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## Consultant submits tourism suggestions

Extended hours, more signs urged

By Andrea Uhde • [auhde@courier-journal.com](mailto:auhde@courier-journal.com) • April 28, 2010

Downtown La Grange needs more stores that stay open later, better curb appeal and more signs directing people there from Interstate 71.

Those were just a few of the ideas Roger Brooks of Seattle-based Destination Development had for La Grange and the rest of Oldham County.

The downtown area “has the potential to be a regional destination,” Brooks said.

But “when we came off of (Interstate) 71, we had no clue there was a historic La Grange.”

Brooks and his wife spent a week driving almost every road in the county, snapping photos and stopping at tourist spots such as Yew Dell Gardens in Crestwood and Creasey Mahan Nature Preserve in Goshen. Brooks took notes on customer service, curb appeal, signage and just about every

other aspect that tourists might notice.

The Oldham County Tourism Commission paid him \$24,000 for the [study](#).

“We’ve got so much here that we just don’t showcase enough,” said Cheryl Sabin, a commission member and owner of Bluegrass Country Estate in L’Esprit.

“I thought he did a fabulous job.”

Brooks, who has worked in 855 communities in 41 states, called Oldham “one of the most beautiful counties I have ever worked in.”

But he still had a long list of ideas for improvement.

“I had a very hard time finding your primary lure,” he told the crowd of business owners, tourism commissioners and officials who gathered for his presentation at the Oldham County Arts Center on April 16.

He said it’s important for Oldham to find its niche and promote it — and he pinpointed downtown La Grange as a possible tourism hotspot.

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With better signs, planters, benches and more visible restrooms and tourist information, the area could start drawing more customers, Brooks said.

He said keeping businesses open later in the day and on weekends also will help.

"If you want people that live in Oldham County to spend some money in Oldham County, you have to be open later," he said.

He described the downtown area as more of a "hodgepodge. Just whoever can pay rent," and stores could work together to be more streamlined with hours and even products.

"I thought it was very informative, very constructive, and to me, I'm ready to roll up my sleeves" and get to work, said Barbara Manley Edds with Discover Downtown La Grange. "Sometimes when you see something every day, sometimes you don't really see it."

She said she and tourism director Kim Buckler are planning to present Brooks' findings again for anyone who missed it.

Brooks, who came to Oldham with only basic information on its attractions, said the county should focus more on Internet marketing and have maps with driving or motorcycle riding routes.

He said the golf courses could work together to promote each other and become a destination, and he had ideas

for an ice cream store and a restaurant near the Little Colonel Playhouse in Pewee Valley.

"That could be a little gem for the whole county," Brooks said.

Also, he said Yew Dell Gardens could be the start of a garden-themed lure for tourists.

"You could be Kentucky's garden capital," he said.

Buckler said Brooks' information will be a guide for improvements and get discussion going across the county.

She said she plans to meet with each community to discuss the assessment further.

Reporter Andrea Uhde can be reached at (502) 582-4663.

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