For our Constituency Report, Dennis and I decided to survey businesses frequented by tourists and ask some questions centered around visitor experience at the Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center. We contacted around 36 businesses either by e-mail or in person and received 15 back. The respondents included restaurants, gas stations, service, retail, transportation, attractions and lodging. Our survey was conducted between mid and late June. We wanted to know:
+ The business owner's perception of the GLMHC.
+Suggestions to improve visitor experience.
+ How they get information about the GLMHC.
+How they disseminate information to staff.
+Suggestions to improve getting information.

1. Have you ever visited the GLMHC?

Only one respondent had never visited, but commented, "Wish we had time".

2. When is the last that you visited?

Responses were about evenly split between 2010 and 2011.

3. What were you hoping to get from your visit?

(6) Knowledge and interpretation of Thunder Bay Shipwrecks

(3) Attended meeting or event

(2) Enjoyment and education

(2) Share local point of interest with out of town visitors

(1) See facility

Comments:
I was pleasantly surprised and couldn't believe all that was included in the displays
We were hoping to have an enjoyable and education experience - we did!

4. What did you do while at the GLMHC?

(9) Toured facility Viewed exhibits

(3) Meeting or event

(3) No answer

(2) Shopped

(1) Talked with staff

(1) Watched movie

(1) Geocache

(1) Went through tubes

5. What did you like the most at the GLMHC?

(3) Everything

(3) Displays

(2) The rooms of artifacts from the ship wrecks/artifacts

(1) NBES

(1) Theater

(1) The experience of authenticity

(1) The friendly, inviting atmosphere

(1) 3-D demonstration

6. What did you like the least? How can it be improved?

(6) No answer

(4) No suggestions

(1) I can't really think of needing improvement - I was amazed.

(1) More information about shows in theatre and when they air

(1) I didn't like the noise, but I understand that the goal is to give the visitor a sensory experience of a ship in dangerous weather

(1) Provide steps to the entrance instead of having to walk around to get to the ramps from the parking area

(1) Information

7. Do you have suggestions to improve visitor experience at the GLMHC?

(6) No answer

(5) No

(1) The "host" was very informative and very friendly.

(1) Everyone I've spoken to likes what they've seen

(1) The very location of the center is a turn-off to tourists. Driving down a street with condemned notices on houses is not a positive first impression

(1) Tour brochures? (directional through exhibits)

(1) Making sure that the hotels/motels in town have info…many times I'm told that when asked, no one at the lodging property could give them any ideas for what to go see or do!

8. What do you think the purpose of the GLMHC is?

(2) Great Lakes history

(1) To increase awareness and knowledge of our heritage and help preserve it for future generations.

(1) Provide history of the area

(1) Educate people about our area

(1) Preserve the history and promote the area

(1) To preserve and explain maritime history

(1) To record and share the history of the Great Lakes, research water issues for the lakes/area, to preserve /share the shipwrecks of our area.

(1) Center is multi-facted, really. Informative, enjoyable, educational

(1) Learn about shipwrecks

(1) Education, history

(1) Educate the public in respect to maritime history

(1) To educate public and preserve our shipwrecks

(1) To bring awareness to the shipwrecks in our sanctuary. To preserve history.

(1) Federal takeover of state and local responsibilities with the taxpayer financing

9. Do visitors ask you or your staff for suggestions on things to do in Alpena?

All of the respondents replied yes.

Comments: Yes-of course! Yes GLMHC is highly recommended

10. Do you recommend GLMHC?

(14) Yes
Comments: Absolutely! Always. Definitely. Of course!

(1) No

11. Does your staff recommend GLMHC?

(13) Yes
Comments: Definitely

(1) No

(1) NA

12. How do you disseminate information about GLMHC to your staff?

(6) No answer

(3) Brochures at my location/Flyers/brochures provided for us to display

(2) Through direct conversation

(2) Encourage staff to visit

(1) I don't

(1) NA

13. Where would you go to obtain general info about GLMHC?

(4) No answer

(4) Web site

(2) Chamber of Commerce (1 respondent added, "which is NOT open weekends.")

(1) Flyers at my location

(1) It's always everywhere

(1) GLMHC

(1) GLMHC, chamber, internet

(1) GLMHC or chamber

(1) Website and chamber

(1) Website or call staff

14. Where would you to find information about events and activities at the GLMHC?

(4) Website/online

(2) No answer

(1) GLMHC website

(1) Web site and chamber

(1) Go to GLMHC

(1) GLMHC or chamber

(1) Chamber

(1) It's always everywhere

(1) Newspaper, TV

(1) It's an effort that I feel belongs to GLMHC staff

15. If you were aware of special activities at the GLMHC, would you recommend them to your customers?

(13) Yes

(1) No

(1) No answer

16. Do you feel that you and your staff have all the information that you need to recommend the GLMHC and its special events to customers? How can this be improved?

(4) Yes

(2) No answer

(1) No- not enough

(1) No, e-mail activities and events

(1) Not sure events are known as well as the sanctuary itself. Maybe a business flyer of upcoming featured events?

(1) Sometimes. E-mails to area businesses would be helpful.

(1) Please send information

(1) Improve by brochures placed at my business

(1) Maybe some sort of flyer- activity, special event sort of thing.

(1) The counter brochures work very well

(1) We receive updated flyers for our display

17. Additional comments:

Happy Fourth!

As time permits, we do things to inform and promote our area to our customers at our store, at events we attend around the state, on our website and in our newsletter.

Bridge not needed. Dock boat below bridge so don't have to raise it and delay traffic.

I really enjoy every time I get to visit the displays and features available. We bring visitors to the facility every opportunity. Such an asset to Alpena and the surrounding area!

I print maps with directions from my business to the GLMHC so tourists can find it easily!

Son played Hockey for the Thunder Bay Wrecks. We handed out players guides to customers. We distributed guides to other locations in the county as well. Wonderful program!

Challenges

One respondent believes that some of the staff project a "snobbish" attitude, but the respondent's perception of staff attitude did not change their overall positive feelings about TBNMS and the GLMHC. The vast majority of people we hear from compliment the friendly staff and admire their professionalism. We wonder if this may be due in part to "sanctuary-ese" - staff using scientific terms not commonly understood by those outside of the profession?

One respondent has developed a negative attitude toward the sanctuary and although he has visited the maritime heritage center, he will not promote the GLMHC to tourists nor encourage his employees to do so. This stems from an issue with the sanctuary regarding regulations.