BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR THE OTTER STATUES

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By Heather Rule

With tourism growing in Ottertail, the talk of the town is the various otter statues that have shown up around the area in recent years. Tall, wood-carved, themed otter statues are pieces of décor and an added photo-op spot in Ottertail.

Ron Grobeck got the idea a few years ago when brainstorming ideas for how to promote Ottertail. He saw gnomes popping up all over Dawson, MN, which were associated with various promotions and festivities. Adding otters around Ottertail seemed like the obvious and logical choice as one of the city's tourist trademarks.

"Having carved otters was a perfect fit for our city simply because we're Ottertail," Grobeck said.

The seven otter statues were carved by Ben Semler, a wood carver from Brainerd who creates a variety of wood-carved creatures. Otters were placed around the city, each matching a theme to the location or business where they're located. For example, the otter at Thumper Pond is a golfer. There's also a firefighter and a shopping otter in front of Red Brick Boutique.

The first otter popped up at Otterfest in August a couple of years ago. That otter found a permanent home inside the Otter Supper Club.

They're planning to add more otters in 2026. One in the city park by the pavilion, and hopes to add at least seven more otters to the seven already in town. Businesses have taken notice of the otters as a way to promote their business, Grobeck said. Expect to see some otters along the city's paved walking path, too. They're in the early stages, but finding a good carver to work with helps create more otters with various themes.

"The creative juices are flowing," Grobeck said.

Keep your eyes open ,as the city will likely start a contest for those who take photos with the otters and submit them to the city. They'll have weekly drawings in the summer, and entrants with winning photos will get a t-shirt promoting Ottertail.

While exploring Ottertail, don't forget to look around for these creative otters.

"People are talking about the otters," Grobeck said. "They're making comments [about] how detailed and neat they are."

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