

# News

## For Immediate Release

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## **POSITIVE START FOR 2009 TRAVEL SEASON**

### Fantastic Caverns Reports Strong Start to Season

**Springfield, Mo., March 4, 2009** — After a disappointing end to the 2008 travel season, Fantastic Caverns is optimistic about the approaching vacation months. Early attendance at the Missouri cave attraction is an encouraging indicator of what may lie ahead. While winter attendance is the smallest of the year, the increases in visitation have the cavern's management looking forward to a busy, summer season.

January 2009 attendance was much better than the previous year, coming in 23% ahead of January 2008. February also ended well showing a 12% increase in visitation to the cave compared to the previous year. According to Steve Thompson, Fantastic Caverns General Manager, ticket sales increased in every category of ticket sold. "The best news is seeing the increase in our full-priced, General Admission tickets," says Thompson. "These tickets are traditionally sold to 'out-of-towners' – those visiting or passing through the Ozarks."

To keep the data in perspective, it is much easier to post a percentage-based increase in attendance during the slowest times of the year. A few hundred admissions will translate into an impressive percentage increase based on low overall numbers. Each year there are factors that will influence the current visitation numbers. Weather, fuel prices, the economy and special events all play a role in every comparison. Considering these factors, January 2009 was the fifth best January on record for the Springfield attraction. February, compared historically, was the eleventh best February (28-days) on record. Comparison data goes back to 1960.

Kirk Hansen, Public Information Director for Fantastic Caverns said that while they have made some budget concessions in response to the lower numbers in 2008, the 2009 marketing plan has remained unaffected. "We are very optimistic about the upcoming vacation season. The idea of reducing our marketing and advertising budget is one that doesn't work well for us," said Hansen. "However, if the positive numbers do not continue into the busy part of the season, we do have provisions in place to limit any loss. There are segments of our advertising and marketing budgets, scheduled for later in the season, which could be reduced if the need should arise." The cavern's marketing is designed to give visitors another reason to visit Springfield and the Ozarks. The 2009 advertising efforts are scheduled into six metropolitan markets including Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Wichita, Topeka, Kansas City and Springfield.

Fantastic Caverns is a family-owned and operated cave attraction located in the Missouri Ozarks. The cave, one of the America's most beautiful, is enhanced by its mode of tour -- Fantastic Caverns is the only all-riding cave tour in North America and one of only four ride-through cave attractions in the world. Fantastic Caverns, located just northwest of Springfield off of I-44 and MO 13, is open daily throughout the year.

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