

Roundup wins Governor's 2007 Montana Tourism Community of Year Award

The Governor's Tourism Advisory Council has selected Roundup, Montana as the 2007 Montana Tourism Community of the Year. The award recognizes that Roundup's efforts to promote and develop Montana's tourism opportunities have preserved and enhanced tourism's role in Montana's economy. The award was officially announced at the 33rd Annual Governor's Conference on Tourism and Recreation on April 2nd in Helena.

"We are thrilled to be selected as the 2007 Montana Tourism Community of the Year," said Mayor Bill Edwards. "Roundup has a lot of history and entertaining events to offer visitors, and we hope that the press surrounding this award will convince more folks to come spend a few days with us."

The nomination of Roundup for the award was a joint effort on the part of Custer Country executive director Jim Schaefer, Laurel Outlook editor Gloria Wester, and Custer Country Board President Rose Emily Longan. The nomination outlined several events and initiatives that the residents of Roundup and Musselshell County have organized to promote their community.

The biggest of these tourism-focused events is the Roundup Independence Days Extravaganza (RIDE), which will celebrate its third anniversary this year. RIDE was born when it became obvious that the 4th of July Rodeo was no longer a viable attraction from either a financial or tourism standpoint, and a group of volunteers put their heads together to develop an event that would bring both visitors and dollars to their community. The members of the RIDE steering committee decided that one day of events would not generate the visitation and economic return necessary to develop a memorable and sustainable event for the community. Instead, they offered a variety of entertainment over a three day period, thereby encouraging visitors to spend one or more nights in Roundup. To obtain seed money, the group applied for and was granted funds from the Special Events Grant Program and from Travel Montana Cooperative Marketing funds.

The event was, and continues to be supported through generous donations from local and area businesses and individuals. Many businesses also contributed volunteer labor and expertise to make the event a success. "Actually, everyone who buys one of our all-inclusive admittance buttons is supporting the event, and thereby supporting positive change in Roundup," said Brian Stoppel, RIDE co-chair.

The success of the event has led to a revitalization of community spirit in many areas. Another group of community-minded individuals is currently working on the development of a new museum with world-class paleontology exhibits (leading, they are hopeful, to inclusion in the Montana Dinosaur Trail). Travel Montana has coordinated and helped finance the promotion and expansion of this heritage tourism project highlighting 15 unique dinosaur facilities across the state. The Roundup Cultural and Heritage Center hopes to be added to this list in the near future.

Mary Reikofski, president of the Musselshell County Chamber of Commerce, is hard at work erecting a replica of the Hanging Tree, a historically significant cottonwood from which criminals (and sometimes wrongly accused innocents) were hanged, back in the day. "We have selected the tree, and we hope to have it in place in the next few weeks," said Mary.

Jim Schaefer, of Custer Country, stated that it was the community-wide support and cooperation evident in organizing such events in Roundup that resulted in the award. "Obviously, Roundup residents are doing something right," he said. "Now, you just have to keep it up!"

Tourism and recreation is one of Montana's largest industries. In 2005, over 10 million people visited Montana spending \$2.7 billion during their stay. Over 45,950 jobs are directly supported by nonresident travel, resulting in over \$531 million in total personal income for Montana residents. A list of previous award winners and more information can be found at: <http://travelmontana.state.mt.us/conference/awards.asp>.