

# Daily Chronicle

## DeKalb expected to profit from IHSA call

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Northern Illinois University's Huskie Stadium in DeKalb as seen July 29, 2009.  
(Daily Chronicle file photo)

DeKALB – DeKalb business owners are optimistic that they’ll see a big economic boost when the state high school football finals start taking place alternating years at Northern Illinois University.

The Illinois High School Association announced Monday that NIU will be host to football finals alternating years, starting in 2013.

Debbie Armstrong, executive director of the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau, said the football finals are expected to draw about 32,000 visitors to the area during the last weekend in November next year.

“That’s a sizable economic impact to the area, not to mention the publicity surrounding the event,” she said.

The IHSA Board of Directors awarded the state football finals in odd-numbered years starting in 2013 through 2021 to Northern Illinois University, DeKalb High School athletic director Dan Jones told the Daily Chronicle on Monday afternoon. NIU beat out Illinois State University and Southern Illinois University for the right to host the two-day, eight-class event.

The University of Illinois has hosted the state championship games at Memorial Stadium since 1999, but changes to the Big Ten schedule forced the IHSA to find a host for title games in odd-numbered years starting next year. The site proposal specifications sought a host for five seasons – 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019 and 2021 – for the eight classes of football. Illinois will continue to host in even-numbered years.

Armstrong said a steering committee made up of members of the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau, DeKalb High School, city and NIU officials worked hard to help bring the finals to DeKalb. She expects a lot of activity to be going on locally surrounding the event that weekend.

Vicky Torres, manager of the Best Western DeKalb Inn & Suites in DeKalb, was pleasantly surprised to hear the news Monday.

“We’re happy. We’ll be full,” she said. “Oh my goodness, that’s amazing. I couldn’t be happier.”

Nancy Young, general manager at Holiday Inn Express Hotel & Suites in Sycamore, said lots of people got involved in the process of bringing the football finals to DeKalb. She also expects the weekend to bring an uptick in business from a different set of customers.

“It’ll be a nice little boost when it happens,” she said.

Armstrong estimates that between \$800,000 and \$1 million could be generated for the city of DeKalb in a single weekend, thanks to the finals locating here. The revenue that’s generated depends on several factors, such as where teams come from, she said.

She said revenue will likely be generated for a wide variety of businesses, including hotels, gas stations, shops and restaurants.

“It really generates revenue through various avenues for the community. It’s very good publicity for the area,” Armstrong said. “We can showcase the area to visitors who may never have been here before.”

Shannon O’Keefe, manager at Fatty’s Pub & Grille in DeKalb, said small high school games held at NIU’s Convocation Center already draw in extra business for the bar and restaurant, so she expects to be very busy the last weekend in November next year.

She said the owner usually tries to do something special for big sporting events, and said she wouldn’t be surprised if they had a tent set up that weekend to accommodate extra patrons.

“That’ll be great for our business,” she said. “... We’re excited to have them. Bring ‘em on.”

DeKalb City Manager Mark Biernacki praised all the parties involved for helping bring the state football finals to NIU.

“It’s certainly wonderful news for the DeKalb community,” he said. “It’ll be a significant boost for the local economy starting in November 2013.”

Now that the announcement has been made, Armstrong said a steering committee will start seeking volunteers to help familiarize tourists with the DeKalb area by pointing them toward restaurants, shops and facilities at NIU.

“We’re very excited to be hosting an event of this caliber for IHSA,” she said.

DeKalb Mayor Kris Povlsen said the decision to locate the state football finals in DeKalb speaks highly of the community and NIU, and said the city’s central location makes sense. He hopes the football finals will help attract businesses, such as hotels, in the future.

“I think we’ll see not only a boom for that weekend, ... but it could also put DeKalb on the map for other businesses to locate here.”

Jennifer Diedrich, economic development coordinator for DeKalb, also was excited to hear the news Monday.

“I think it’s going to benefit the community in so many ways,” she said. “It will bring so many people into DeKalb that may not have otherwise come into DeKalb.”