

# Officials gear up for CMHR tourism spike

*Expected to bring \$79M more annually*

By Martin Cash

THE Canadian Museum for Human Rights is going to create the biggest tourism boon in Winnipeg in more than a decade and the wheels are in motion for the city to capitalize on it.

Estimates are that the CMHR will account for \$79 million a year in additional direct spending in the city — a spike of about 16.5 per cent from the current \$480 million of tourism spending.

“That’s a lot of money to our city,” said Marina James, CEO of Economic Development Winnipeg. “We have some advance work to do. We can’t disappoint the initial visitors — we don’t want to embarrass ourselves.”

At EDW’s annual meeting on Thursday, James said, “The asset landscape is changing in Winnipeg. We are expecting significant growth for tourism in the city.”

The growth is already showing.

Chantal Sturk-Nadeau, senior vice-president of Tourism Winnipeg, said there is strong interest in Winnipeg from the meetings and conventions market for bookings in anticipation of the museum 2013 opening.

“We already have more bookings for 2013 than we do for 2012,” she said.

For instance, the Community Foundations of Canada, the organization representing community foundations including the Winnipeg Foundation, has booked its national meetings in Winnipeg for 2013. It will be the first time in more than 20 years that the 400-plus delegate group will meet in the city.

Rick Frost, CEO of the Winnipeg Foundation, said the museum’s opening was definitely one of the attractions for the group.

The museum estimates there will be 250,000 visitors a year and Sturk-Nadeau said her agency is working hard at developing programs that will help those visitors enhance their stay in the city — and spend more money.

“I have been doing this for 12 years,” Sturk-Nadeau said. “This is the first time I can honestly say there is such an exciting, positive outlook. There are a lot of products finally coming to fruition.”

One new asset the industry has been pursuing for many years that has not yet materialized is an expanded convention centre.

But Klaus Lahr, president of the Winnipeg Convention Centre, said Thursday he believes



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confirmation of a \$213-million, 250,000-square-foot project may not be far off.

Lahr said the city and provincial officials are fully inside in understanding the benefits of the project and he believes the biggest challenge at this point is for the federal government to identify the appropriate pot of money to help finance the expansion.

“It’s no longer a question of if we need it,” Lahr said Thursday. “Those questions have all been answered.”

But Lahr will certainly not get any confirmation from the federal government until after the May election. He said he hopes he’ll be able to



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**Construction at the Museum for Human Rights Thursday. It’s expected to see 250,000 visitors a year.**

“slide in” through the window of opportunity between the May federal election and the October provincial vote.

“We have been at this for 10 years,” he said. “We have answered all the questions, jumped through all the hoops, done all the research. All that is done.”

With the museum about two years away from opening, Lahr said the best-case scenario for an expanded convention centre completion would be 2015.

“That’s if all the stars align this year,” he said.

The fear is the longer the project takes to get started, the more opportunities will be lost.

“How many years in a row will some of those groups (who are interested in coming to Winnipeg) be told there is no space before they stop calling?” Lahr said.

Sturk-Nadeau said even though there is heightened interest in Winnipeg from the meetings and conventions market sparked by new developments like the museum and the extensive Assiniboine Park redevelopment, the city is effectively excluded from bidding on conventions of more than 3,000 people; the inventory of meeting space in the city cannot accommodate groups that large.

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