



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

October 2020

Over the past number of years, Red River North Tourism has made presentations to Councils in late autumn, sharing results of annual activities, providing an accounting of expenditures, and tabling a preliminary budget. This has allowed Councils to determine the level of financial support for the following calendar year.

In October and November of 2019, we shared our proposed budget and program plans with Councils. However, we did not have an opportunity to share them with our members and partners, as events caused the postponement and eventual cancellation of the Annual General Meeting scheduled for March. This became of little consequence as the global pandemic swiftly changed everything and our attention became focussed on how to share information and meet visitor needs throughout the summer.

We share those documents with you now, along with a summary update report, so you can see how we are moving forward, exploring new paths as we go. Our goals remain unchanged. We have always believed this region has great economic potential from tourism. Under the current circumstances we could benefit from people wishing to explore closer to home.

In September, Board representatives logged on to the *Travel Manitoba* virtual AGM. Overall, Travel Manitoba is forecasting a 45%-60% drop in tourism spending for the year. Most enlightening were summer survey results which showed that in-province travel to smaller, rural destinations was preferred, with more outdoor nature-based activities and fewer crowds. Red River North fits this description perfectly! The consumer trend to digital uses was also clear: the Travel Manitoba marketing program saw a 36% increase in digital users and a 33% increase in new digital users.

Despite the need to change or cancel key programs, such as the *Garden & Art Tour*, we can still say it has been a successful year. There are several reasons for this confidence:

First, we continued the part-time Tourism Coordinator position, originally a job-share with RM St Andrews Recreation. Having consistent attention applied to projects and programs, albeit part-time, has been invaluable, especially through this past year of upheaval and change. Because we had a Coordinator, we were able to hire a summer student and the two quickly became a dynamic duo, generating ideas, completing tasks, and putting a face to Red River North Tourism at public events throughout the summer. I would like to acknowledge the support and cooperation of Teresa Howell, RM St Andrews, Recreation, for her continuing assistance in programming and especially in obtaining grants in support of our initiatives.

Second, we have entered into a service agreement with the City of Selkirk to manage a new program: *Destination Selkirk*. This builds on our core regional programs, leveraging resources and offering new opportunities to profile Selkirk. We will utilize our strong connections with various City personnel, and while the program is beginning modestly, the potential is clear.

Third, two important winter events: *Homes for the Holidays*, and *Holiday Alley*, now fall under the RRNT umbrella. While we will not be able to present Homes for the Holidays in 2020, programming for Holiday Alley is underway.

Fourth, we are pursuing the refurbishment and re-opening of Kennedy House. A preliminary ten-year plan proposal met with approval from the RM St Andrews to enter into discussions with the Province and we are hopeful that an agreement can be reached soon. There is potential here for collaboration with the neighbouring attractions of The Rectory and Lower Fort Garry and extending the visitor experience along the length of the River Road Parkway.

And finally, I thank our volunteers, program partners, and sponsors, who remain strong advocates for tourism in the region and are prepared to represent those interests whenever the opportunity arises. Our efforts depend on your enthusiasm and it is always deeply valued.

Tourism is about accentuating the positive and bolstering the local economy. The future will require flexibility and an openness to new trends and new prospects. The Board welcomes community participation. At our Annual General Meeting this coming March there will be opportunity to fill positions on the Board and all interested parties are encouraged to stand for office or join an action committee.

In closing, I offer the attached interim report on our activities. We welcome your questions and comments. Your continuing interest in tourism is appreciated.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lois Wales".

Lois Wales  
President  
Red River North Tourism