

## City got to show its best sides

Henderson is Kentucky's eighth-largest city, but a lot of Kentuckians have never really seen it.

"I've been passing through, but I hadn't spent a lot of time here," Mike Mangeot, who works in Frankfort, said at the conclusion of his first real visit here last week.

"I'd never been here before," said fellow visitor Fran Carrico, a Springfield resident.

"I live an hour and a half away, and I've been in Kentucky for five years, but I hadn't had a chance to come to Henderson," said Jim Moore of Princeton.

They were three of 130 Kentuckians in town last Wednesday through Friday for a convention of economic development professionals and elected officials. For most, it was their first good look at Henderson.

That could pay dividends. Many Kentuckians only know Henderson from driving through on U.S. 41-North. We're just that town with a bunch of fast-food restaurants.

If dozens of economic development agents went home and said good things about this community to their family, their friends and their professional acquaintances, it could inform a lot of people that a pretty nice little town sits on the Ohio River out in western Kentucky.

So, what did they think?

### **Rave reviews**

"This is a great town, just outstanding," enthused Mike Mangeot, president and CEO of the Kentucky Association of Economic Development, the organization that conducted its spring conference here.

Their hosts -- Kevin Sheilley and his staff at Northwest Kentucky Forward, along with a committee of local business and non-profit representatives -- made sure that the visitors got to see more than the inside of Wolf's Banquet and Convention Center, where their meetings and breakout sessions took place.

There was a golf outing, a reception with barbecue at the Audubon State Park museum, entertainment and an Italian cooking class at Riverbend Academy, among other things.

"The hospitality has been wonderful," Mangeot said. "The mayor and Wolf's were so accommodating, and the support of the community was amazing.

"Audubon Park was just gorgeous," he said. "It's one of the best-kept secrets in Kentucky. I heard a number of (KAED) members say so.

"Downtown -- I hate to say this, because it's so trite -- but it's lovely," Mangeot said.

"It's a really nice downtown," said Fran Carrico, who works for the Kentucky Cabinet for Economic Development and is active in the Main Street program in Springfield.

"And I loved Wednesday night at Audubon Park," along with Riverbend Academy, which she described as "a really unique art center."

"I think everyone was pretty impressed," Jim Moore, the Princeton resident who is executive director of the Caldwell-Lyon Partnership economic development organization.

"I've been very impressed with how vital your downtown is," Moore said. "I think Kevin and the community did an excellent job."

"I can't tell you how much we enjoyed being here," Mangeot said. "And it has benefits for our members, who get to see other communities ... Economic developers like to see what other communities are doing."

### **Exceeding expectations**

"Henderson was so much more than they expected," Sheilley said as the conference broke up late Friday morning.

"They loved downtown, and I think they left a lot of money here," he said.

Downtown Henderson Project Director Julie Turnipseed agreed, reeling off purchases she saw the conference attendees make downtown. KAED staff Meghan Crosman, for example, was enamored with Gabbi's Boutique, which custom-sews outfits for dogs, Mangeot said.

"We forget what a wonderful asset we have in our downtown," Sheilley said. "The constant comment was, they had no idea this was here."

Mayor Tom Davis, who owns Wolf's, declared the event "a huge success, from the comments we've gotten from guests.

"Our host committee" -- Sheilley, Turnipseed, Marcia Eblen, Doug Bell, Kim Humphreys, Kenny Barkley, Sue Baker, Marty Littrel, Todd Blackburn, Debbie Gray and Cj Maple -- "did such a good job having a wide array of activities. They showed Henderson at its best.

"I think we've given Henderson some good exposure to other communities of Kentucky," Davis said.

"We need to do more things like this -- more 100- to 150-(person) groups that think of Henderson as a place to go."

Get enough gatherings of people like that going home to tell people about their experiences in Henderson, and the state's eighth-largest city will cease to be such an invisible city to our fellow Kentuckians.