discussed how wonderful it will be, once we've had some good rains and there is water throughout the entire Goose Pond area.

Now we have, and it is, and we're not the only ones to notice. The birds are attracted to the water as the sunlight is reflected from the water's surface back into the sky. They land, looking for food with which to replenish before continuing their journey, either to their native mating ground or warmer climates. Having this 'stopping' spot ensures they get where they're going in a healthy, more strong condition. Plus, the number and variety of birds is increasing.

All of this is excellent progress aids the ongoing efforts to develop the tourism industry throughout Greene County. Once a visitor is here, it's easier to keep them here if we give them multiple and varied opportunities to experience our community and culture.

Something must be working because a number of locals who travel through the Goose Pond area frequently have noticed and commented on the abundance of birds and the birdwatchers pulled over on the side of the road with their expensive and elaborate equipment, hoping to catch a glimpse (or perhaps even a photo) of a bird rarely, if ever, seen in Indiana before.

We don't necessarily have to understand this phenomenon, or the avidness and intensity of the bird-watching enthusiast, we just have to capitalize on Goose Pond's ability to draw visitors here. Tourists are tourists, no matter what draws them here in the first place. We just need to learn how to appreciate them and encourage them to stay longer and come back, preferably with friends.

Joan Bethell is the executive director at Greene County Economic Development Corporation and can be reached at (812) 847-4500 or jbethell@gcedc.us