



Spreading the Word

Hamilton County Convention and Visitors Bureau's (HCCVB) focus is attracting visitors, and who better to help spread the word than Hamilton County's 290,000 residents? That's why this year the bureau made it a goal to better connect with local residents. That means a lot of different things: media relations, community relations, and being more visible at local festivals.

"We're so visible in Louisville, Cincinnati and even Chicago, because of our ad campaigns, but we need to make sure our local residents know we're working for them, and encourage them to enjoy all of the amenities that are right in their backyard and invite their friends and family," said HCCVB Deputy Director Karen Radcliff.

One of the first things HCCVB did was to set up booths at local festivals, where bureau staff promoted the county's attractions, answered questions and explained how tourism development pumps dollars into the local economy. HCCVB also wants local residents to encourage their out-of-town friends and family to visit.

At the same events, the Bureau is also assisting partners to help better understand their visitors. After all, anyone who has promoted an event knows the key to success is understanding your audience. However, many volunteer-run events don't have the resources to hire a professional research company, so HCCVB is working to help its partners fill that need.

This summer and throughout the fall, bureau staff members have armed themselves with an iPad and traveled to various events around the county collecting information from attendees, such as their age, where they live, how they heard about the event, what they like most and their thoughts on how the event could be improved.

Additionally, HCCVB is asking web visitors to take a quick survey. All of this information will be compiled and provided to partners and stakeholders, so they can better market and plan their events.

Already HCCVB knows from its website analysis that about 50 percent of visitors to VisitHamiltonCounty.com are local women in their 30s and 40s, who want information about food, events, home décor, design and parenting resources in their community.

“When fully compiled, this information will be invaluable to our festival partners, so they can be even more successful,” said Radcliff, a veteran marketer. “It’s going to help them plan for their events, and also to use when they are applying for grants or seeking sponsorship opportunities.”

Next Stop on Nickel Plate Arts

When HCCVB created the **Nickel Plate Arts** organization about a year ago, the goal was for it to mature into a self-sufficient cultural entity. How to accomplish that is the question that’s on the minds of staff members and its advisory council, who are in the midst of a strategic planning process to provide a road map for the next three to five years.

Nickel Plate Arts hosted three community feedback sessions and recently sent out a survey to stakeholders and partners to gather information. The information will be used to finalize a strategic plan, which is expected to be completed by late fall.

“Our first goal was simply finding a home and generating interest from artists and the community,” said Ailithir McGill, Nickel Plate Arts’ Director. “Now that we have a home (two remodeled historic homes in Noblesville), we need to assess our needs, leverage our resources and identify our greatest opportunities.”

Meanwhile, Nickel Plate Arts is becoming more visible. This summer, signage designed by Commercial Artisan, were installed in each of the communities that are along the Nickel Plate Railroad. The interpretive signage was made possible by a grant.

Nickel Plate was created to support, promote and provide outstanding arts experiences in six communities along the Nickel Plate Railroad from Fishers through Tipton. Learn more about the organization at NickelPlateArts.org.

Indiana’s Gas Boom and Bust

Historians say the discovery of natural gas in the late 19th century in East Central Indiana was a period in Indiana history equivalent to California’s Gold Rush. The story of the Gas Boom, including the Trenton Gas Dome, which included the nation’s largest repository of natural gas, and subsequent building boom around the area is being preserved through a Heritage Tourism Development Project.

Thanks to an Indiana Tourism Development grant, HCCVB, the Grant County Convention and Visitors Bureau and state tourism created a handbook to help heritage and community development leaders in seven pilot counties tell the Gas Boom story.

While several civic leaders and historians have worked to capture stories from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there had been no comprehensive effort – until now. In 2011, a small group of dedicated people interested in keeping the story alive for future generations,

convened community conversations, which became the catalyst to create a heritage tourism development project.

In addition to the handbook, Ball State University students created and produced a documentary that provides a birds-eye view of the region's history through the eyes of manufacturers. In 2012, the Indiana Office of Tourism Development awarded the Indiana's Gas Boom project a grant for a trail, which will be used to create an identity for the project, for which stories about the Gas Boom can be told.

The boom led to construction of impressive civic and business buildings throughout the area, caused rapid development of neighborhoods and attracted foreign immigrant workers from Belgium and Wales. The gas itself was a tourism attraction and towns burned flambeaux or towers of gas around the clock. Some say the lights could be seen from as far away as Chicago. The extravagance took its toll, however, and within 15 years, the gas wells were depleted. Like the Gold Rush, it was an important time in Indiana history.

In addition to Hamilton and Grant counties, other counties involved include Delaware, Howard, Jay, Madison and Tipton counties. For more information, see the website: www.indianagasboom.org or contact Brenda Myers at bmyers@8greattowns.com.

Happy Travelers Help Cambria Win the Gold

Cambria Suites in Noblesville received the hotel chain's Gold Award for guest satisfaction. But that's not all. Jeremy Geisendorff was named the General Manager of the year for the Cambria brand, Karen Bowers received the Director of Sales of the year, and the Hamilton County hotel received the RevUP award for having the highest growth in revenue per room.

Preserving Hamilton County Heritage

This fall, the HCCVB, in partnership with Indiana Humanities and the Bowen Center for Public Affairs at Ball State University, will host conversations throughout the county to discuss how Hamilton County's heritage can be preserved for future generations. It's all part of Indiana Humanities' Community Conversations series developed to help communities tackle challenging issues. Hamilton County was one of four Indiana communities selected to host a series this year.

The initial conversations began in June when more than two dozen leaders of historical organizations took a cross-county tour of heritage sites, and then provided input on ways to preserve the county's heritage.

Conversations this fall will focus on both short-term projects to help celebrate the state's bicentennial in 2016, as well as longer-term legacy projects.

For more information on the project, contact Brenda Myers at bmyers@8GreatTowns.com.

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Hamilton County was selected to participate earlier this year.

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