

Visit THIEF RIVER FALLS

2019 ANNUAL REPORT



Where Two Rivers Meet



History

The Thief River Falls Convention & Visitors Bureau was enacted in February 1984. The CVB operated as a tourism marketing division under the Chamber of Commerce from 1984 to 2006. In 2006, the CVB incorporated and formed their own organization.

In the spring of 2018, as part of their new creative marketing strategy, the CVB officially rebranded their organization to “Visit Thief River Falls” and also redesigned their logo. We didn’t change our legal name, we are simply doing business as “Visit Thief River Falls.” This type of rebranding has been a common shift that many CVBs have made over the past few years. The new brand is a call to action and will simplify our marketing efforts. Being the “Thief River Falls Convention & Visitors Bureau” is still our legal name, that’s what our organization will be referred to in this report.

Funding Source

The CVB is funded solely by the 3% Lodging Tax that is collected from overnight visitors at all 7 hotel properties in Thief River Falls, as well as the city campground. This tax is collected by the City of Thief River Falls and 95% is passed along to the CVB monthly. These lodging tax dollars are used to market the entire community. There are no membership dues or fees assessed from individuals or businesses.

State of MN Office of the Attorney General: Lodging Tax Statute § 469.190

The funds that the CVB operates on are state-regulated by the following State Statute: “Ninety-five percent of the gross proceeds from any tax imposed under subdivision 1 shall be used by the statutory or home rule charter city or town to fund a local convention or tourism bureau for the purpose of marketing and promoting the city or town as a tourist or convention center.”

Mission Statement

“The objective of the Thief River Falls Convention & Visitors Bureau shall be to promote the Thief River Falls area as a destination for conferences, conventions, events, group tours and leisure travelers; thereby enhancing the economic growth of the area.”

Tourist Definition

- The University of Minnesota Tourism Center uses the definition given by the U.S. Travel Association: “A tourist is defined as someone who is 50 miles or more (one way) from their primary residence.”
- Patrick Simmons, Research Analyst at Explore Minnesota Tourism: “We consider a tourist to be someone traveling for pleasure on an overnight trip, or on a day trip of at least 50 miles from home.”



Lodging Tax Usage: According to the Office of the Attorney General

- If lodging tax usage is questioned, the Attorney General's office is asked for an opinion. Here are a couple examples of those opinions:

"We have been of the view that 'marketing and promoting' the city for purposes of lodging tax expenditures includes activities directly related to providing information concerning tourist or convention assets of the city to persons outside the immediate area or in directly seeking to attract such persons to the city, but does not generally include creation of such assets or the support of community betterment in general. In light of the fact that the revenue in question is raised by taxation of hotels, motels and like tourist facilities, it is likely that **the legislature intended that the restricted 95 percent be used in ways calculated to directly attract persons likely to patronize such facilities as opposed to uses which generally benefit the city as a whole.**"

"Certainly, advertising or similar efforts to make tourists or convention planners from outside the area aware of local events such as the fair or sporting events would appear to be legitimate marketing or promotion. **If, on the other hand, the result of the expenditures is simply to assist the event in general or in some way that would not reasonably be seen as calculated to attract additional people for tourism or convention business, they would not likely qualify.**"

Economic Impact

According to Explore Minnesota's "Tourism Facts: Minnesota Leisure and Hospitality Industry 2016," tourism in Minnesota has an impact of \$41 million in average daily sales at leisure & hospitality businesses, supporting almost 265,000 jobs. This in an industry that needs and deserves support because of the immediate return it brings to the state. Every \$1 invested in tourism promotion brings \$9.00 in state and local taxes and \$92 in spending by travelers.

- In 2017, the Leisure & Hospitality Industry had the following impact on Pennington County:
 - Gross Sales - \$27,635,036
 - State Sales Tax - \$1,779,576
 - Jobs - 522
- Explore Minnesota estimates the following travel spending by sector:
 - Food - 25%, Lodging - 20%, Retail - 16%, Transportation - 16%, Recreation - 16%, Second homes - 7%
- Using the data above, for every dollar a visitor spends at our hotels, they spend an additional \$4 elsewhere in our community.

The 2018 Thief River Falls gross lodging tax revenue was approximately $\$134,219 \times 33 = \$4,429,227$ in Total Thief River Falls Annual Hotel Revenue $\times 5 = \$22,146,135$ in Total Thief River Falls Visitors' Annual Economic Impact

Grants & Cooperative Marketing Programs

In 2019, the Convention & Visitors Bureau accessed \$5,000 in marketing grant dollars through the *Explore Minnesota Tourism Organizational Partnership Grant*. We also accessed \$2,000 in marketing grant dollars through Riverland Association and \$2,000 through Pine to Prairie Birding Trail. Those are cooperative marketing programs that we buy into with membership dues.

The CVB was also a partner in the *2019 Minnesota Heartland Tourism Association Marketing Program*. We were able to receive approximately \$25,000 in marketing value for the cost of \$1,400. This consisted of both email marketing and retargeting campaigns promoting biking, fishing and hunting. The geo-targeted areas included MSP, Eastern SD and Eastern ND.



Vertical Markets

The CVB works hard to promote all Thief River Falls assets to attract overnight visitors. Here are a few vertical markets that we focus on promoting through a variety of advertising initiatives:

- Snowmobiling
- Summer Attractions
- Events
- Meetings and Conventions
- Sports Facilities
- Biking
- Fishing
- Hunting
- Shopping

Print Advertising

We realize the demand of print is slowly decreasing, but there are a few staple print pieces that we advertise in. One is the Explore Minnesota State Travel Guide and another is the Northern Highlights guide that is printed each summer by the Times. The CVB also partners with the Chamber of Commerce on an ad in the Miss Minnesota Pageant Booklet supporting our Miss Thief River Falls and Miss River-Fest contestants, but also promoting our great community. This year, we also advertised in the Carillon which is a Canadian newspaper.

Social Media/Digital Advertising

Our spring/summer advertising campaign was a Facebook campaign promoting summer attractions, recreational opportunities and events in Manitoba. The campaign reached 123,007 people and increased our page likes by 1,072. We were able to exceed 10,000 likes, which was one of our goals for this campaign.

Our fall advertising campaign is a programmatic marketing campaign promoting fall waterfowl hunting in the Twin Cities. The campaign is through the Star Tribune and it's running through November 6. We are targeting outdoor enthusiasts and sportsmen ages 30+. We will serve our target market with an email, then output their physical addresses and geotarget them on their mobile device. What is exciting about this campaign is that the Star Tribune is mapping out all seven of our hotels as conversion zones and tracking how many people saw our ad and then subsequently stayed at one of our hotels. The Star Tribune also provided us with a STAAT tag to add to our website which is an audience analytics tag. It will provide first party insights that Google Analytics doesn't have.

Streaming Radio Advertising

Our winter advertising campaign was a Pandora Internet Radio Campaign. Our geographic target market was Eastern ND & Central/Southern MN. We received 561,308 impressions and reached 56,588 people. We also got 192 clicks to our website. This was an "Audio Everywhere" campaign, which means listeners could hear our ad even when they couldn't see our ad.

Video Advertising

We have partnered with several freelance videographers to create promotional videos to use in our advertising efforts. This fall, we are partnering with TRF Radio to create two new promotional videos that include aerial footage. One will be a general attraction video and the second will be a hunting video. We plan to promote them across our social media pages, as well as our website.



Media Event

“Call of the Goose” Media Familiarization Tour: 2019 was our 13th year in partnership with the Middle River Community Club to promote waterfowl hunting in NW Minnesota and the 45th Annual Goose Festival in Middle River, MN. This is a great partnership as this is an event that celebrates waterfowl hunting and draws approximately 5,000 visitors. Being Middle River doesn’t have lodging amenities besides a small campground, Thief River Falls lodging properties are positively impacted by this event.

The following media companies attended the 2019 media event: Outdoors Weekly, Wild Dakota TV, Brainerd Outdoors Radio, KKWQ Radio, KRWB Radio, The Honker, Pioneer Radio, TRF Radio, TRF Times & North Country Promotions. Examples of the coverage Thief River Falls gets from this event includes multiple page articles in hunting publications, 30-minute television shows and significant radio coverage throughout NW Minnesota.

Here are a few examples of the coverage we have received from the *Call of the Goose Media Familiarization Tour:*

- Wild Dakota’s television episode: <http://bit.ly/2eySnVd>
- Minnesota Bound’s television segment: <http://bit.ly/2ehmrON>
- The Outdoor Report’s video: <http://bit.ly/2eCEAXP>

Pine to Prairie Birding Trail

Another vertical market that we are heavily involved in promoting is birdwatching. We are a member of the *Pine to Prairie International Birding Trail Committee* which stretches from Fergus Falls to Warroad. A few years ago, Manitoba’s birding trail was connected to our trail, creating North America’s 2nd International Birding Trail. This has increased international tourism to all communities along the trail. MN DOT approved our signage request in 2010 for a brown sign directing motorists to our Birding Observation Site at the Thief River Falls Wastewater Treatment Ponds. They are located west of Thief River Falls off State Hwy 1. The signs direct both eastbound and westbound motorists to our site where they will find a handicapped accessible, enclosed birding shelter and an interpretive sign.

Local Attractions Tour

The FREE “Be a Tourist in Your Town” tour is available to our city’s front-line staff to provide education about our city’s attractions and recreational opportunities.

Customer Service Training

The University of Minnesota Tourism Center puts on a customer service training course called “At Your Service,” which trains the trainer to give the course in their community. CVB Director, Laura Stengrim, went through this training course in St. Paul and is now certified to deliver the course locally. This course has been offered to all persons working in the hospitality industry over a dozen times in the past few years. This includes, but is not limited to staff at: Hotels, restaurants, retail stores, convenience stores and attractions.



Health & Hospitality Program

Sanford Health partners with the CVB on the “Health & Hospitality Program” which gives visiting Sanford patients and family members a discounted hotel room and a free taxi ride. This program is promoted internally with Sanford’s patient access staff and brochures are distributed at clinic registration desks.

Community Branding

The Chamber of Commerce’s Downtown Development Association initiated a Community Branding task force in 2018 and asked Executive Director, Laura Stengrim, to facilitate that task force. The mission of this task force was to create a consistent brand for Thief River Falls and to use that brand as the design on new welcome banners for the city of Thief River Falls. The new community tagline “Where Two Rivers Meet” was created and will be used to market Thief River Falls consistently across several organizations and entities. Please see the last page of this document for examples of the brand.

Bike Thief River Falls

A group of volunteers are working together to make Thief River Falls more bike friendly and the CVB has contributed to this effort in the following ways: 1) Assisted with creation of a new bike trail map, 2) Created a promotional video promoting biking, 3) Facilitated the creating of a new bike rental program at the hotels that started Memorial Day weekend 2019, 4) Paid for additional usage rights for 5 biking photos for usage in their marketing efforts.

Marketing & Promotional Event Funding

The CVB has the ability to provide Event Marketing Sponsorship Funding to attract out-of-town visitors to Thief River Falls events. This funding must be used to fund marketing and promotion of event in media that reaches primarily out of town visitors. Priority will be given to events that encourage overnight visitation. Events must also be open to the public.

The CVB sponsored the tourism marketing of the following events in 2019 totaling \$6,105.97:

- TRFAHA Hockey Tournaments - \$1,800
- Norwegian Heritage Week - \$1305.97
- Pennington County Fair - \$1,000
- RiverFest - \$1,000

One of the board’s objectives is to encourage more local events and clubs to take advantage of this funding.

Click here for more information on the CVB’s Event Marketing Sponsorship Funding: <https://visitrf.com/planners/event-marketing-sponsorship/>.



Thief River Falls Visitors Guide

The theme of the 2019 Thief River Falls Visitors Guide is “Where Two Rivers Meet” which is our new community tagline. Click here and scroll to the bottom to view the page-turning version of the Thief River Falls Visitor Guide: <https://visitrfr.com/free-visitors-guide/>.

The guide includes comprehensive two-sided map page that features the City Map, River Walk Trail Map, Bike Trail Map & Snowmobile Trail Map. This is the centerfold and pulls out easily. We also printed over runs of the map in tablet form. These are free of charge for any business that is interested. We will be adding a Troll Map in the 2020 Visitors Guide.

The guide is almost solely funded by advertisements. The CVB pays less than \$2,500 to our publishing company annually for higher quality paper and a gloss cover coating. We print 25,000 copies and distribute to all Travel Information Centers across the state, Thief River Falls businesses, and to individuals as requested through an electronic form on our website. We also have both a page-turning and PDF version of our Visitors Guide on our website.

The 2020 Thief River Falls Visitor Guide will be printed in December 2019 and distributed in January 2020.

Visitor Guide Distribution

In addition to distributing the Thief River Falls Visitor Guide to all potential visitors who request information on Thief River Falls and to all Thief River Falls businesses, we also distribute the guide to the following locations across the state:

Paid Distribution Locations:

- Mall of America Brochure Distribution Program
- Minneapolis St. Paul Airport Distribution Program
- Pioneer 90.1 Minnesota State Fair Distribution Program

Free Distribution Locations:

- | | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worthington Travel Information Center • Thompson Hill Travel Information Center • Moorhead Travel Information Center • St. Croix Travel Information Center • Beaver Creek Travel Information Center • Fisher’s Landing Travel Information Center • Albert Lea Travel Information Center • Two Harbors Information Center • MN United Snowmobilers Association • Albertville Premium Outlets • Grand Forks Air Force Base • Red Wing Visitor Center • Cass Lake Chamber of Commerce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wabasha Chamber of Commerce • Bemidji Chamber of Commerce • St. Cloud Travel Information Center • Leech Lake Chamber of Commerce • Pelican Rapids Chamber of Commerce • Willmar Chamber of Commerce • New Ulm Chamber of Commerce • Sauk Centre CVB • Little Falls CVB • Hinckley CVB • Fargo-Moorhead CVB • Greater Grand Forks CVB • Grand Forks Airport |
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Tourism Information Website

The CVB gave its website (www.visittrf.com) a fresh new look in February 2017. Our website has a responsive design and the capability for flash, video, Google Maps and much more. We also implemented a color scheme changeover in 2019 to match our new logo.

The 2019 Visitors Guide is available to download on the website and our TV commercials are embedded in the site. In the last year, 29,851 users accessed our website with 37,162 sessions. 86% were new users, and 14% were returning users. The majority of our users come from Minneapolis, Winnipeg and Fargo. The top three pages visited are events, discover and attractions.

Social Media Marketing

Facebook: The CVB manages the Visit Thief River Falls Facebook page. We created it in 2009 and have 10,556 likes, which is 1,868 more than last year at this time. We market events, retail promotions, restaurant specials and seasonal attractions through this page. We also do giveaways and contests.

YouTube: The CVB manages the Visit TRF YouTube channel. All television commercials and video contest entries are posted on this channel. We link this directly to our Facebook page and website.

Tourism Education

Laura is the Marketing Chairman of Riverland Association, so the CVB has been very involved in hosting their NW MN Tourism Conference the past 11 years. This first four were held in Thief River Falls, and the last seven have been held in Crookston. The speakers range from advertising agencies and event organizers to marketing professionals and business owners. Everyone interested in attracting more visitors to their business, event or community is welcome to attend, and the cost is \$40 for members and \$45 for non-members.

Tourism Awareness

Radio Interviews - The CVB has been invited to be interviewed on Pioneer Radio monthly to bring tourism awareness to the residents of Thief River Falls and update the community on our tourism marketing efforts.

Newspaper Editorial - The CVB has submitted an editorial to the Thief River Falls Times to be featured in their "Progress Edition" the last few years. This is an educational article aimed to explain our mission and tourism marketing efforts and specifically how our mission differs from that of the Chamber of Commerce.

Community Expo - The CVB has had a booth at the Thief River Falls Community Expo every other year to educate the public on our mission, tourism marketing efforts, and how we can help local businesses and events succeed.

Welcome Bags

In 2019, the CVB partnered with the City and the Chamber to print 10,000 new welcome bags that feature the new community brand's "Welcome to Thief River Falls" logo. Those bags are distributed to new residents at the City of Thief River Falls utilities office, as well as to visitors at conferences, conventions & sporting events. The ODC assists with the fulfillment of bags for a minimal fee, paid for by the CVB.



Complimentary Photo & Video Usage

Any non-profit may receive usage rights for up to five photos per year, which results to a value of \$150 (\$30 per photo) that we pay to the photographer for additional usage. Any additional photos that a non-profit would like usage rights for is up to them to pay the photographer \$30 per photo. Any non-profit may receive usage rights for one video per year, which results to a value of \$50 per edited video (with another \$25 per revision/change after the first draft of the edited video has been sent) that we pay to the videographer to revise our video with a new heading/tagline/logo. Any additional footage that a non-profit would like to own would need to be purchased from the videographer directly. Usage approvals will be at the discretion of the executive director and/or board of directors.

Promotional Items

The CVB has several promotional items that are available free of charge to visitors, such as pens and magnetic power clips. The CVB also created and printed four Thief River Falls postcards that are available free of charge to any visitors or any business that would like to give them away.

Tourism Information Booth

In 2015, the CVB purchased a 3-piece fabric tension display booth, which includes a backdrop, table cover and iPad stand. We have used this booth at local events to distribute tourism information and execute social media promotions.

Statewide/Regional/Local Representation

Thief River Falls is represented by the CVB's Executive Director on the following associations/boards/committees:

- Riverland Tourism Association Board
- Minnesota Heartland Tourism Association Board
- Thief River Falls Chamber of Commerce Board
- Red Lake River Corridor Joint Powers Board
- Minnesota Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus Board
- Advance Thief River Steering Committee
- Bike Thief River Falls Committee
- Pine to Prairie Birding Trail Committee
- Call of the Goose Familiarization Tour Planning Committee
- Sanford Health Consumer Council
- Northland Community & Technical College Community Advisory Committee
- Ralph Engelstad Arena History Committee
- Minnesota Lodging Association



Visit Thief River Falls Board of Directors

Dave Carlson	Co-President
Barbi Larson	Co-President
Hamilton Keefe	V.P./Treasurer
Larry Rohlf	Past President
Jane Anderson	Director
Melissa Benoit	Director
Deb Grorud	Director
Curt Howe	Director
Glen Kajewski	Director
Ray Kuznia	Director
Megan Rheault	Director
Amy Wozniak	Director

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Thief River Falls Community Brand

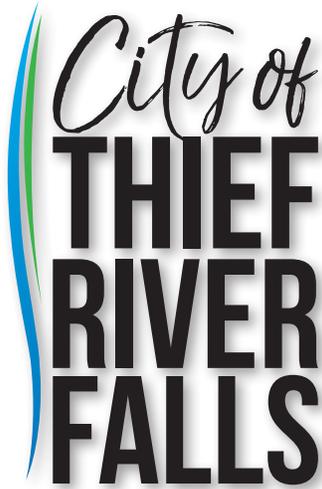
Established 2018



Visit Thief River Falls Logo



Thief River Falls Chamber of Commerce Logo



City of Thief River Falls Logo



Welcome Banner Design



Window Cling Design

"Where Two Rivers Meet"

Community Tagline