

# Joliet Herald News

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## **GET YOUR KICKOFF WITH A MAJOR ROUTE 66 TOURISM PUSH, OFFICIALS HOPE JOLIET WILL BE THE PLACE TO ...**

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JOLIET - Faster than the kids at Rydell High could slap out the hand jive, city agencies have started gearing up to launch Joliet's latest marketing venture: Joliet Kicks on Route 66.

On June 2, the city, the City Center Partnership and the Joliet Area Historical Museum will celebrate Joliet's ties to the Mother Road with a sock hop, ice cream parlor, classic cars, the movie "Grease," Blues Brothers impersonators and, yes, the hand jive.

When dealing with Route 66, the hokier, the better.

"It's very kitschy. It's very fun," said Rebecca Lantka, marketing manager for the Joliet Visitors Bureau.

As much fun as reliving the good old days may be, there is a serious side to the city's efforts. Officials see their prime location on the Mother Road as a way of attracting tourists to the city.

And the numbers are no laughing matter.

The state's tourism bureau estimates 300,000 people, many of them from other country, traveled the iconic route in Illinois last year. Route 66 second only to Chicago in attracting tourists to the state.

"They are looking for what is quintessentially American," said Susan English, the museum's executive director.

The state is giving Joliet more than \$83,000 to develop and market tourist attractions tied to Route 66. The city is kicking in more than \$87,000.

Securing the state grant required the city, the City Center Partnership, the Joliet Area Historical Museum, Route 66 preservationists and state representatives to work together to sell the plan.

"It's been a community effort," Lantka said.

Area officials are focusing on three places to highlight Route 66: the museum's welcome center, the Broadway Greenway Park and downtown Joliet.

Interaction and plenty of photo opportunities are the main draw at the museum. Visitors will be able to sit in couches shaped like cars and watch a "drive-in" movie featuring scenes along Route 66, English said. Or they can test out the real Magic Fingers in the bed of the mock hotel room while the nearby TV plays reruns of the "Route 66" television show. A photo booth will allow visitors to take their picture with different backdrops - the Rialto Square Theatre, a prison cell or Route 66 - and e-mail it to others or print it as a souvenir.

"I think they want to experience the road, that's why they're following it," English said.

"They don't just want to read about it."

Other features at the museum's welcome center include the Blues Brothers, informational kiosks, brochures, maps and information about other Joliet attractions.

Motorists driving along Illinois 53, part of Route 66's modern day alignment, will see Joliet Jake and Elwood dancing on top of the Rich & Creamy ice cream stand. Officials also will update the stand with plenty of neon and a large ice-cream cone sign.

The "Route 66 Park" also will have an informational sign directing people to the museum's welcome center and other places in Joliet.

Local leaders also will use decorative signs to direct tourists through downtown and place replica gas pumps in front of key attractions such as the Rialto.

For more information on Joliet Kicks and the kickoff event at the museum, visit [www.jolietkicks.com](http://www.jolietkicks.com) or call (877) 4-JOLIET.

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