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ARP funding to help strengthen economy through visitation

Centre County Commissioners approve HVAB grant for multi-faceted marketing campaign

STATE COLLEGE, PA, July 6, 2021 – Centre County Commissioners today approved American Rescue Plan grant funding for The **Happy Valley Adventure Bureau (HVAB)** to conduct a large-scale, summer destination marketing campaign to grow visitation to Happy Valley, PA and help further drive economic recovery.

“Using American Rescue Plan funds to invest in Centre County’s tourism marketing is a win-win,” said Commissioner Chairman Michael Pipe. “As more people travel and visit our great attractions, they will also enjoy our restaurants, bars, and overnight accommodations. Supercharging HVAB’s 2021 marketing campaign will enrich and strengthen our economy and help our community on the path to continued recovery.”

Commissioner Mark Higgins said Centre County is one of the first counties in the nation to fund a marketing grant for tourism and hospitality, a distinction for which the board is very proud.

The \$250,000 grant will fund a multifaceted campaign designed to reach key drive markets in the Pittsburgh area and East/Southeast, both in- and out-of-state. The campaign will be carried out through 18 advertising outlets across multiple platforms, including broadcast, print, social media, digital, and static and moving billboards. Target audiences are active families and couples within a 250-mile radius who especially enjoy the outdoors and exploring new destinations, as well as repeat visitors and Penn State fans with an emotional attachment to the area.

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“The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau applauds the Board of Commissioners for recognizing the importance of visitation to our economy, as well as the need for a robust investment in tourism promotion in order to compete with those being made by other counties and other states,” said Fritz Smith, HVAB President and CEO. “This allocation is critical to continue our efforts to rebound from the devastating economic situation in 2020.”

Centre County saw a drop of 1.3 million visitors from 2019 to 2020, and a loss of 500,000 overnight stays. Hotel revenue was down 71.6 percent, a revenue loss of \$60 million. Local and visitor spending losses were \$425 million between March 2019 and December 2020.

Prior to COVID, the HVAB was set to launch a major marketing push, the first since rebranding in 2019, to capitalize on what was expected to be a record year for visitation. The pandemic forced the HVAB to pull ads in key markets that had already been placed. The organization’s subsequent revenue loss from the halt in travel – from which it continues to recover – made it impossible to resume a large-scale marketing campaign at this time without ARP funding support.

Smith stressed that the HVAB has not stopped its marketing and marketing-related activity over the past year and a half. Efforts have ranged from bolstering blog content; promoting safe visitation during pauses in the pandemic; launching successful campaigns on Expedia and Travel Zoo; ramping up its sports tourism activity; and engaging with travel writers and influencers to keep Happy Valley top of mind.

“However, now that Americans are ready to travel, a campaign of this level is absolutely what is needed to stand out in the crowded and competitive field of visitor attraction,” he said. “This investment will elevate awareness that is starting to build about Happy Valley, PA being an ideal destination for visitors. The positive and measurable impact on the local economy will benefit all who live, work, learn and play here.”

“Centre County offers amazing experiences during the summer,” Higgins concluded. “We have dozens of outdoor activities including some of the best fly fishing, kayaking, ATV and motorcycling touring, road, mountain, and gravel biking on the East Coast. Our city, towns, villages, mountains, and valleys contain hundreds of unique small businesses, restaurants, hotels, B&B’s, arts, history, and cultural attractions, and a tasting trail with craft breweries, distilleries, wineries and cideries. Our numerous farmer’s markets and farm to table restaurants provide the bounty of an inland empire for your tasting pleasure.”

Commissioner Steve Dershem said Happy Valley is a year-round destination, with amazing things to do 365 days a year.

“Let’s be thankful for what we’ve got, move ahead into the future and support the folks in our local communities that make this all happen,” he said.

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