

LOCALNEWS

Geotourism initiative moves forward

HOCP expected to sign contract with National Geographic in February

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

The Heart of the Continent Partnership is expected to sign a contract in February with the National Geographic Society Maps Division to create a regional geotourism initiative for the border lakes region of Minnesota and Ontario. An update on the initiative is expected to be provided to members during the quarterly meeting of The Heart of the Continent in International Falls Jan. 30 and 31. The gathering is scheduled to take place at Voyageurs National Park headquarters, Highway 11 East. Meanwhile, the signing of the contract with the National Geographic Society is planned for Feb. 11 and 12 in Duluth, where a training session about the initiative

is also planned. Local people interested in taking part in the training session should contact Eric Johnson, a member of the design team planning and implementing the effort, at 218-244-6506. Upon signing of the contract, HOCP will become a part of NGS's global network of interlinked geotourism websites, which should help the area gain visibility, visitorship, and awareness for the region. The project will allow potential tourists to plan their trip online by viewing an interactive map and website featuring the region's opportunities, as well as accommodation options, restaurants, events, recreational activities, or anything else a visitor to the area would want to do. A paper map will also be

established. The effort is expected to provide worldwide exposure with links between all the NGS geotourism sites. Site visits will be tracked. The attractions, parks and communities included on the map and website should see increased visitorship. In addition, the collaborative project is intended to build lasting working relationships among the communities and the people who care about public lands. Drawing input and involvement from a wide spectrum of local stakeholders, this geotourism project is intended to help sustain and enhance the geographical character of the region — its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents — by highlighting the unique

natural, cultural and historical resources and historic gateway communities in the HOCP bi-national region which includes more than 5 million acres of public lands. The Heart of the Continent Partnership is a coalition of land managers and stakeholders working together on cross-border projects that promote the natural, cultural and economic health of the lakes, forests and communities on the Minnesota-Ontario border. The partnership is developing a common identity and sense of belonging to the larger cross-border area. In addition, HOCP is attempting to create and sustain economic stability for the communities that surround these public lands.

Johnson announces candidacy for House 3A

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Eric Johnson of International Falls has announced his candidacy for the Minnesota House District 3A seat. A life-long resident of northeastern Minnesota and a long-time International Falls business owner, Johnson held his first public town hall-style meet-and-greet as a candidate for the position Oct. 29. He announced his candidacy for the seat, now held by Rep. David Dill, DFL-Crane Lake, at the Northern Minnesota District Fair in Littlefork July 12 and has since been attending community events as he rolls out his "Vote Smart Vote Eric" campaign. His message, he said in a statement, is about "smarter taxes, smarter government, smarter budgets, smarter schools and smarter uses of the region's natural resources." The statement continued that on several occasions since announcing his candidacy in July, Johnson has commented "This is the land that I love. I always have and always will call it my home." Johnson owns International Dental Arts Inc. in International Falls. The lab manufactures dental appliances for dentists across Minnesota and elsewhere. Johnson said in the last

10 years the business has faced many challenges and the company has been able to overcome them through aggressive research and development, testing, and embracing new technologies to help the business run more efficiently. "International Dental Arts remains relevant and competitive in an ever-changing industry facing stiff competition," he said. "I believe I can use these same principals to help make our state government run more efficiently also," his statement continued. "Bigger, bloated, inefficient government means less freedoms for all of us. The mindless system of taxing to just throw the money down the black hole of bureaucracy has to end. We need to apply some common sense to St. Paul and how northern Minnesota is represented. We need more northern Minnesota can-do attitude in St. Paul and less big government St. Paul up here in the Arrowhead." Johnson also volunteers on the boards of several tourism and recreation-based, nonprofit organizations throughout the region.



Eric Johnson

Provision on land ports included in bill

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar Tuesday announced that a provision allowing a pilot program to allow private donations to upgrade land ports of entry in towns like International Falls was included in the final version of the omnibus spending bill. The provision is similar

to legislation Klobuchar cosponsored that would help move construction and rehabilitation of ports of entry forward by allowing donations of property or funds to be put towards the projects. Earlier this week, Klobuchar sent a letter to the chair and ranking members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committee urging them to

include the provision in the final bill. "Towns like International Falls know how important land ports of entry are to boosting tourism, growing exports, and strengthening our economy," Klobuchar said. "Including this provision in the final bill will allow individuals and businesses to partner with government to help con-

struct and repair ports of entry that have been neglected for too long." The existing International Falls land port of entry was built in 1993 and officials agree that it is now too small to handle cross-border traffic. Including this provision would allow for public-private partnerships to help fund a new port of entry.



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