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# The Valley

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Mankato Area Chamber of Commerce President David Schooff (left) and Minnesota State University athletic director Kevin Buisman hope to work together to improve attendance at MSU athletic events.

## Study: MSU, community must work together

By Jim Rueda  
Free Press Sports Editor

**MANKATO** — The first step, says Minnesota State University athletic director Kevin Buisman, is complete. Now it's time to take another.

Last winter, when MSU officials announced they were moving a home hockey game against the Minnesota Gophers to the Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul, the decision was met with much criticism locally.

The MSU administration promised that a portion of the revenue gained from moving the game would be used to fund a research project aimed at examining how Maverick athletics is viewed by students, alumni and the community and whether or not attendance can be significantly improved.

The study was initiated July 1. About 4½ months and \$30,000 later, the results were announced at a news conference Tuesday on the MSU campus.

The research was independently conducted by Forté Consulting Inc. of the Twin

## STORY: Open seats represent 'opportunity'

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Cities and shows there is a "consistent gap between attendance and stadium capacity which has helped to create perceptions of low fan support and enthusiasm." Despite the fact that fan attendance has been steady or increasing in recent years for football, men's basketball and men's hockey, an average of just 60 percent of the seats are being used in their respective facilities.

The good news, said Forté spokesman Tom de Ranitz, is the open seats represent an "opportunity for continuing improvement" in attendance. And the study has identified steps that should be explored to help fill seats.

The extensive study included a range of input from alumni, focus groups, MSU students and Mankato households. The project shows that improving attendance will require the university and the community to work together to generate inter-

est among local students and community members as well as Twin City-area alumni.

De Ranitz suggested that while the majority of MSU sports fans indicate an "overall satisfaction with many elements of the Maverick game day experience, (they) also indicate a desire for greater enthusiasm and fan engagement" at those same events.

The study says MSU should separate itself from its peers, such as the colleges at St. Cloud State, Minnesota-Duluth and North Dakota, by highlighting traditions pertaining to MSU athletic events and encouraging the development of new ones.

De Ranitz said marketing to area families also could be a key.

"When you bring in families, you not only get the bonus of multiple people attending your event from one account, but you begin to grow loyalty," he said. In particular, de Ranitz said connecting Maverick events with family dining-out experiences is likely to increase

family participation.

Buisman is looking forward to taking the next step.

"This study provides a strong foundation for the university and community to use in moving forward together," he said.

"We now have solid data to confirm a lot of informal perceptions ... and this data also sheds new light on some of the underlying reasons for our attendance patterns," Buisman said. "Now, the challenge is to use this information in constructive ways to help build consistent support of Maverick athletics."

David Schooff, president of the Mankato Area Chamber of Commerce, also is looking forward to moving ahead.

"This is a great tool for us and we welcome the opportunity to work with the university to try and implement some of the suggestions outlined in the study," he said. "Improved attendance not only benefits the college, it benefits the community as a whole."