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FEATURED

New Vienna tourism director hits the ground running

By Peter Lindblad deforestedit@hngnews.com May 22, 2019



Rose Franz has been working as the Town of Vienna's tourism administrator since February, and is working to promote the area's attractions to visitors.

Peter Lindblad

Visitors to the Town of Vienna often arrive looking for something to do. Rose Franz has the answers.

The town's new tourism administrator hopes to shine a spotlight on everything the municipality has to offer, including the hotels and restaurants just off the Interstate, Ehlenbach's Cheese Chalet, the award-winning J. Henry & Sons distillery and a U.S.-sanctioned BMX bike track that is one of only 350 of its kind.

"Visit Vienna" is the new slogan.

"We've been working with a consultant, and she said, 'It has a small-town feel with a big personality,'" said Franz.

Franz took over the part-time position in February from Heike Compe, now the executive director of the DeForest Windsor Area Chamber of Commerce. She found out about the opening almost by accident.

"It's interesting. We have two young kids, and we're out in the community, looking for things to do," said Franz, who is keeping her other job working with the art charity The Memory Project out of Middleton. "We'd come up to the (Comfort Inn & Suites) hotel to use the pool. I stumbled onto the Facebook page for Exit126. I would follow it to see what activities were coming up, and they posted the job there."

Originally from Central Wisconsin, Franz and her family have lived in the Windsor-DeForest area for the past four years. Since they enjoyed supporting the community and attending events here, Franz applied and got the job.

Right away, Franz attended the recent Wisconsin Governor's Conference on Tourism in Wisconsin Dells and started working with local businesses, trying to get to know them and to see how she could help fulfill their needs.

"I met with a lot of the business owners in the area for the first time, and they are loyal and very proud," said Franz. "You get that sense when you visit their businesses."

Her office can help bring them more traffic.

"We have money to invest in the community to do what we can to bring people to the

area,” said Franz.

So far, the experience has been illuminating, as was her first visit to the farm and tasting room at the J. Henry & Sons distillery.

“It’s amazing,” said Franz. “It’s a little slice of heaven out there.”

These days, Franz works out of an office at Comfort Inn & Suites. The BMX bike track is nearby. So is Ehlenbach’s Cheese Chalet, which draws out-of-towners.

“I had no idea the amount of different cheeses they have,” said Franz. “It’s over 300.”

Even many locals may not be aware that the strip extending from Comfort Inn & Suites to the “Welcome to DeForest” sign on Hwy. V is mostly located within the Town of Vienna.

To get the word out about Vienna and its charms, Franz is planning to increase its social media presence. There are also plans to enhance the profiles of Sissy and Pinky, the iconic fiberglass statues of a cow at Ehlenbach’s and the pink elephant with glasses that sits outside the Shell gas station, respectively. Visitors often enjoy taking photos of themselves with Sissy and Pinky.

“We kind of want to make a bigger splash with them, give them more personality,” said Franz.

Social media is the tool that will help do the job. Franz said the community can expect more of a presence in that regard.

“That’s how people learn about events,” said Franz.

The Fourth of July parade is a big one coming up, and glasses like the pair won by Pinky will be given out to build enthusiasm for Vienna tourism.

Franz said Vienna tourism will also collaborate on promoting events and attractions in the DeForest-Windsor area, such as the new athletic complex going up in DeForest and the Yahara Trail. She wants to work with other nearby places, like Lodi and Waunakee, as well. Visitors who stay in the hotels on Hwy. V will be looking for things to do all over the area.

One advantage Vienna has its location. It's about 45 minutes to Wisconsin Dells, and Madison is just a short drive away. The Devil's Lake area isn't far either. In winter, Vienna offers snowmobile trails close to the hotels.

"We're at a good midpoint," said Franz.

Another thing the consultant told Franz was that there's a little of everything in Vienna. That's something Franz is working to promote.