

Muskegon hoping to capitalize on education adventure opportunities

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Chronicle file photoZayn Szucs, 8, of Muskegon paints a scene of Muskegon Lake near Harbour Towne Marina in this Chronicle file photo. Art is an integral part of Education Adventure, an initiative to be launched in 2010 by the Muskegon County Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Muskegon Area Chamber of Commerce. Art plays a vital part of the initiative. The Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp is a premier art education institution, and the Muskegon Museum of Art, Muskegon Civic Theater and the Lakeshore Museum Center offers many youth-oriented programs. Bryan Hughes said he saw the potential of marketing Muskegon County as an “education adventure” as he watched dozens of groups of scouts spend overnight visits on the USS Silversides.

“If Frankenmuth can be known for Christmas, why can’t Muskegon be known for educational adventures?” Hughes said.

Muskegon County tourism promoters are listening to the executive director of the Great Lakes Naval Memorial and Museum.

The Muskegon County Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Muskegon Area Chamber of Commerce will launch an Education Adventure initiative for 2010. The adventure part of the equation is evident when considering Michigan’s Adventure Amusement Park, kite boarding on Lake Michigan or lugging at the Muskegon Winter Sports Complex.



Bryan Hughes

And tourism promoters say educational opportunities for elementary students, families and senior citizens are just as prevalent at Muskegon-area destinations. The Education Adventure program initially will be targeted toward second- to sixth-graders and their families.

The Great Lakes Naval and Memorial Museum's USS Silversides welcomes hundreds of scouts and church groups for overnight stays on the World War II submarine. But there are plenty of other educational opportunities in Muskegon County:

- The LST 393 is a former transport ship that served in the D-Day invasion of Europe that is open for tour.
- The Port City Princess offers historical tours of both Muskegon and White Lakes.
- The White Lake Light Station has plenty of maritime history — and reportedly a couple of ghosts — within the historic structure on the south side of the White Lake Channel.
- The Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp is one of the world's premier art education institutions, hosting hundreds of young people every summer for exploration and training in instrumental music, choral, dance and the visual arts.
- Institutions like the Muskegon Museum of Art, Muskegon Civic Theater and the Lakeshore Museum Center have plenty of youth-oriented programs throughout the year.
- Educational opportunities in water research and alternative energy potentially are available through two Grand Valley State University centers in downtown Muskegon.



And even Michigan's Adventure has its annual Physics Day when hundreds of junior and high school students conduct science research while enjoying the amusement rides.

“We have educational programs in place at many of our attractions,” said Jill Emery, Muskegon County tourism manager. “What we have to do is pull them all together.”

Hughes, Emery, chamber President Cindy Larsen and their staffs have begun working on a 2010 marketing plan. It includes a separate Web site to which the community and its tourism destinations can link, an Education Adventure brochure and eventually advertising supporting the local activities and destinations.

Emery said Muskegon County is unique among the Lake Michigan shoreline communities in attracting families. It's mix of historic, cultural and adventure activities is a good fit for families with young children, she said.



Chronicle file photoStudents participating in the annual Physics Day at Michigan's Adventure ride the Shivering Timbers

Those same attractions would draw school groups, scout groups, church groups and home-schooled children, Emery said.

But Muskegon County's educational attractions are not just for youth. Emery said that Baker College of Muskegon's new downtown Culinary Institute of Michigan, for example, could offer one-day or weekend cooking classes that could be packaged with other destinations to draw an adult visitor.

“We are in a unique position to offer a quality educational and recreational experience,” said Janessa Stroud, chamber vice president. “We need to make this part of our tourism culture. We look forward to promoting it.”

Chronicle file photo Ethan Perrin of South Lyon Cub Scout Pack 38 checks out a gun turret near the USS Silversides at the Great Lakes Naval Memorial and Museum in Muskegon.

Port City Princess owner Sylvia Precious said her dinner cruise boat always has had educational programs available



for adults and school groups. She said she hopes to expand that part of her business.

“It needs to zero in on our maritime history and focus on Muskegon,” Precious said of the Education Adventure initiative.

Michigan Adventure General Manager Camille Jourden-Mark said the park has had a Physics Day for 20 years. The amusement park has used educators to write curriculum for the student activities. The Muskegon Area Intermediate School District can assist in bringing lessons to life at a variety of destinations, she said.

“We want to bring people in for an educational opportunity and show them an adventure along the way,” Emery said. “Hopefully, this will take on a life of its own.”

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