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Don’t expect this county seat to be a hustle and bustle of activity. Instead “Find Us, Lose Yourself” means we want you to relax, unwind and leave feeling refreshed and invigorated. Located in west central Minnesota, Fergus Falls is a beautiful and vibrant community. Healthy in the arts, history and offering an abundance of recreational activities, our location on I-94 makes Fergus Falls easily accessible. And if you’re coming by bicycle, the Central Lakes Bike Trail is an excellent cross-country route. The Otter Tail River meanders through downtown and is a beautiful backdrop for the nearby shops and restaurants. Residents and employers select Fergus Falls for the excellent education, healthcare, infrastructure and sense of community.

The people are our best asset – we know our neighbors, welcome visitors and work together to make Fergus Falls our home. We’re glad you’re here.

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Variety of Learning Thrives in Fergus Falls

by Steve Herriot

Learning has been defined as “time spent in school for the purpose of acquiring knowledge and skills that can be applied in a future workplace.” In the last 30 years, the educational concept of “lifelong learning” has been coined to describe a more self-motivated, voluntary, and ongoing pursuit of knowledge. Lifelong learning can be based in curiosity, competitiveness, personal growth, or professional improvement. It can happen during daily interactions with others or with the world around us.

Also important is the understanding that people have a variety of preferred learning styles in order to be engaged and retain information. People learn from on-the-job training, adult and continuing education, or internet-based learning environments. Many local schools and organizations in Fergus Falls have included the goal of “lifelong learning.”

A great example is the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center (PWLC), which launched a partnership with the school district in 2003 “to engage students in science, math, and through real-world, field-based learning experiences.” Over the years, the Prairie Science Class was formed and formally offered to fourth and fifth graders in the public schools. Curriculum was designed to match state standards, but the learning activities were more engaging than simply sitting at a desk being lectured to. Math might involve measuring the depth or temperature of snow, banding birds and measuring their wingspan, or writing while bundled up in a snowsuit, sitting in a prairie field, observing and reflecting.

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Other lifelong learning opportunities in Fergus Falls include a robust private school spectrum and a plethora of programs, clubs, events, classes, and educational material. In addition, M-State Fergus Falls offers more than 20 degrees and programs.

Wouldn’t that trifecta be a trophy catch?

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FOCUS ON THE “OPENERS”

Everyone loves a good opener and we take pride in the opportunity. The state openers honor sports that hold great tradition, respect and provide economic impact in Minnesota. In 2019, Fergus Falls hosted the MN Governor’s Deer Opener and Otter Tail County hosts the Governor’s Fishing Opener in 2020. We intend to bid on the 2021 Governor’s Pheasant Opener! Wouldn’t that trifecta be a trophy catch?
From "ma and pa" motels to impressive conference hotel properties, it gets down to comfort and great service—and they all deliver. The hotel grid above details the properties and their amenities.

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**Reduce waste at your event!**

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Finding Outdoor Fun in Fergus Falls

by Steve Heriot

Are you an outside person looking for something new to do in the great outdoors? Let’s take a quick look at a few of the many outdoor recreational opportunities available in the Fergus Falls area.

Perhaps you are fascinated by birds? Have you ever wanted to know more about their habits or range, or what their songs might mean? ‘Birding’ is sort of like a scavenger hunt! All you need are a pair of binoculars, a field guide, and a little time to spend outdoors. Fortunately, you’ve come to the right place for bird watching; Fergus Falls is the anchor for the 200-mile Pine to Prairie Birding Trail. The trail stretches north to Warroad, traveling through diverse terrain and habitat. The trail extends another 300 miles north of Minnesota into Manitoba. A trail guide is available at the Chamber of Commerce and can be downloaded online at MNBirdTrail.com.

Fans of mountain biking will be happy to know that Ferber Park offers mountain bike trails, a section of the North Country Scenic Hiking Trail, eight acres of prairie grass and pollinators, and attracts bikers, hikers, bees, birds and butterflies! The trails are open from sunup to sundown, and are located in the northeast corner of the city. It is a primitive park with a few parking spots, a bike rack and information kiosk. More trails are planned for the future.

Have you ever wanted to try disc golf? For a minimum investment in a couple of discs, you can enjoy one of the fastest-growing sports in the United States. According to the Professional Disc Golf Association (PDGA) there are more than 5,000 courses and more than 3,000 PDGA sanctioned tournaments in the U.S. annually. Delagoon Park in Fergus Falls features a scenic, 27-hole course that is moderately hilly and wooded. There are signs at each tee, new rubber tee pads, and sturdy baskets. The course is family-friendly and features long and short tees on every hole. Wetland hazards create a challenging experience on the course, which also meets PDGA standards for sanctioned tournaments. Follow “Delagoon Disc Golf Course” on the UDisc Golf app for tournament information and course updates.

Traditional golf enthusiasts can play the Pebble Lake Golf Course, which offers 18 holes and 6,780 yards of championship golf with rolling terrain, tree-lined fairways, and fast greens. The layout offers multiple challenges, yet has five sets of tees to suit every level of golfer. In addition, the course features a full-service practice facility, pro shop, nostalgic clubhouse with deck, event space and bar.

With 29 official city parks in Fergus Falls there are a variety of spaces to enjoy and places to explore. Built in 1910, Broken Down Dam collapsed in September 1909 and is now a ruin on the Otter Tail River, east of town. Improved trails and parking make access to the site an easy hike from the top. Fishing, swimming and kayaking are popular from the water.

Whether your interests are in fishing, hunting, swimming, boating, hiking, biking, birding, golfing or just relaxing and enjoying the scenery, the Fergus Falls area has countless activities to enjoy in our great outdoors.
People in Fergus Falls know how important organized art and culture are to a community, and especially to its youngest members. Local art and culture develop community identity, eliciting pride and sometimes result in neighborhood revitalization and the beautification of public spaces. Art can educate, bring to light social issues, build connections, and help attract both visitors and new residents to a region. Of utmost importance to a community are the children who will be the adults and decision-makers of the future. Engaging children in creativity at an early age helps inspire them to life's possibilities, stimulate their imaginations, and equip them to be lifelong learners. To that end, local museums, libraries, and arts organizations in Fergus Falls have created programs that develop an appreciation for art and culture in young people.

The goal of the new Otter Cove Children’s Museum is to use open-play and hands-on educational exhibits to nurture creativity, physical activity, creative exploration, and a lifelong love of learning in children to and under. Their mission is to support the optimal development of the region’s children by intentionally creating the environment for abundant play opportunities that launch children’s imaginations, stimulate skill development, and instill a sense of place and purpose that will last a lifetime. The facility features an indoor playground, infant sensory/crawling area, large motor area, miniature downtown exhibits, craft area, toddler playground, and water sensory space.

Art and Culture Is Important for Kids Too

by Steve Heriot

The Otter Tail County Historical Society (OTCHS) is a private, non-profit organization whose purpose is the collection, preservation, and interpretation of Otter Tail County’s history, culture, and heritage. They offer an exhibit gallery, guest artists, educational outreach program, special public programs, archival and object collections, and a genealogical and local history research library. The museum also has a wide variety of educational outreach activities including several dozen museum lesson kits with resources such as photographs, artifacts, historical documents and live demonstrations. New this year are lesson kits tailored to kids on the autism spectrum.

They say you can’t judge a book by its cover. It might also be said that you can’t judge a library by its books, because a library’s value to its community is greater than one would first imagine. The new Fergus Falls Public Library includes an expanded children’s area with an enclosed early learning activity and programming room. Other features include flexible meeting and study rooms, more computer workstations, and a technology instruction area. New sculptural bike racks were locally designed, produced and installed on the library plaza last summer.

Finally, the 412-seat performance theater, A Center for the Arts, provides Fergus Falls with a year round variety of excellent programming such as touring performers, live concerts, community theatre, dance, and visual arts programs. Touring ensembles, as well as a local community theater and dance productions, fill the building with energy and entertainment. Outdoor summer concerts fill the streets with that same energy in partnership with several downtown arts organizations including the Kaddatz Galleries, Springboard for the Arts, Fergus Falls School of Dance and Lake Region Arts Council.
Craft Brew Pubs Pop Up Along the River

It doesn’t take the lazy, hazy days of summer to make an ice-cold, craft beer taste good. And with two new brew pubs along the banks of the Otter Tail River in Fergus Falls, the owners of all three breweries share a sense of community that draws people together.

The current “experienced” owners are Ben and Tessa Schierer of Union Pizza & Brewing Co.; they’ve been open nearly five years. Fergus Brewing and Outstate Brewing both opened last year. In talking with the owners, it’s clear that the dreaming, planning and testing started years ago.

Andy Beck is proud of the Scandinavian feel of the taproom at Fergus Brewing. “Contemporary, clean and warm makes our guests feel comfortable – like they are in someone’s home.” Perched on a hill overlooking the Otter Tail River, this cow rendering plant turned artist studio turned taproom, seats about 60 people and is open Wednesdays through Sundays. The beer garden is bedecked with twinkle lights and outdoor games and will be connected to a wrap-around deck this summer.

You’re right to want to know more about the beer, right? Tommy Velasco, taproom and distribution manager at Fergus Brewing said Beck’s degree in laboratory science and love for flavor, texture and appearance have resulted in a variety of delicious seasonal beers. “We have 10 beers on tap at a time,” said Velasco. “Our smaller capacity means we can change out a tap with a new flavor or style weekly.” Two of the local favorites are the Viking Picnic Lunch (which won first place in the 2019 Craft Beer Tour) and Postman’s Break-fast Oatmeal Stout, so-named in honor of Beck’s dad, Brad Beck (the local postmaster, who passed away last summer). “Two of the local favorites are the Viking Picnic Lunch (which won first place in the 2019 Craft Beer Tour) and Postman’s Break-fast Oatmeal Stout, so-named in honor of Beck’s dad, Brad Beck (the local postmaster, who passed away last summer).”

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Wether grounded firmly on shore, up to your hips in water or safely in a kayak or canoe, the Otter Tail River through Fergus Falls and Otter Tail County promises a memorable fishing experience. There’s no promise about what you’ll catch, but the experiences of these two avid river fishermen can prepare you for a great day on, in, or near the water.

Matt Nelson, an avid kayak fisherman, grew up near the Red River in Fargo. The Otter Tail River flows right into “the Red,” and since Matt discovered it in 2011 it’s quickly become one of his favorite places to spend the day kayaking and fishing. Given that both his nickname (and YouTube Channel) are NDYakAngler (“Yak” for kayak), that’s his preferred way to fish the Otter Tail. But he adds “some spots like dams or bridges - where there’s fast current - will be more easily fished from shore. Even wade fishing is a good option; most of the river is somewhat shallow, and the clear water makes it easy to see what you’re walking into.”

Below the Surface – Fishing the Otter Tail River
by Jean Bowman, photos provided

The Otter Tail River has several dams, and they can be an opportunity. Nelson thinks they are a great place to find fish. They act as a road block for fish migrating upstream so they tend to congregate below them. The eddies beneath the dams, as well as the deeper water and rocky shorelines on the top sides of them, will hold a variety of fish. Otter Tail Power Company owns the dams, but Nelson notes they permit access at several locations, allowing anglers to walk across the top of the dam to access either side of the river.

Luther Aadland, a river scientist in the DNR River Ecology Unit, has fished the Otter Tail River for 30 years. Lake Sturgeon, Smallmouth Bass and Catfish are prevalent in the river. “My best trips are downstream of Orwell Dam where Channel Catfish and other species are also available,” says Aadland. “Mississippi River “smallies” were introduced to this reach in the early 1990s and they grew rapidly.”

“The catch and release-only regulation for Smallmouth Bass helps maintain a healthy population of big fish,” adds Nelson. Nelson and Aadland are both happy to fish any time of day. Aadland prefers evening, but morning and mid-day can also be good; he also enjoys night fishing. Nelson’s favorite times to fish are sunrise and sunset, although he’s done really well mid-day too, by “finding fish hanging out in shady spots along the bank.” He adds that late summer is his favorite time to be on the river; the current is generally slower by then so it’s easier to keep a position in the kayak!

Like good fishermen, both Aadland and Nelson maintain a little mystery to their success. Nelson’s favorite way to catch Smallmouth Bass is by using topwater lures, “they aren’t always willing to hit the surface but when they are it’s such an exciting way to catch them,” exclaims Nelson. Aadland also enjoys topwater baits. When fly-fishing, he suggests grasshopper and mayfly imitations which can be very effective.

When visiting Fergus Falls, Orwell Dam is a great place for a family outing. There are plenty of good shore fishing spots as well as picnic tables, a playground, and restroom facilities. For inexperienced paddlers, Nelson recommends launching on one of the reservoirs to get a feel for the kayak or canoe in still water before making their way toward the river. As an added resource, there is a helpful Otter Tail River Trail map available on the DNR website. Nelson asks, “What are you waiting for? Get out and enjoy the river! Whether you’re out for a day of fishing or just want to take in some beautiful river scenery the Otter Tail is a great place to spend the day!”
There’s plenty of buzz about airplanes, air traffic and community events at the Fergus Falls Municipal Airport. Access to air transportation can help communities retain and attract businesses and provide jobs. It is also a major factor in the relocation decisions of many businesses.

The U.S. aviation industry creates economic growth, supports nearly 62 million jobs, and creates nearly three trillion dollars of economic impact. In addition, thousands of businesses in our nation rely on general aviation aircraft and airports to reach and compete in the global market.

Fergus Falls Municipal Airport (Einar Mickelson Field) is one of over 5,000 general aviation airports in the U.S. It handles personal and business transportation, agricultural operations, support for medical transport, transportation of freight, law enforcement, firefighting activities, and recreational flying.

The primary runway is 100 feet by 5,640 feet and the crosswind runway measures 75 feet by 3,300 feet. The airport has a variety of instrument approaches and offers fuel service for Jet-A and 100LL, A&P/IA Maintenance Service, and aircraft storage.

The airport serves the community in a variety of ways, according to Andrew Yaggie, an airport board member. “Our airport is the gateway to the lakes. People use the airport for different purposes such as tourism, business, and cargo. On an average summer weekend, you might see a variety of aircraft, from a Super Cub to a Cessna Citation 12-seat business jet. Early last December Santa even flew in to our airport as part of the Over-the-River Holiday Festival!”

Yaggie says that he and others in the community enjoy introducing people to aviation. One such organization that accomplishes just that is the Fergus Falls Area EAA (Experimental Aircraft Association) Chapter, a group of local aviation enthusiasts who fly, build, restore or simply enjoy airplanes and aviation. Their main project is the Young Eagles Program which brings volunteers into the schools. Each year over 500 local students get to enjoy flying, many for their first time. The chapter also hosts the Annual Fly In, which is held in conjunction with the Fergus Falls Summerfest. Yaggie invites visitors to join them for the 2020 Fly In on June 14 and enjoy the Belgium Waffle Breakfast during the event. More information can be found on their website: 1174.EAAChapter.org.

Aviation Helps Fergus Falls Soar
by Steve Heriot
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