

Good afternoon. It's good to be here with you again. It's been another good year for tourism overall, and with our GOOD supply of snow, let's hope it's a better winter than last year for tourism in Minnesota!

It's great to have Marilyn Carlson Nelson with us today. Thank you, Marilyn, for promoting both U.S. tourism and Minnesota's tourism industry.

All of you have been working hard this past year, attracting travelers to your businesses and communities, and providing the quality vacation experience your visitors are looking for.

I've been out promoting tourism this past year, too. Tourism is a priority for my Administration and I'm proud to be called "Jesse, the Tourism Governor" Ventura.

This year, I've been getting the word out about Minnesota to people around the world:

I spoke with members of the American Society of Association Executives in Washington, D.C. I wanted these convention planners to know that our state offers a wide range of excellent facilities, and lots of fun things to do *after* their business is done.

I spoke with representatives of major Japanese tour companies in Los Angeles. After my trade and tourism mission to Japan last year, I'm convinced that this is an important and lucrative market for us.

I caught a bunch of fish at Crane Lake and I gave key outdoor writers and other media some good stories to tell about Minnesota fishing and vacations.

I took a hike down Michigan Avenue in Chicago, with the Minnesota Explorer newspaper in hand. I wanted to convince the Windy City that Minnesota should be their premier vacation destination.

Now I'm ready for another good year of spreading the word about Minnesota.

You've spent the last couple of days talking about how to build tourism around Minnesota's arts and heritage.

Heritage tourism is about inviting folks to learn more about our people, our traditions, and our creativity, and about who we are as Minnesotans. And we've got so much to draw from all around our great state.

We've got the amazing Guthrie Theater. It draws an audience from all 50 states and Canada. Twenty percent of the Guthrie audience is from outside of the Twin Cities area.

The Minnesota Opera has a growing subscriber base from out-of-state markets like Iowa, Wisconsin, Canada, and now even Ohio and Oregon.

The Minnesota Orchestra this past year has sold over 16,000 tickets to people from outside Minnesota.

And that's just the arts.

Minnesota's historic sites, like Split Rock Lighthouse and the Lindbergh Home and Interpretive Center, regularly draw visitors from across the country, and around the world.

I believe that *every* community in Minnesota has something to offer.

We've got terrific smaller communities like Grand Marais, with its playhouse, art galleries, art school, and North House Folk School

And New York Mills with its "Great American Think-Off."

We're proud of our Dakota and Ojibwe heritage, and can invite visitors to the excellent Mille Lac Lake Indian Museum or the Midwakaton Pow-wow in Mankato.

I encourage you to come up with new and different ways to draw visitors to your destination, and think of what your community has to offer.

Duluth is playing winter up this year, during their six-week Winterfest celebration, full of unique snow activities like sleigh, dogsled and luge rides; snow sculptures, curling demonstrations and a lutefisk contest. Only in Minnesota.

The town of Luverne is promoting the fact that well-known photographer Jim Brandenburg grew up there. They boldly asked him if he'd be willing to have a gallery of his work on their main street. Now they've got a gallery of terrific photography of prairie and north woods scenes, making Luverne a great getaway, especially in combination with a visit to the buffalo herds of Blue Mounds State Park.

This is a terrific state for bird watching, and dozens of communities are taking advantage of it. The new Pine to Prairie Birding Trail promotes over 40 bird watching sites between Warroad and Fergus Falls. More birding routes are being developed along the Minnesota and Mississippi River, and there are several birding festivals each spring.

On the Gunflint Trail, Gunflint Lodge is always coming up with clever ways to attract new guests. For instance, they have Woodland Women's Retreats, promoting adventure and relaxation.

Further down the shore, the Coho Restaurant at Bluefin Bay displays and sells the works of local artists, with all proceeds going directly to the artists. That's a great example of cultural tourism.



And, by the way, congratulations Rob Buntz of Bluefin Bay Resort on being named Outstanding Individual in Tourism.

And talk about bold ideas. Look at the Mall of America right here in Bloomington. Someone thought it would be good to build the country's largest shopping and entertainment center here in Minnesota. Lots of people had their doubts. Now it's the state's biggest tourism attraction. Wander through the mall and you're going to hear languages from many other countries.

So, I challenge you to go home and think big, think bold, and come up with new ideas and new ways of doing business, new ways of building tourism.

We've worked hard for Minnesota tourism in the past two years, and together, we'll tell Minnesota's story.

Best wishes for another rewarding year. As your Tourism Governor, I'm looking forward to working with all of you to share our great state with visitors from around the world.