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## BUSINESS

PRINT THIS STORY

Posted Sept. 06, 2005

# Take your meeting on a road trip

### Companies seek change of scenery

**By Kristin Stankewicz**  
*For The Post-Crescent*

Bored with the board room?

If thinking about another meeting in your own conference room makes your eyelids droop, take heart. The Fox Cities area offers plenty of offsite locations to keep your team awake, enthused and on task during meetings.

"We can get twice as much done in half the time when we're offsite," says Mary Harp-Jirschele, chief operating officer of Employment Resources Group of Menasha. "We try to choose sites that are unique and yet provide a space that is conducive to a meeting."

The company recently held a meeting at The Big Picture large format movie theater in downtown Appleton. The theater has three small meeting rooms that can be combined to hold up to 100 people, said co-owner Jim Bork. Or groups can use the theater and movie screen for their gatherings.

Most of the meetings Bork has coordinated at The Big Picture have been for local businesses or groups, rather than out-of-town organizations. "The out-of-town groups usually go to the conference centers," he said.

Bork said he's "not trying to compete with the big conference centers," but thinks The Big Picture is a good venue for a smaller group.

He's also worked with companies to set up creative theme meetings.

### Before you go

Questions to ask a potential offsite meeting spot:

- Is the facility large enough to hold your group?
- Is the necessary technology available (Internet access, audiovisual equipment, etc.)?
- Are support materials such as podiums, microphones, flip charts, etc. available?
- Will weather be a factor?
- Can your catering needs be met, either by the facility or an outside service?

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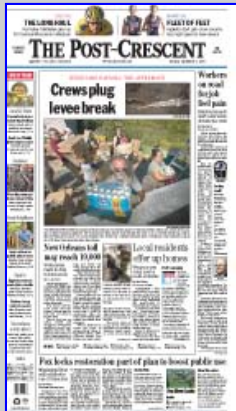
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Today's Front page



"Their meeting theme might be 'going to new heights' and we'll show the movie "Everest," or maybe 'going into uncharted waters' and we'll show "Lewis and Clark," Bork said.

Another popular meeting site in downtown Appleton is the Fox Cities Performing Arts Center. The center offers several options for businesses, said Maria Van Laanen, vice president of communications and external relations.

"The unique thing is that we have a variety of different size spaces," she said. Businesses can use the PAC "whether you're looking to host a meeting for 25 board members in the Founders Room, or a major presentation in Thrivent Financial Hall, which can accommodate 2,100 people."

When Christina Moubarak, who coordinates the Pulse Young Professionals group for the Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce & Industry, needed a location for an event she chose the Girl Scout Program Center in Grand Chute. "It was new, and different," she said.

The Pulse meeting focused on health and wellness so Moubarak wanted a room with a laid-back feel. The Girl Scout Program Center's Friendship Room, which can be divided into three smaller rooms, has a large stone fireplace and windows overlooking nature.

"We've had Thrivent, Kimberly-Clark and the City of Appleton" use the facility, said Erin Dunlavy, program and property director for the Girl Scouts of the Fox River Area.

"We also have our Camp Winnecomac in Kaukauna, which has a low ropes course. It's like you're out in the woods, but you're right in the city," said Dunlavy, adding that both sites have special rates for nonprofits.

Before building The Big Picture, Bork spent 25 years in strategic planning and field management training at Aid Association for Lutherans, now Thrivent Financial, where he was a proponent of taking employees offsite for meetings.

"It gets rid of reminders of hierarchy, like in the board room where the president always sits in a particular seat," he said. "It also prevents people from running back to their desks during breaks, which can make it hard to get them back."

Bork once brought a team to 1000 Islands Nature Preserve in Kaukauna for a planning and community service trip. "We went out and enjoyed nature, and did projects. It gives people an opportunity to dress down and free up their thoughts," he said.

Lee Hammen, naturalist and administrator at 1000 Islands Nature Preserve, said the facility can seat about 100 people indoors and has an outdoor picnic area.

"We have groups that sign up every year," he said. "It gets used quite often. It's a different atmosphere, with the mounted animals and talking parrot."

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For a sports-oriented meeting experience, Fox Cities Stadium in Grand Chute rents out its Leinie Lodge. "A lot of companies like it because it's different," says Lisa Nortman, who handles event planning for the stadium. "It's a bar-type setting, and we can bring in catered food."

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