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Reader's View: Tourism effort strong in the Spa City

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Last week, I was honored to be invited to participate in the 25th Anniversary Dinner for the Saratoga Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) held at the Hall of Springs.

As one of the founding members of the CVB, by virtue of being the opening general manager of the Ramada Renaissance Hotel (now the Saratoga Hilton) which adjoins the City Center, I was asked to share a few comments about the tourism industry and the early days of the CVB.

The unexpectedly large, enthusiastic turnout for the 25th Anniversary Celebration — more than 175 attendees — is positive proof there is overwhelming support and appreciation among the Saratoga business community for the job the CVB did to reinvigorate our city and continues to do today.

My opening remarks detailed the statewide economic benefits that tourism provides to all regions of our state. In fact, in 2008, travelers to New York spent \$53 billion, which generated \$7 billion in state and local taxes, of which Saratoga County received \$24.4 million and \$24.2 million, respectively.

Our message in Albany is a properly funded “I Love New York” marketing and Matching Funds programs — a total of \$10.6 million — will help deliver travelers to our great state. The marketing dollars the state invests will be returned six or seven times over to our depleted tax coffers, from which Saratoga will certainly get its fair share. Right now, we can ill-afford to cut tourism marketing budgets.

I also detailed how challenging, at times, it is to deliver our message — that the tourism industry has a direct, positive impact on the state’s economy — to state legislators, especially during these down economic times when our budget shortfall is growing larger by the day.

In my current position as president of the New York State Hospitality & Tourism Association, which was founded in Saratoga Springs in 1887, I have traveled throughout our great state many times over the past 14 years and I am hard-pressed to find such enthusiastic support and a dedicated commitment to a local CVB

elsewhere in our state or, for that matter, across the country.

This local support is the primary engine that drives the success of our CVB. It motivates the professional sales team and gives them the ability to deliver top-notch sales and marketing on behalf of the entire community and ensures that when visitors come to Saratoga the hand of hospitality will always be extended.

It is quite evident to me that Saratogians truly understand the return on investment of the CVB's sales efforts and that their hard work helps make the vibrant downtown community what it is today, especially during the off-season.

So, thanks to the original idea in 1984 for a free-standing, dedicated sales organization — the Saratoga CVB — by a small downtown travel agency owner (Mary Reed of Saratoga Circuit Travel & Tours) and another believer (Dave Morris, operator of the Saratoga Raceway), coupled with the support of the lodging community, including Cindy Hollowood of the Holiday Inn, Gene and Lois Collins of the Downtowner Motel and myself, the city was able to employ a dedicated sales team to highlight all of the great things we had to offer as a destination. And let's not forget that soon after the original idea was presented, the local business community wholeheartedly got on board to support the initiative.

In closing, I trust that all Saratogians will join me in recognizing all of the officers, board members and supporters of our CVB over the past 25 years. I am confident that under the leadership of incoming Chair Rita Cox and President Todd Garofano, Saratoga will continue to reap the benefits of the successful CVB sales team's efforts to carry on the Saratoga tradition of being a great destination for years to come, and make all of us, including myself, proud to be Saratogians.

Daniel C. Murphy is president of the New York State Hospitality & Tourism Association and a Saratoga Springs resident.

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