

LOCALNEWS

KEDA

If they build, will they come?

KEDA considers ways to enhance cold weather testing success

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

What came first: the chicken or the egg?

The Koochiching Economic Development Authority Board asked itself a similar question Monday when considering the possibility of extending its cold weather testing offerings in the future. The organization considered its current success and put out the question that if there was more space, would the customers come? Or should it wait until there is specific interest and act accordingly?

“Long term for this community, (cold weather testing) is one of the biggest things we can market,” said KEDA member Brian McBride. “It’s the chicken and the egg... Do we wait for them to come to us?”

KEDA Director Paul Nevanen said the need is there. He reported a successful cold weather testing season supported by 19 test groups at the facility and another four that tested in the area.



Paul Nevanen

Brian McBride

Through facility use fees, hotel stays, meals and other items, more than \$1 million was spent in the community throughout the course of the 2014-2015 testing season.

“I did not factor airfare as part of the economic impact because it is hard to establish the local component,” he said. “However, the test teams did contribute greatly to the number of enplanement for the airport.”

Still, while there may be a need, expanding is something Nevanen said he considers, but without a customer coming forward, there is never a guarantee. “It’s a different market,” he said, noting customers run on one-year budgets and are sometimes secretive about where they carry out their testing needs.

KEDA member Wade Pavleck said when the first cold box was built, it was a leap of faith.

“We filled it up and it’s

been going ever since,” he said. “We might not be able to get a contract, but if we thought the need was there... We have a track record of filling it.”

In related business, the board agreed to allow Nevenan to move forward and gather further information regarding a hangar space lease on a lot adjacent to the cold weather testing building.

Nevanen said Jaguar Land Rover, which helped to establish the second cold box, has requested KEDA’s help in securing some additional, temporary space to support future programs.

“We are working with a private sector individual that is building a hangar on the adjacent lot to the testing facility,” he said. “They would make some space available to JLR during the season.”

He said because KEDA has a vendor relationship with JLR, the organization would lease the hangar lot and the private individual would eventually build a hangar to meet aviation needs of hangar requirements.

“We would get reimbursement from JLR on the lease,” he said.

Grand Mound site options considered

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

Local and state officials continue to discuss a plan for reopening the Grand Mound History Center closed in 2003 due to state financial concerns.

Several local officials met again last week with staff from the Minnesota Historical Society, which owns the site on Highway 11 about 17 miles west of International Falls.

The site, the only one with national historic landmark status that is not open to the public, includes a visitor center and trails which interpret the cultural and historic significance of the Grand Mound burial site. It is located in Ontario just across the Rainy River from the Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung Historical Center which focuses on the Manitou burial mounds created in the area on both sides of the border about 5,000 years ago by the same people, called the Laurel Indians. Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung Historical Center is operated by Rainy River First Nations.

MHS cited in its closure of Minnesota’s Grand Mound site a lack of money generated by visitor attendance fees.

The meetings were prompted by letters sent last year by the Koochiching County Board and International Falls Mayor Bob Anderson to D. Stephen Elliott, director and CEO of the Minnesota Historical Society, asking him to visit with local officials to discuss the society’s plans for the site’s future.

Since then, several society staff have met with local officials in an effort to develop a plan to reopen the site in some form, but in a form that is sustainable and protects and preserves the site.

Anderson and county Board Chairman Wade Pavleck have been a part of the meetings with MHS staff. Both local officials said they appreciate MHS staff coming to Borderland to meet about the Grand Mound site.

“My goal is to get the state to invest some money in the facility,” Pavleck said this week.

“(MHS staff have) been terrific,” said Anderson. “I think the meetings have been fruitful and hope they feel that way, too.”



FILE PHOTO

A chained gate keeps the public away from a visitor center and the 5,000-year-old burial mounds along the Rainy River, about 17 miles west of International Falls, closed in 2003 by the Minnesota Historical Society.

Discussions about reopening the facility include cooperative partnerships with Rainy River Community College, Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung Historical Center and Rainy River First Nations, Pavleck said. “Everybody is in the same room, looking at options, understanding the state has limitations, too,” said Pavleck of the effort.

Anderson said potential partners in the future of the site may also include Voyageurs National Park and other tribal communities.

“We’re kind of looking at this being a multiple-year process, and I guess my personal opinion is I’d like to see some level of improvement every year that is sustainable,” Anderson said.

MHS staff have indicated interest in opening the visitor center at the site on some scale, which may require members of the partnerships, Anderson said.

The meetings and options considered have been a good process, said Anderson. “It maybe is moving slower than some would like, but what I would like to see is improvement that is sustainable,” he said.

Pavleck reiterated his concern the location of the Grand Mound site plays a role in the state’s funding for it.

“This is the largest mound in the Upper Midwest,” Pavleck said. “It is of huge historical significance. If it was located south of Highway 2, there is no question it would be funded and staffed. But it’s up here

and so it does not get the same attention.”

Options being considered include opening the site to self-guided tours and/or opening the visitor center at least in the summer months, said Pavleck.

“You can’t always do things based on visitation and money,” said Pavleck. “Some times you go on cultural significance and protection of historical sites.”

Pavleck said he’d like the site to reopen and be tied into the Manitou sites and others on the Rainy River and its tributaries.

But he said he’s pleased MHS is “truly seeking input from people like us that live here and from tribal members, who for them it’s a religious site. (MHS staff) are telling us they have no preset agenda, but they have to live within their budgets. I understand that, but what are the real goals?”

Anderson said another meeting in the area is set for late June or early July.

“We’re still very much in the planning or defining what does the Grand Mound model look like,” said Anderson.

He said the mounds at the site have similar religious meanings as cemeteries and similarly must be protected from vandalism and all-terrain riding.

The site also plays a role in the tourism industry, drawing people who “just want to know how the culture lived and died thousands of years ago — this is a place of great interest,” said Anderson.

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