



Visit **THIEF RIVER FALLS**

2021 ANNUAL REPORT



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 our own organization.

In the spring of 2018, as part of our new creative marketing strategy, the CVB officially rebranded our organization to "Visit Thief River Falls" and redesigned our 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.

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."

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."

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

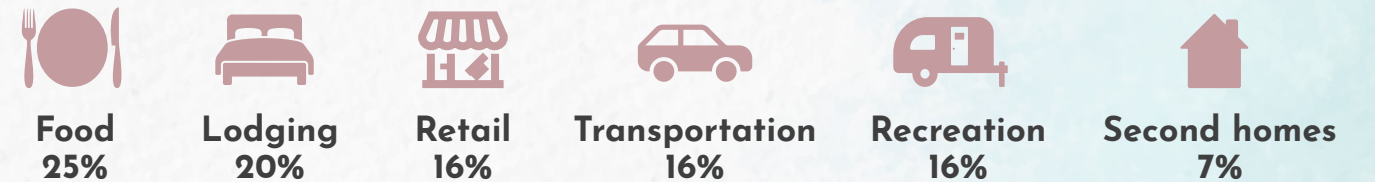


According to Explore Minnesota's "Tourism Facts: Minnesota Leisure and Hospitality Industry 2016," tourism in Minnesota has an impact of \$41 million in average daily sales at leisure & hospitality businesses, supporting almost 265,000 jobs. This in an industry that needs and deserves support because 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 2019, the Leisure & Hospitality Industry had the following impact on Pennington County:

Gross Sales	State Sales Tax	Jobs
\$28,666,699	\$1,964,054	550

- Explore Minnesota estimates the following travel spending by sector:



Using the data above, for every dollar a visitor spends at our hotels, they spend an additional \$4 elsewhere in our community.

The 2020 Thief River Falls gross lodging tax revenue was approximately $\$114,359 \times 33 = \$3,773,843$ in Total Thief River Falls Annual Hotel Revenue $\times 5 = \$18,869,213$ in Total Thief River Falls Visitors' Annual Economic Impact.



GRANTS & COOPERATIVE MARKETING PROGRAMS

In 2020, the Convention & Visitors Bureau accessed \$18,000 in crisis marketing grant dollars through the Explore Minnesota Tourism Organizational Partnership Grant. We also accessed \$7,050 in marketing grant dollars through Riverland Association. That is a cooperative marketing program that we buy into with membership dues.

PRINT ADVERTISING

The CVB Board of Directors feel that 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, another is the Minnesota Explorer (which is printed seasonally, and another is the Travel Times that is printed each summer. The CVB has also partnered with the Chamber of Commerce on an ad in the Miss Minnesota Pageant Booklet supporting our Miss Thief River Falls and Miss RiverFest contestants, but also promoting our great community.



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.



VISITOR SURVEY

We launched a visitor survey at all seven hotels in January 2021. This short survey was created in Survey Monkey, embedded into our website, and promoted at hotels offering a quarterly prize as an incentive.



PINE TO PRAIRIE BIRDING TRAIL

A 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.



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, 4) Paid for additional usage rights for 5 biking photos for usage in their marketing efforts, 5) Assisted in the launch of the new, MEC 100 Ride event.

HOSPITALITY SPOTLIGHT

National Travel & Tourism Week was May 2-8, 2021. We honored our frontline hospitality workers that week by featuring them on our Facebook page and thanking them for their service during the pandemic. The goal was to post a photo and brief bio of one frontline worker (front desk staff, housekeeping, etc.) at each of the seven hotels and feature one each day for the seven days May 2-8.



ADVANCE THIEF RIVER & CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PARTNERSHIPS



#TRF Strong - We were honored to partner with the Chamber and ATR on a weekly webinar series throughout the spring and summer of 2020 providing resources to business owners regarding Covid-19. We had speakers from MN DEED, the MN Retailers Assn., and many more. Topics ranged from: Emergency Loans/PPP/Cares Act/Marketing through Pandemic, etc.

Welcome to Line 3 Workers - There were approximately 1,000-1,500 Line 3 replacement workers here throughout this year. We formally welcomed the pipeliners by giving them each a Visitors Guide, as well as printing and distributing the "Welcome Line 3 Workers" Window Clings to 100 area businesses (a financial partnership with the Chamber of Commerce and Advance Thief River.)

Come Home to TRF - This is a promotional campaign, targeting TRF alumni and encouraging them to move back to the area. Laura was invited to serve on a small working group to lay out the fundamentals of the campaign.

Service with a Smile - Michelle Landsverk with Advance Thief River invited our organization and the Chamber of Commerce to partner on a social media campaign to address the open jobs in our hospitality industry. It's called "Service with a Smile" and we are inviting our hotels, restaurants, and retail stores to nominate an employee to film a short video promoting what they love about their job. We posted these to our Facebook pages in hopes to encourage people to apply for a job in the industry.



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 2021 totaling \$7,800:

- TRFAHA Hockey Tournaments - \$1,800**
- Pennington County Fair - \$2,000**
- RiverFest - \$2,000**
- MSAA State 3D Archery Tournament - \$2,000**

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://visitttrf.com/planners/event-marketing-sponsorship/>.

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

Free Distribution Locations:

- 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
- 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

THIEF RIVER FALLS VISITORS GUIDE



The 2021 Thief River Falls Visitors Guide was completely redesigned to resemble a magazine layout with more photos and informational copy, and less traditional ads. The feedback has been very positive, and we intend to keep the new layout going forward.

The guide is almost solely funded by advertisements. The CVB pays approximately \$2,500 to our publishing company annually for higher quality paper and a gloss cover coating. We print 17,000 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 2022 Thief River Falls Visitor Guide will be printed in April 2022 and distributed in May 2022.



TOURISM INFORMATION WEBSITE

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. Click here to check it out: www.visittrf.com. The Thief River Falls Visitors Guide is available to download on the website and our promotional videos are embedded in the site. In the last year, 29,732 users accessed our website with 36,620 sessions. 87% were new users, and 13% were returning users.

SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES



The CVB manages the Visit Thief River Falls Facebook page. We created it in 2009 and have 13,502 likes. We market events, retail promotions, restaurant specials and seasonal attractions through this page. We also do giveaways and contests to increase our Likes.



The CVB manages the Visit Thief River Falls Instagram page and we have 1,043 Followers.



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.

TRAVEL BLOGGER PARTNERSHIP

Shrpa is a company that offers self-guided, day trips created by locals. Thief River Falls has amazing experiences, and through this partnership, we showed everyone how fun and easy it is to explore it with Shrpa. Amazing adventures from day one.

TOURISM DATA COLLECTION

Datafy is a tourism data and marketing platform that is utilized by nearly 100 different CVBs from across the country. They have credit card, geo-location, and mobile advertiser ID data that is actionable through their programmatic advertising platform. Their platform is holistic and has been specially crafted to help CVBs draw in more visitors. It includes live credit card and GPS data that is displayed in our own personal portal. We can easily see who our visitors are, where they are coming from, how much they're spending, how long they're staying, and much more. We can choose the locations we see data for, including hotels, businesses, cities, counties, or any other place we can think of. We can also view all these same metrics for historic data, ranging back over three years.

NATIVE ADVERTISING

Story Writing + Native Advertising Coop Marketing Program

This program provided three custom written articles (including photos, video, social links/feeds and hyperlinks), plus native advertising. Native is one of the strongest ways to get people to learn about certain tourism businesses and organizations. Our sponsored story was placed next to organic content online, giving users a high-impact, natural exposure to your native ad. Each ad will include Explore Minnesota co-branding, and link directly to the industry partner's website.

VIDEO MARKETING

Video inspires action. With more than 1 billion unique users visiting YouTube each month, video ads offer an extraordinary opportunity to reach large audiences. This video marketing co-op offers you the ability to include YouTube in your marketing mix and diversify your reach across platforms. In addition to gaining more exposure, we reached target audiences using criteria such as demographics, geographics, topics, and viewer interests. The in-stream ads play before, during or after another video. Viewers see the first five seconds of the video and can continue watching or choose to skip. Charges incur only when your video is watched for 30 seconds or to the end for shorter videos. Ads show on all devices including Connected TVs. Audiences are created to both reach new people and retarget from your website.

CAMPAIGN DETAILS:

Start Date: April 21st, 2021

End Date: June 27th, 2021

Total Program Cost:
\$3,000 for 27,500 completed (30 second) views

INSIGHTS:

- o MediaOne YouTube campaign delivered 75,145 impressions and 33,328 completed views (+21% bonus)
- o View rate was strong at 44% and 64 clicks to the website were generated as an added bonus
- o Over 424 total hours of commercial time consumed at an average 20.3 seconds per impression



#TRF MONUMENT

Visit Thief River Falls purchased a monument as part of an organic marketing campaign. This monument is a six-foot-tall piece of public art and it was constructed in the letters "#TRF." It is located along the riverbank at Red Robe Park, just off 8th street. The background of the monument is where

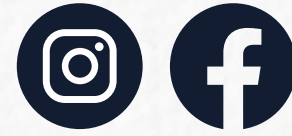
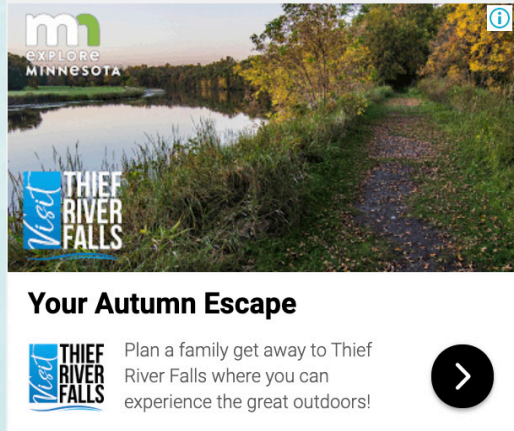
the Thief River and the Red Lake River meet, and it was chosen as the location because our community tagline is "Where Two Rivers Meet."

Organic marketing is a popular marketing trend. It involves getting your customers (or in this case, visitors) to promote your product for you. Visit Thief River Falls is the tourism marketing organization for Thief River Falls, so their product is Thief River Falls. Brafton.com defines it this way, "Anything you don't spend money on directly - blog posts, case studies, guest posts, unpaid tweets and Facebook updates - falls under the umbrella of organic marketing." There are several organic marketing campaigns Visit Thief River Falls has run, including their Tales of TRF blog series, organic social media posts, and their most recent Socially Distanced Selfie Scavenger Hunt.

The goal of this monument is for visitors and residents to promote Thief River Falls by using it as a photo background and posting those photos on social media. People are asked to remember that this is a piece of art, and it shouldn't be sat on or climbed on. There was recently a light kit added to the monument so it is illuminated at night.

SOCIAL MEDIA & SEARCH TARGET DISPLAY MARKETING

Winter 2020-2021 Advertising Campaign



Media:
Facebook
& Instagram



Message:
"Socially Distanced
by Nature"



Creative:
Photos of takeout at restaurants with masks, and socially distanced activities such as snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, etc. Use words/phrases from the recent Facebook poll to organically promote TRF.



Geographic Market:
MN & ND (We usually exclude TRF from paid FB ads, but we will leave it in our audience to include the pipeline & other business travelers.)

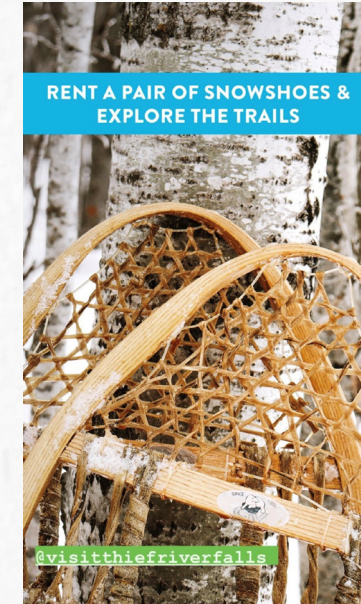


Our winter social media campaign through Orange 142 ran for the months of February and March.

- o Impressions: 456,182
- o Clicks: 1,006
- o Click Through Rate: .22% (Industry standard is .08% - .1%)
- o Facebook Fan Growth: 1,067
- o Instagram Fan Growth: 92

Fall Search-Based Targeting Display Program Co-op Marketing Program

This program is a unique ad targeting solution that leverages the same keywords, phrases and intent utilized in Paid Search but to serve more engaging and creative display ad placements. Search Based Display utilizes a Cost Per Click (CPC) rate structure that allows for guaranteed web traffic. Additionally, there are no fluctuations in costs from competitors, quality scores or time of year like commonly found on Paid Search campaigns. Search Based Display campaigns, on average, have higher click through rates compared to traditionally targeting display campaigns by serving ads to consumers who have active search histories relevant to the solutions and services promoted.



INSTAGRAM TAKEOVER

Our 24-hour Story Takeover on Explore Minnesota's channel was on February 18 and is pinned to Explore Minnesota's Instagram profile here: <https://bit.ly/383UshL>

- o Impressions: 75,611
- o Link Clicks: 152
- o Interactions: 432
- o Shares: 12
- o Profile Visits: 2
- o Reach: 77,370

We will be participating in another takeover this fall.



GOOGLE DMO PARTNERSHIP

This program will help us position our local businesses and points of interest to be both complete and compelling within Google's products, which has become the world's largest travel planning platform. It will provide immediate, tangible support from Visit Thief River Falls on behalf of local businesses in order to create long-term value and potential economic development. The program will generate a measurable increase in reach of existing destination assets, including imagery and business data and expand the digital capabilities of destination marketing staff.

TRF FAQ

Our Marketing Committee helped draft a "TRF FAQ" document for the front desks of each hotel to use to answer Frequently Asked Questions. It will also appear in the 2022 Thief River Falls Visitors Guide.

MARKETING INTERNSHIP

We have had the privilege of having two interns interested in marketing from Lincoln High School this year. This is a great partnership that we hope to continue.

- Spring 2021 - Gabby Hallstrom
- Fall 2021 - Josie Johnson



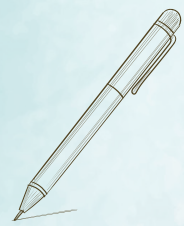
TOURISM EDUCATION

Laura is the Marketing Chairman of Riverland Association, so the CVB has been very involved in hosting their NW MN Tourism Conference the past several years. The speakers range from advertising agencies and event organizers to marketing professionals and business owners.



WELCOME BAGS

The CVB partnered with the City and the Chamber to print 15,000 new welcome bags that feature the new "Welcome to Thief River Falls" logo. The bags are distributed to visitors at conferences, conventions & sporting events, as well as for temp. employees working in Thief River Falls.



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 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

The CVB owns a 3-piece fabric tension display booth, which includes a backdrop, table cover and iPad stand. We use 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 (Secretary/Treasurer)
- Thief River Falls Chamber of Commerce Board (Ex-Officio)
- Red Lake River Corridor Joint Powers Board (Advisor)
- Minnesota Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus Board
- Advance Thief River Steering Committee
- Bike Thief River Falls Committee
- Pine to Prairie Birding Trail Committee
- Northland Community & Technical College Community Advisory Committee
- Minnesota Lodging Association



VISIT THIEF RIVER FALLS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Jane Anderson	Secretary	Megan Rheault	Director
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**Feel free to contact the Board of Directors or Executive Director
with questions or suggestions at any time:**

Laura Stengrim, Executive Director 218-686-9785 info@visittrf.com