

## Hershey Harrisburg Regional Visitors Bureau launches Sports & Events Authority

*New division will focus on unique branding and dedicated services as competitive advantage to securing more business for the Hershey & Harrisburg Region from these two lucrative market segments.*



**Harrisburg, PA** (July 20, 2016) – Mary Smith, President & CEO for the Hershey Harrisburg Regional Visitors Bureau ([HHRVB](http://www.HHRVB.org)) today announced the organization has created a new division called the Hershey Harrisburg Sports & Events Authority ([HHSE](http://www.HHSE.org)) to focus on sales and services dedicated to the sports tourism and special event markets.

The bureau announced the details of the new division's mission and revealed the unique branding to an audience of approximately 100 tourism partners during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual "Mecum Auction Block Party" hosted by HHRVB at the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex & Expo Center ([FSC](http://www.FSC.org)). The annual event serves as the official media kick-off and preview party for [Mecum Auctions Harrisburg](http://www.MecumAuctions.com) which takes place this weekend from July 21-23, 2016.

Tourism officials chose to make their announcement at the auto auction preview party because Mecum Auctions was once again named one of the bureau's **TOP5 Client Events** for both economic impact and overall attendance in 2016. Therefore, Mecum Auctions exemplifies the type of large-scale or citywide event the bureau's new division will be charged with bringing to the region.

"The mission of the Hershey Harrisburg Sports & Events Authority is to expand upon the bureau's sports tourism and events initiatives," said Smith. "This new division is now charged with attracting new business from those two market segments and providing our clients with an enhanced level of service and assistance."

The ultimate goal is always to drive economic development for the region through tourism, said Smith.

"While HHRVB fulfills that mission through destination marketing, this new division will be fulfilling that mission by working more closely with regional partners, local venues, and event facilities to fill their vacancies throughout the year," said Smith. "This approach will create the greatest benefit for our tourism stakeholders and have the greatest impact on our regional economy."



**Gregg Cook**

The new division will aim to increase sales indicators related to sports and large events by 10 percent in the first year, according to Gregg Cook, who was named the Executive Director for HHSE after serving as the Sports Marketing Manager for HHRVB for the past 13 years.

“To obtain our goals of significant growth in room-nights and economic impact from sports and events we first had to do our homework and create a model that would harness our greatest strengths and address our biggest issues,” said Cook. “Staffing and structure were two of the top priorities identified in our research.”

A study conducted by the Huddle Up Group, LLC and DMOproZ revealed that adding to the bureau’s staff would be critical to offering clients the type of individual attention and dedicated services that are necessary to remain competitive in today’s highly crowded marketplace.

“Because of our mission and our relatively limited budget for a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO), we have always maintained a small and streamlined structured,” Smith said. “While this is highly efficient for a destination marketing and communications organization, that structure created great challenges to providing our clients with any type of significant event support services.”

According to Smith there is now someone dedicated within the new HHSE model to servicing sports and events clients beyond the initial sale. Those services may include the addition of manpower required to produce an event or assisting with the marketing and promotional aspects of the event, to simply consulting a client on best venues or lodging options.

“Our new division will now enable us to promote and provide the types of dedicated services our clients often require to be successful,” Smith said. “And that becomes a huge competitive advantage for us.”

And gaining a competitive advantage is important in today’s crowded marketplace, says Cook. Pennsylvania and the Mid-Atlantic Region have become highly saturated with cities and regions vying for a piece of this lucrative sports and event business.

The Huddle Up Group, who studied the viability of a Sports & Events Authority model for HHRVB, identified 14 other regions and organizations within Pennsylvania and 11 cities within the Mid-Atlantic Region that are currently active in recruiting or catering to the sports tourism and event market segments.

Cook says the competitors identified in the research take various forms including Convention & Visitors Bureaus (CVB), Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO), and designated Sports Commissions, but none are exactly like HHRVB’s Sports & Events Authority model.

In Pennsylvania alone, the only regions from the study with a similar model are Erie, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. However, Cook points out that the HHSE model is still unique because it includes events whereas those other regions only focus on sports.

“Our model uniquely combines the sports and events markets under one division because these are two of our most lucrative markets and they require similar services,” says Cook.

In fact, these two markets are clearly the workhorses within the region’s business portfolio according to the bureau’s TOP20 Client Events List for 2016. The annual list issued by the HHRVB reveals the region will host more Sports Tourism events in the area than any other sales segment in 2016, but large-scale public events take top prize for generating the greatest return for Overall Attendance & Economic Impact.

According to the list, 80 percent of the bureau’s TOP20 Client Events are related to Sports & Events and will generate an estimated \$132 Million for the region’s economy in 2016.

According to tourism officials, while creating a division dedicated to selling the destination for sports and events is something new for the bureau, the sales efforts and goals are nothing new. In 2015, the bureau reported 61 percent of the total 104,000 room-nights recorded as a direct result of HHRVB’s sales efforts were generated by a sports or events client.

“Over the past decade we have worked hard to become a highly respected, well-recognized, and competitive organization among sports promoters and events producers,” said Cook, who worked with Smith over the past ten years to develop the previous structure and strategy for a successful sports marketing program within the HHRVB.

The region has long been a strong destination for certain types of youth sports such as basketball, wrestling, and field hockey, according to Cook. Pursuing those types of youth sports will not change under the new model. Just as Cook says they will not begin pursuing swimming, diving and softball events because the region still does not have the venue capacity or type of facilities required to secure those bids.

Tourism officials stated they are looking to generate more business for the region with this new division, which does not necessarily mean just recruiting larger events.

“We’ve been successful in positioning our organization and selling our region as a destination for sports and events,” Smith said. “So we aren’t necessarily changing our focus on the types or sizes of events we are pursuing. But we are greatly expanding the scope of services we can provide to our clients.”

Smith cited the other core strengths that will continue to be important to the success of this initiative such as the region’s accessibility, affordability, and infrastructure.

“We are fortunate to represent a Goldilocks destination for event clients. We are easily accessible from the Mid-Atlantic, relatively affordable compared to surrounding major metro markets, and nationally recognized as a family-friendly tourism destination,” said Smith. “We have the legacy of Milton Hershey attracting millions of leisure travelers to our hotels and we have Pennsylvania’s Capital City of Harrisburg supporting a constant flow of business travelers into our community. As such we can offer clients the unique opportunity of producing their event in a place that is close and convenient to large population centers with an inordinate inventory of moderately priced hotels, restaurants, entertainment options, sports facilities, and event venues.”

Officials emphasize that all of these assets are important to attracting business to the region and now the bureau has the services to seal the deal with event producers.

Tourism officials expect this new division to give the region the competitive advantage necessary to remain a leader in the sports tourism market which is estimated by some reports to be an \$8 Billion industry in the U.S. annually. Youth sports in particular have also proven to be recession-proof historically for the Hershey Harrisburg Region which recorded continued growth in that market segment alone following the recession that began in 2008.

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## **MEDIA INTERVIEWS**

Mary Smith, President/CEO of the Hershey Harrisburg Regional Visitors Bureau is available for media interviews regarding the contents of this news release. Please try to make interview requests at least 12-hours in advance. The bureau will make every effort to accommodate all interview requests. Contact Rick Dunlap, Public Relations Director at [Rick@HersheyHarrisburg.org](mailto:Rick@HersheyHarrisburg.org) or by cell 717.884.3328.

## **ABOUT THE HERSHEY HARRISBURG SPORTS & EVENTS AUTHORITY (HHSE)**

The HHSE Authority was created in 2016 as a division of the Hershey Harrisburg Regional Visitors Bureau (HHRVB). The mission of HHSE is to expand the bureau’s sports tourism and events initiatives, to forge mutually beneficial partnerships with new and existing clients, support locally produced events to expand audiences, and drive economic development as it relates to sports and events tourism. HHRVB serves as the official non-profit partnership-based Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for Dauphin and Perry Counties located in Pennsylvania.

## **ABOUT THE HERSHEY HARRISBURG REGIONAL VISITORS BUREAU (HHRVB)**

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The HHRVB is the official non-profit partnership-based Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) leading economic growth for Pennsylvania’s Hershey & Harrisburg Region through destination marketing and tourism development. The organization, accredited by Destination Marketing Association International ([DMAI](#)) since 2010, is committed to actively marketing the tourism assets in Dauphin & Perry County to business and leisure travelers both domestic & international. The bureau also leads regional sales efforts to attract meeting & event organizers, sporting event producers, and group tour leaders. For more information, go to [VisitHersheyHarrisburg.org](http://VisitHersheyHarrisburg.org) or call 877-727-8573. Media can use #HHRVB and #HHRVB4Media when tagging stories and social media posts related to the region.