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WILD WALK LOOKING LIKE A WILD SUCCESS
Center says attendance breaking all previous records
Regional impact felt

Tupper Lake, NY - It was eight years in the planning. Now, one month after it officially opened to the public on July 4th, all the planning seems to be paying off for the Center and surrounding towns.

The Center reports that it has broken every single attendance record set over its 9 year history. It has more members than at any time in its existence, admitted more customers in its first 30-days since the Walk opened than it did in any other 30 day period, including its big initial opening in 2006. Local food emporium Well Dressed Food owner David Tomberlin says he is seeing 30 percent more people in his shop wearing their Wild Center admission stickers. “It’s been a great boost.” Local restaurant owner Ted Demarais of Little Italy says his lunch business has doubled from both prior years since the Walk opened. In Lake Placid, Jim McKenna, who heads the Regional Office for Sustainable Tourism (ROOST), said “The Wild Walk addition to the Wild Center has already proven to be an engine that helps the whole region. There’s absolutely no question that this new attraction-within-an-attraction has emerged as a real driver of new visitors to the Adirondacks.”

Wild Walk, with more than 1,250 feet of bridges and platforms that rise up into and eventually over a living Adirondack forest, was featured in New York State’s I Love NY television advertising campaign. It continues to get wide coverage from national media with stories in Travel + Leisure, The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post and ABC News to name a few. The experience includes a giant spiders web visitors can hang out in, a four-story tree house, and a treetop bald eagle’s nest that offers a 27-mile view on a clear day.

“A walk around our parking lot looking at license plates is like a tour of America,” said Stephanie Ratcliffe, Executive Director of the Center. “We’re seeing people from everywhere.” Ratcliffe says a survey of visitors shows that more than half of the people are coming because a friend told them about the Walk. “That means the most to us. We know I Love NY gave us this huge boost, and now we’re seeing another boost from all the people who seem to really enjoy the whole experience, and are telling others to come see for themselves.”

The resulting numbers are outsized, and on some days the Center turns into one of the biggest population centers in the area. “In a single 10 day window,” said Ratcliffe, “we’ve had more than 18,000 people visit. To put that in perspective, it’s a good deal more than the entire year round population of Tupper Lake, Lake Placid, Saranac Lake, Old Forge, Inlet, and Lake George combined.” In the month of July, more than 50,000 people visited the Center.

Dave St Onge, the facility manager of the Center says they are keeping up with the crowds. “The experience here is almost twice the size we used to be, with people using the trails, coming inside, hanging out on the Walk, taking canoe rides. We have a huge crew of interns this year, and while some of them are clocking up to ten miles a day showing people around, the end result feels less crowded than in years past when everyone would come inside
for a movie screening or when rain watered the campus.”

The Center has plans to maintain the momentum by boosting leaf peeper visits with a ‘Climb into the Color’ promotional campaign starting this month. “National Geographic Traveler and others have been by with cameras and reporters,” said Tracey Legat, who has guided more than 50 press visits. “We’re looking forward to next summer, when more stories about Wild Walk will be published internationally, and seeing what happens when all the people who came this year spread the word to their friends and families.” Legat said reviews in places like TripAdvisor were already drawing new visits. “We’re getting reviews like this one - ‘Wild Walk is unprecedented’, or this ‘I highly recommend this place as a must visit’ and we’re listening to feedback to make the experience better and better, so we’re really hopeful that Wild Walk will have a lasting impact.”

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