

Q&A with Sally McWilliams

Sally McWilliams is the owner of MediaLink, providing outsourced marketing services to the tourism industry. Since 2005 she has assisted Southeast Indiana's Dearborn County Convention, Visitor and Tourism Bureau in developing and marketing their group tour product.



Photo: Sally McWilliams

Your women-only program is unique, tell us a little about it.

A: Dearborn County CVTB offers visiting groups an enjoyable travel experience and the opportunity to give back while they “Have Fun, Give Hope” on a Tour for the Cure. Tour for the Cure is a travel rewards program that helps raise funds for breast cancer research. Individuals on the tour enjoy the benefits of travel, while the local participating hotels, restaurants, attractions, and class providers included in the itineraries donate to Tour for the Cure. Operators and group leaders booking overnight tours can also get involved. Their donations of \$1 per passenger are in turn matched by both the hotel receiving the overnight stay and the Dearborn County Visitors Center. It's a win-win arrangement supporting the Vera Bradley Foundation for Breast Cancer.

Q: How did you get involved with the Vera Bradley Foundation?

A: As an Indiana Convention and Visitors Bureau, we thought it would be an ideal partnership to select an Indiana-based foundation supporting an

Indiana-based research effort, so we selected the Vera Bradley Foundation for Breast Cancer to receive the Tour for the Cure donations. The foundation concentrates its efforts on supporting cutting-edge breast cancer research and is the primary philanthropy for Vera Bradley, Inc., located in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and well known for their luggage, handbags, and accessories. Since the Foundation began their efforts, more than \$10 million has been contributed to breast cancer research. All funds raised support the clinicians and researchers working toward a cure in the Vera Bradley Foundation for Breast Cancer Research Laboratories at the Melvin and Bren Simon Cancer Center in Indianapolis. It's a pleasure to work with so many wonderful people within Indiana who are making a difference for all of us.

Q: What are some of the benefits of women-only trips for the travelers.

A: Women-only trips allow the traveler to spend some time celebrating who they are and enjoying new experiences. Women often find that taking a trip with a group of women is more fun and less stressful, and

themed itineraries often attract women with similar interests. Many women prefer not to travel alone, yet don't want to feel like “a spare” among couples. Whether they are on their own or travel with family or friends, most women enjoy the social aspects—having fun and making memories—as much as the attractions they visit.

Q: What should tour planners consider when planning a women-only trip?

A: Look for experiences that make the trip “about them.” Hands-on activities offer participants the chance to learn something new and to put their personal style on the project. Women are typically “givers,” so choose attractions or facilities that go the extra mile in customer service. Women travelers welcome the chance to feel special and receive some extra attention and thoughtfulness. Think about including something in the itinerary that's kept a secret until arrival – like shopping “bonus bucks” or a stop for ice cream – for a pleasant surprise. Women-only tours notice the small things, and those details can set the experience apart from other tours. ■