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(Neb.) - Gov. Heineman Proclaims See Nebraska Week, Announces 2012 Nebraska Passport

By: John Thayer Posted at: 04/30/2012 02:17 PM

2012 Passport highlights 80 stops on 10 special interest tours

LINCOLN - Gov. Dave Heineman today kicked off *See Nebraska Week* by announcing the 2012 Nebraska Passport program which promotes opportunities for summer travel across the state. The Governor declared May 5-12 as *See Nebraska Week* and highlighted vacation and travel options for travelers throughout Nebraska.

"The 2012 Passport's 80 unique stops highlight many of the great attractions that make our state an exciting place to explore," said Gov. Heineman. "Travelers will find that their lodging, dining and entertainment dollars go further in Nebraska. We encourage Nebraskans and those in surrounding states to get out and explore Nebraska this year."

The 2012 Nebraska Passport program highlights destinations throughout the state. Travelers are encouraged to pick up a souvenir passport at one of 80 participating locations and collect stamps from each location visited to win prizes. Tourists who travel to the featured locations receive a stamp at each stop. At the end of the trip, visitors can send in a tear-out page from the passport. If visitors complete an interest tour, they get a Passport T-shirt. If visitors collect 25 stamps, they get a \$25 GROW Nebraska gift card; and if visitors get 40 stamps, they receive a Canon Powershot digital camera. A grand-prize drawing for an Apple iPad will be held in October.

This is the third year of the passport program which began with 27 stops along the state's scenic byways in 2010. In 2011, it expanded to 33 stops across the entire state. This year's passport has expanded to 80 stops organized into 10 special interest tours: culinary, culture, family fun, festivals, golf, GROW Nebraska, parks, unique accommodations, water adventure and wineries.

The passport promotion highlights destinations including: 51st Annual Wilber Czech Fest, The Prairie Club golf course in Valentine, Sehnert's Bakery & Bieroc Café in McCook, Lake McConaughy Visitor/Water Interpretive Center in Ogallala, High Plains Homestead in Crawford, Pawnee Plunge Water Park in Columbus and Mac's Creek Winery & Vineyards in Lexington.

Other vacation options include historic attractions, opportunities to take in scenic views along scenic byways, waterways and recreational trails, tours of the state's 25 wineries, local festivals and other special events, and farms and ranches offering hunting and other sporting opportunities. Nebraska's eight state parks and 65 state recreation areas provide additional opportunities for outdoor activities.

The tourism and travel industry has an important economic impact on the state. According to the U.S. Travel Association, tourism is the third largest revenue producer behind agriculture and manufacturing, and generates more than \$4 billion a year. Total travel expenditures in Nebraska have increased by more than \$2.4 billion from 1990 to 2011.

According to the Division of Tourism, in 2011, tourism accounted for more than 45,600 jobs statewide in areas including bed and breakfast owners, outfitters that provide canoeing and kayaking along the Niobrara River, taxi drivers, hotel employees, and people who work at attractions around the state from Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo to Minden's Pioneer Village.

Nebraska remains one of the most cost-effective destinations in the nation for travelers. Interactive maps, road trip ideas, trip

planners and more are available online at VisitNebraska.gov. Travelers can find out more about the 2012 Passport at www.nebraskapassport.com and connect with Nebraska Tourism through the Visit Nebraska Facebook page at www.facebook.com/visitnebraska, on Twitter @NebraskaTourism and on YouTube at www.youtube.com/nebraskatourism.