

## Warm Weather Markets Bring Northern Michigan Together



*By Paul Beachnau, Executive Director  
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I will be heading to Dallas, Texas this month to promote the Gaylord area as a wonderful place to escape the heat, play world class golf, enjoy pleasant summer temperatures, numerous crystal-clear lakes and rivers, and abundant outdoor adventures.

This trip to Dallas marks our tenth year of working with the Traverse City Airport to visit a warm weather market where summertime can be almost unbearable. What seemed a challenging major goal one decade ago has led to non-stop service from Dallas to Traverse City, and that service has expanded from three months of the year to 5 months of the year.

We are using this model to explore other warm weather markets and build regional marketing partnerships as well. Statistics have confirmed that visitors travelling from farther away stay longer and spend much more on their trip than those from nearby. Obviously, this is better for our local tourism economy and yields a higher return on our marketing investment.

While Midwesterners bask in 80-degree days in June, July and August with even more pleasant evening temperatures, it is a luxury for those in Texas, Florida, Georgia and other southern states. Many of those folks are stuck inside during the summer due to the extreme heat; it is the same concept of those in Northern Michigan visiting southern states during our cold winters.

While it is important to continue our marketing initiatives in the Midwest that provide long weekends and drive trips, our budget growth and overall success has allowed us the opportunity to market farther out of the Midwest, and for other activities in addition to golf.

In addition to partnering with the Traverse City Airport and Traverse City Convention and Visitor Bureau for our Dallas promotion, we have also built partnerships with Petoskey and Charlevoix. This new collaboration extends regional marketing initiatives to the east coast, highlighting outdoor activities, pleasant temperatures and uncrowded visits. To many residents of large metro markets where travel and overall prices are greater, Northern Michigan is considered a travel bargain.

It can be easy to take for granted when you live here, but our travel product comprised of leisure activities, natural resources and outdoor recreation is capable of drawing in visitors from throughout the United States. For example, I tell our Golf Mecca members regularly that without a doubt our golf courses are as good as any in the United States. Many of our guests that visit from distant locations confirm that. In fact, we recently had a golf travel writer tell us that many of our courses are better than the best courses in Texas.

As we take stock of our travel offerings in the Gaylord area, particularly our abundance of high quality outdoor recreational opportunities, it's clear we have much to offer on a larger scale. This, combined with increased demand for travelers seeking outdoor experiences, puts us in a great position to seek markets throughout the United States. In addition, forging partnerships and collaborating harmoniously with other tourism organizations in Northern Michigan increases our presence and makes us a more desirable destination overall.