



Nomination Category Outstanding Community

Population Size: Based on the latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau Rural (city with population of 10,000 or less, or a county that is among the 33 least populated in Iowa)

Organization/Individual Being Nominated Jefferson

Nominee Contact Name Matt Wetrich

Nominee Address Street Address: 201 E Lincoln Way
City: Jefferson
State / Province: Iowa
Postal / Zip Code: 50129

Nominee E-mail director@jeffersonmatters.org

Nominee Phone Number (515) 386-2155

Nomination Submitted By: Molly Cunningham

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Nominator Phone Number (515) 386-2155

Scoring Criteria: The nominee's work to cultivate and enhance tourism in Iowa is clearly stated. Provide commentary on why they are deserving of recognition. (10 points possible) Jefferson, Iowa located in Greene County has been an award-winning Main Street Community since 2012. The city was named an Iowa Great Place 2022 and named a Thriving Community 2023 by the State. It is also home to award winning tourism destinations and groups: Mahanay Bell Tower, RVP~1875, Deal's Orchard. Main Street's Tourism Team awarded Iowa Tourism's Award for Promotional Marketing Materials. Tower View Team of Jefferson Matters awarded Governor's Arts Award for Excellence 2018.

The City of Jefferson partnered with Main Street tourism efforts beginning 2012. City hotel/motel funds are used for advertising events and city. These funds helped to create a city-wide app and a walking tour of our National Historic district. Three alleyways downtown have been renovated with artworks with Arch Alley awarded Main Street Iowa's Creative Placemaking Award in 2022.

Jefferson is home to 4 octave 47 bell Mahanay Carillon Tower with an enclosed observation deck. Since we have a deck, we took advantage of that and have installed Iowa's only roof top installations: another reason to experience the tower. The tower also surpassed their 10 year high for visitors in a six month period of time with over 7,000 from 49 states, 5 continents, 24 foreign countries.

Music concerts in the TJ Gardens, completion of 47 carillon bells for the tower, roof top art along with major events of the yearly Market to Market Race, BRAG (bike ride around Greene County), Art in the Garden, Bell Tower Festival, Cruisin' to the Square, Winter Festival and strong retail businesses have drawn people of all age and interests.

Deal's Orchard, winner of Iowa Tourism's award for Best Tourism Retail expanded fall celebration from one week-end to an entire month seeing over 10,000 visitors. Recently expanded line of hard ciders and offer Cider at Sunset concerts.

The community also has a successful collaboration between the City, Jefferson Matters, TJ Gardens of Greene County, Greene County Supervisors other nonprofit and for profits in our community all supporting tourism efforts. These entities support what each is doing; always making sure each event for tourists and our residents are the highest quality.

In 2023, new experiences were added: Market to Market Starting Block Party, RAGBRAI pass thru event, after a 10 absence WHO's RVTV returned, Porch Fest, and a new regulation disc golf course was created that hosted their first statewide PDGA tournament.

The combination of collaboration of all entities for tourism has led people to move here. We are growing.

Scoring Criteria: The nominee showed originality and creativity in overcoming their challenges. (10 points possible)

One challenge has been our annual Bell Tower Festival. For over 50 years we celebrated the main tourism attraction in our community, The Mahanay Bell Tower. However, in recent years the attendance numbers were way down and there was talk of not having this celebration any longer. With a new group of young volunteers, extra funding from the City of Jefferson and county supervisors along with the Greene County Gaming Association the festival, which had fallen on hard times, is roaring back to life.

“When I was a college kid back for the summer, with an inkling that I might be coming back to live in Jefferson, I wondered if there would be an opportunity to help the Bell Tower Festival thrive again like the memories I had of it from kid hood. At first, I thought it an unreachable idea and that the people in charge were too important to be bothered by a young version of me but I soon learned how the need for volunteers is great, and if you have an idea and are willing to apply some effort to execute, not only will a committee accept you but they’ll support you. Growth awaits whoever will set the conditions to thrive.” Philip Heisterkamp, Bell Tower Festival Chair.

The Festival now has carnival, art experiences, Reunion Rendezvous, and more musical performances and larger open concept beer tent allowed around the square. This festival draws people back to Jefferson all 50 states with their yearly class reunions. Approximately 20,000 attended the overall festival in 2023.

Jefferson was selected for 5 overnight stops on the County Travel Discoveries tour in 2023. The tour director surprised us with the request for bag handlers. We quickly had an outpouring of local support with "bag porters" made up of 4H youth, high school groups, and adult Kiwanis. They met the buses with a welcome gift in the evening and were back at the hotel the following morning at 7 AM. They named us one of their favorite stops and are set to return in 2024.

Jefferson Matters: Main Street also faced a challenge when they merged with the Jefferson Chamber with Jefferson

Matters gaining both tourism and events from the Chamber to oversee. However, again with great volunteers stepping up to chair events, strong action plans and with funding that the city had given to the chamber for support going to Main Street, these challenges were met head on and events are now thriving and growing in number. When everyone in Jefferson realized it was all of us working together towards the same goal - to bring awareness of our community to the rest of Iowa - it was only then, that each of our events became stronger and even more successful than in the past. When a community has good solid events for residents and the rest of Iowa to attend that is where true successful communities are found.

Scoring Criteria: The nominee showed innovation in developing new tourism markets, unconventional approaches to old markets or new technology uses. (10 points possible)

Our Welcome Center located in Thomas Jefferson Gardens is the hub of our tourism information. It offers an abundance of printed materials, a television highlighting local events, and a representative to assist visitors in experiencing Jefferson.

Our volunteer group called the tourism team now does the majority of tourism marketing for the city and for the tourist attractions located in Jefferson through print, radio, and television. The Bell Tower Foundation and Greene County Development Corporation sponsor RVP~1875 and Bell Tower with highway billboard signs. The Tourism team places ads in Our Iowa magazine, uses our local telephone company's spots with ICAN, place ads in Central Iowa Tourism magazine, have used the Iowa Tourism booth and Main Street Iowa's booth at the Iowa State Fair different years, have used the co-op marketing available through Travel Iowa, we have a presence at the bus tour market place, maintain the city-wide app that is free to all tourists and use a new website experiencejeffersoniowa.com which won Travel Iowa's best website in 2023. We use social media with Facebook, Facebook events and boosts of posts and Instagram. Our Facebook page is followed by 3.5K. We also use Travel Iowa's website to announce events and use the new Iowa Arts Online Directory for calls to artists and to find musical performers.

We provide visitor brochures at the local airport, the trail head of the RRVT bike trail, and at the disc golf course located at Daubendiek Park. In all retail business we

provide the City Directory with downtown businesses, restaurants and attractions for people to pick up and use. Bell Tower rack cards are distributed to the hotels, Wild Rose Casino, rental properties at the Lake Panorama International Golf Course. We have sent out tourism postcards to random people to invite them to Jefferson. Our local radio station has a daily Let's Talk Greene County giving information to people here and across their broadcasting network.

We know by using the 3-legged approach to marketing with print, radio and television plus social media we will reach many people with the message to #experience Jefferson. But we also know that word of mouth of other travelers is also key to getting people to visit so four Bell Tower guides and 5 community members involved in tourism have completed the tour guide training. The Country Travel Discoveries bus tour company said Jefferson was a favorite stop due to our fun bag porters, great attractions, and all-around hospitality. Jefferson is a place where Welcome is not just a word but rather it is the way to show off our community to visitors.

Scoring criteria:
Shared any measurable numbers such as a return on investment, visitor numbers, revenue, etc, to quantify how the nominee supported the Iowa tourism industry as a whole.
(10 points possible)

In 2023, The Mahanay Bell tower recorded its highest numbers in the last 9 years and in a 6 month period welcomed 7,000 visitors. Adult admission is \$5; local sponsorships allow children free admission up to age 18. Deal's Apple Orchard has seen a huge increase in visitors during their Fall Festival week-end. They have made it a month long celebration at the orchard to accommodate all visitors and customers. They have added different hard ciders to their line increasing their sales. They added a sunflower field and zinnia field along with a second bouncy mat for children. They estimate 10,000 people came through their doors this year. Spring Lake was filled with campers all summer long as 120 hook-ups were rented along with their cabins.

The Greene County Historical Society held a Barbie week including an oversized Mattel Barbie Box for a great photo op for visitors becoming their own Barbie. They saw an increase in their numbers after the Barbie film was released. They have a collection of 1,000 Barbies now. They don't charge admission but noted their donation box was

much fuller this year due to more tourists stopping.

With a new roof top art installation this year, a new alley renovation, Imagination Alley, that blends AR technology and art together, Art in the Garden Art Festival, Porch Fest, and an Ekphrasis event and a successful public sculpture exhibition the arts are alive and thriving in Jefferson for art enthusiasts to enjoy from across the mid-west. Public art is a huge driver of positive economic outcomes for businesses downtown.

The opening of The Centennial Restaurant brought people from across Iowa to dine in a recently renovated building. The restaurant was featured in Our Iowa magazine and along with the group Why Not Us who renovated the building in a Des Moines Register feature article. Why Not Us was selected to be included in the Iowa Women's Federation Ovation book this year spreading the news about Jefferson and the restaurant even further across the state. This statewide recognition and awards we have been chosen to receive are beneficial to our retail stores that all report an uptick in sales due to more people showing up in Jefferson's National Historic district for either a day trip, a bus tour group or overnight with family and friends.

As we all know working in tourism, getting people "here" in the first place is the biggest hurdle a community ever faces. We have jumped over that hurdle as a community together. The return on our investment for our small community hosting various bus tours that either stayed for a day or for overnight, spent at least \$25,000 in our community for lodging, dining and attraction admissions. Our unique attractions coupled with our incredible community involvement will continue to bring tourists, buses, day-trippers, and large state organized events to Jefferson.

Scoring criteria:
Project showed positive impact on the community and state (10 points possible).

Jefferson supports Iowa Tourism by providing great day trips for people of all ages and incomes throughout the year. We have both indoor and outdoor venues to enjoy. We have award-winning public art and live theatre for those that enjoy the arts and humanities to glow in the dark bowling for kids, to workshops recreating the furniture built in 1875 at the award-winning RVP~1875. to wonderful parks that have

camping facilities, tennis courts, pickleball courts, swimming pool and in the winter an ice skating rink.

We use all means of advertising with print, radio, and television. We use Travel Iowa's website to not only advertise our events but also post all of our restaurants and venues on their website to help us get in front of people's eyes. We have used Travel Iowa's co-op advertising opportunities to spread the word about Jefferson into Wisconsin and Missouri.

We are a most welcoming community with an award winning National Historic downtown district. Jefferson was named a 2020 Great American Main Street and has won numerous awards from Main Street Iowa for facade projects and the arts using creative placemaking that is important to tourism in small communities. Being recognized as a top Main Street community again spreads the word to others across America that we are a community to come and visit.

The importance of statewide recognition is invaluable as it gets people wanting to come to Jefferson. We have done this by being recognized as an Iowa Great Place, a Thriving Community by the state, by numerous mentions in the Des Moines Register and Our Iowa magazine when The Centennial Restaurant opened its doors. Bus tours began arriving to downtown Jefferson as they knew we once again had a great restaurant.

We support Central Iowa Tourism and Travel Iowa by attending workshops and conferences on how to grow our tourism audience. Central Iowa Tourism featured our award-winning Arch Alley on the cover of their 2023 guide.

We are continually adding new and exciting things to offer tourists. New roof top art installations each year and this spring an exciting new mural with cutting edge technology paired with artwork will keep bringing people traveling to Jefferson either for a day or an overnight.

The Raccoon River Valley Trail begins just three blocks from our downtown. We have several parks located within the

community they can stay at for a rest along with camping spots right alongside the trail at the Greene County Fairground site.

So, no matter how you get here, by bicycle or by car or even now my corporate jet since the city has made the runway accessible to jets and have a new large hanger, there will be something for tourists to do when they arrive. They won't be disappointed when they #experience Jefferson!

You may submit up to 5 supporting documents and/or photos. (file size limit 20 MB each)

[Arch Alley.jpg](#)

[Bell Tower Festival.jpg](#)

[Checking Out Rooftop Art.jpeg](#)

[Country Travel Discoveries Review.doc](#)

[RAGBRAI.jpg](#)