

City lures tourism with tongue-in-cheek ads

The Fayetteville Area Convention Camp; Visitors Bureau's new ad campaign takes an unorthodox approach to appeal to mainstream tourists.

Sep. 15--The Fayetteville Area Convention & Visitors Bureau's new ad campaign takes an unorthodox approach to appeal to mainstream tourists.

The bureau is focused on boosting tourism by three specific groups -- religious, military and sports organizations. Toward that end, this year it boosted its marketing budget -- which includes but isn't limited to advertising -- to \$809,000, 40 percent more than a year ago, said CEO John Meroski.

Tourism spending, according to the bureau, rose 4 percent last year to \$328 million - a welcome tonic for a metro region with 5.8 percent unemployment and a military population whose ranks have been depleted by the war in Iraq.

One of the new ads, designed for meeting planners for religious groups, waxes spiritual: 'Our 445 churches, mosques and synagogues are all praying ... you'll have your religious conference here.' The ad for organizations affiliated with the military? 'For over 200 years, we've welcomed military groups with open arms ... except on two occasions,' it proclaims above images of Gens. Cornwallis and Sherman, who invaded during the Revolutionary and Civil wars, respectively. 'That whole taxation without representation thing rubbed our patriotic militia the wrong way,' the ad continues. 'Eighty-four years later, General Sherman didn't get the keys to the city when he occupied Fayetteville during the Civil War. Then again, he and the Union Army set our lovely town ablaze and blew up the arsenal. How rude of him.' The humor of the ads, which began appearing in specialty magazine and on billboards at the end of August, aims to help Fayetteville stand out. 'And Fayetteville doesn't take itself very seriously,' said David Smith, creative director at Durham ad agency The Republik, which created the ads. 'They take tourism seriously, but they don't take themselves seriously.' At the same time, appealing to three specific tourism groups helps the visitors bureau stretch its ad dollars further. The ads are appearing in niche publications such as the religious-oriented 'Rejuvenate,' as well as regional meeting publications such as 'Convention South.' 'First of all, they don't have the

money to reach out to everyone,' Smith said. 'Second, it wouldn't work.' Fayetteville has targeted groups it believes the region has something to offer.

For example, the ad for sports groups touts the area's 20 golf courses and its pro and semi-pro sports teams. And the fact that Babe Ruth hit his first professional home run there on March 7, 1914.

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