



# While you're in town ...

## Marketing effort targets visiting groups

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Courtesy of *The News-Sentinel* September 14, 2005

It would be nearly impossible not to have a good time in a group dominated by specialists in hospitality, entertainment, travel and local attractions.

But make no mistake, Tuesday's Conference & Travel event at Chop's restaurant was all business.

Ann Waters, owner of Conference & Travel, had brought a variety of local businesspeople there following a bus tour of historic Fort Wayne to invite collaboration in a new event management business.

Destination Fort Wayne is a marketing effort to coordinate tours and special activities to entertain groups in town for conferences, trade shows or business meetings.

"(The marketing program) is something we've always wanted to do in Fort Wayne and now that we're getting a lot more visitors, we can do it," Waters said.

Jane Wiehe, group sales director for Conference & Travel, is in charge of developing Destination Fort Wayne and explained it already arranges entertainment as part of its tour packages for Fort Wayne groups traveling to other cities. It made sense, she said, to apply that expertise for groups visiting Fort Wayne.

Destination Fort Wayne has promotional material for entertainment packages featuring Fort Wayne Children's Zoo, Jefferson Pointe, DeBrand Fine Chocolates and Foellinger-Freimann Botanical Conservatory. Auburn's Kruse Classic Car Museum and World War II Victory Museum were mentioned along with several other possibilities in brainstorming on themed entertainment packages.

"This is just a sample of what we can do," Wiehe told guests as she invited their ideas. "We just want this to be fun and exciting.... We're on the brink of it and appreciate your being with us for our first steps."

Finding the right vendors here and identifying the attractions most suitable for a group can be challenging

for event planners unfamiliar with Fort Wayne, so Destination Fort Wayne will also provide that service, Wiehe said.

Individuals mingling with officials from the company at the promotional event for Destination Fort Wayne were enthusiastic about the plan.

Encouraging collaboration among area business is an important mission for the Greater Fort Wayne Chamber of Commerce, and "we like to see this kind of thing happening," said Scott Taylor, Chamber membership vice president.

Pat O'Brian, vice president for Excursions Trailways, said the chance to do more bus tours in Fort Wayne could raise its profile here, which could in turn increase its business taking local groups to destinations out of town.

"We get numerous requests for tours," said Melissa Cordial, public relations coordinator for Vera Bradley. "In the future our new facility will welcome tours."

Susie Juenin, sales manager for the recently expanded Grand Wayne Convention Center, said Destination Fort Wayne could help the city attract events by making them more enjoyable and easier to coordinate. When the Indiana Auctioneers Association comes to town in November, for example, spouses will need something to do, she said.

Dan O'Connell, executive director for the Fort Wayne Allen County Convention and Visitors Bureau, said the new business will fill a void in the city. The timing is right for the startup of Destination Fort Wayne, O'Connell said, because the recent upgrade and expansion of the convention center enables it to book larger events, and "the duration of the stay will be longer."

*Photo by Steve Linsenmayer of The News-Sentinel*

*Ann Waters, left, and Jane Wiehe, both of Conference & Travel, visit DeBrand Fine Chocolates on Tuesday. The two hope partnerships with businesses such as DeBrand will help them provide entertainment for groups visiting Fort Wayne.*

