

# THE FUTURE'S SO BRIGHT

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*Joel K. Schettler*

— Joel Schettler, editor

All around us, many of the traditional economic measures are showing indications that, if not prosperity, economic recovery may indeed be upon us. The stock market is hitting all-time highs. In November, the nation's jobless rate fell to a five-year low. The same is true here in Minnesota. The state's unemployment level is among the lowest in the nation, and now rests at a level not seen since October 2007.

I'm often kindly ribbed around the office about how I like a good chart, especially around the time we begin to compile data for our industry review (see page 38). Sometimes what can be seen in a good graph would take a thousand words to explain in a paragraph. Trend lines show a pattern of recovery in hospitality that mirrors that of the nation's overall health. If you place a graph of real tourism spending atop that of unemployment figures you would find the lines to be nearly exact symmetrical opposites. During the same third quarter of 2007, the nation's tourism spending reached all time highs, followed by dramatic drop-offs in the ensuing years. Data shows that we may soon reach new high-water marks.

The "future's so bright." That is the theme of the upcoming Minnesota Tourism Conference, to be held in Duluth next month. Do you believe it? Does the data paint the entire picture? When everything is put back together again, will our industry be the same as it once was? What is different? Make your own conclusions as you view some of the data we've put together in our review. But I would also like to encourage you to attend the roundtable session at the tourism conference where the same industry experts featured in our story will look through the numbers and discuss with me how they assess the state of our industry.

To crib Dylan, the times are a changin'. Want proof? Just check out a few of the stories that can be found in this issue of *RSVP*. As Managing Editor Amanda Fretheim Gates writes in the opening line in our cover story this issue (page 44), "you can't attend or plan an event these days without giving social media some thought." How quickly times have changed. To be a meeting and event planner is to be a facilitator for connections. To do that effectively today means that you must extend your reach beyond the hall floor or meeting space. To drive connections, create conversation and engage attendees requires skills and strategies that continue to evolve year after year.

Merriam Webster may believe "science" to be the word of the year, but my contribution would be the term "FOMO" or "fear of missing out." Normally the term is for those who can't part with their smartphone in fear of missing a text, email, or tweet in real time. But I would argue that the term could apply to technology itself. The rules that guide our actions and the terrain in which we work have changed. With seemingly magical new technologies comes an unlimited sense of what we can do. We expect bigness, especially when social media comes to mind, but we often feel we don't quite have a grasp on how to use it properly—that we are missing out on new opportunities. Our profile feature (page 34) highlights how Visit Saint Paul took their marketing campaign on the road. In so doing, they learned what worked, and what didn't, when trying to engage with visitors, literally and socially, turning first encounters into lasting impressions.

The future is indeed bright. But it's also complicated, and often we fear what we don't completely understand. The only thing we can count on the future to bring is change.