



File photo/Rhonda Silence

There are opportunities every day to make Cook County visitors feel at home. Customer service skills are important, not only at events like this wine weekend at Bluefin Bay, but in every interaction. Recent training offered by the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality highlighted the importance of understanding and meeting customers' needs.

# Everyone matters in a tourism economy

Jane Howard

A lot of people depend on the tourism industry in Cook County. Visitors have many interactions with the local population from the time they make their first inquiries into coming up the North Shore until the time they eat their last meals in restaurants and get gas before leaving for home. Any one of those interactions can make a big difference in how an experience of Cook County is remembered.

One factor that is sometimes overlooked in customer service is that of cultural differences between visitor and host, and they can result in misperceptions that leave a bad taste in a customer's mouth.

To help develop skill in successfully interacting with customers of all backgrounds, John Bennett of the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Community Vitality offered an afternoon seminar at Cook County Higher Education on December 14, 2011 entitled *At Your Service: Working with Multicultural Customers*. About 15 people representing lodges, hotels, and other tourism businesses throughout the county attended.

A customer typically tells nine people if he or she has a negative experience with a business or organization, Bennett said. "An unhappy customer remembers an incident for 23½ years, and on average, they talk about that experience for 18 months," he said. "People won't forget."

Both service providers and customers bring their own culture to their interac-



File photo/Brian Larsen

From serving wine to selling minnows, treating customers right is important. Buck Benson at Buck's Hardware Hank in Grand Marais offers service with a smile, even on the busiest days like the opening of fishing season.

tions, and this can result in tension. One "poorly managed moment of truth" can cancel out a lot of positive experiences at a business, Bennett said, and "sometimes it doesn't matter if you're right or not." He defined moments of truth as any contact between a customer and a business representative, starting from the first phone call

a customer might make to inquire about reservations.

The workshop's training manual admonished, "Think of yourself as the manager of each moment of truth. These moments are golden opportunities to positively shape a customer's total experience."

A business owner or employee needs to satisfy the customer if he or she wants the customer to walk away with good things to say about the business. The trouble is, two people can see the same thing but perceive two completely different pictures. That's why cultural awareness is important.

"As a service provider," Bennett said, "the important thing is to understand what your customer sees in a service situation. Words may mean different things to different people."

It's not just words that leave an impression, either. Attitude, tone of voice, and demeanor as well as choice of words when helping a customer deal with a problem can make a huge difference in their experience.

Understanding customers and being aware of how the business is coming across is vital. Being able to give customers what they want and need is crucial as well. In order to serve customers most effectively, Bennett recommended that business representatives know the business, know the local community, and know the region. And when you don't know the answer, he said, know who you can call.



# Weekly Weather



Photo by Jerry Alan Gervais

The Temperance River looked "pretty lonely" under the 600 Road Bridge just north of Tofte at the beginning of December 2011. Jerry Alan Gervais noted that the river bed is the lowest that he has seen it in 50 years. Gervais said he took the photos during a late season bird hunt with his dog "Tofte."

Date	High	Low	Precipitation
<b>From Dave Clutter, Poplar Lake</b>			
Dec. 27	8.2	-11.4	0.00 Trace
Dec. 28	22.3	-4.1	0.00 3.50
Dec. 29	25.0	18.9	0.00 1.00
Dec. 30	24.1	20.8	0.00 0.00
Dec. 31	28.4	23.5	0.00 0.20
Jan. 1	23.5	3.2	0.00 1.75
Jan. 2	5.4	-6.3	0.00 0.30

Date	High	Low	Precipitation
<b>From Joseph &amp; Mary Routh, Hovland</b>			
Dec. 27	--	--	--- ---
Dec. 28	--	--	--- ---
Dec. 29	30	19	0.00 5.00
Dec. 30	28	21	0.00 0.00
Dec. 31	32	25	0.00 Trace
Jan. 1	30	14	0.00 1.50
Jan. 2	15	-1	0.00 0.00



Welcome to our weekly advice column to pass along important information regarding medication use, new therapy advances and general healthy living tips. Our goal is to keep you informed and make sure you are using any medications, vitamins, herbs or supplements safely and effectively.

## Happy 2012!

With the changing of the calendar to a new year, many people are finding that their medication insurance plans are changing as well. Keep an eye on the mail for a new card or other info from your insurance provider that will help us get you the medications you need.

Anytime you know that insurance will be changing, give us a call and we can enter the new information into our system to prevent any delays when you come in to pick up your prescriptions. Even if you don't think anything has changed with your card or plan, try to have your latest card with you so we can be sure we are up to date with your plan and billing information.

Also keep in mind that January 1st is often a "reset date" for many insurers. This can mean that your copayments may change or deductibles are now your responsibility. Insurance may remain the same for many of you, but don't be surprised to see some different costs for medications as we begin 2012. We are here to help you with insurance questions and can put you in contact directly with the insurance company if we cannot help immediately.

Thanks for your feedback and support.

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### Foundations of service:

- Attitude:** Your attitude often makes the difference in a customer's experience, and you are in control of your attitude.
- Attention:** Customers receiving individual, personal attention are more likely to perceive their experience positively. Listen carefully to your customer to figure out what he or she really wants.
- Action:** Take initiative – don't wait for your customer to ask for help.
- Appearance:** Pay attention to your personal appearance as well as that of the business. Even how your team interacts will make a difference to your customers.

### Phone etiquette:

- Use a greeting.
- Identify your business, your name, and your function.
- Offer service.
- Wait for a response if you need to put the customer on hold.
- Offer a choice when taking a message. "Would you like to leave a message with me or on voicemail, or would you like me to refer you to someone else?"
- Take complete messages in writing with date and time of call, caller's first and last name and phone number, reason for the call, and your name.
- On your voicemail, record your name and department, the date, and when you will be picking up messages. Respond to messages promptly.

### Tips on emailing customers:

- Don't assume it's okay to use first names.
- Include a signature line with full name, title, business, and contact information.
- Write in complete sentences, and check your grammar and spelling.

### Three things that might anger customers:

- "I don't know."
- "I can't do that."
- "That's not my job."



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