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CONTACT:

Lesley Kistner

Public Affairs Director

814 769-9490

LesleyK@happyvalley.com

HVAB announces move that will strengthen investment in destination marketing

Strategic changes will better position organization to drive local economic recovery

Monday, May 3, 2021 – The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau (HVAB) today announced strategic changes that will better position the organization to drive local economic recovery efforts through leisure, sports and business visitation, as well as ensure that the county can capitalize on future tourism growth.

On May 1, the HVAB will move Visitor Center services and administrative offices from its current location at 800 E. Park Avenue to a suite of offices on South Fraser Street in downtown State College. The HVAB Board of Directors approved the move at its March meeting.

“As the Adventure Bureau itself works through recovery, the Board and staff feel strongly that the best use of resources at this time is fostering recovery of the hospitality industry and the business community through a focused investment in destination marketing,” said HVAB President and CEO Fritz Smith.

Smith said with more of the populace being vaccinated and COVID numbers and restrictions dropping, people are starting to act on an extreme pent up interest in travel. While Happy Valley is perfectly positioned as a desirable post-COVID destination, competition for visitation across multiple sectors will be fierce.

“We are already seeing a considerable marketing push from other regions and states,” he said. “We have to make sure that awareness about Happy Valley as a safe, affordable and family friendly destination stands out in a crowded marketplace, and that means fully allocating limited resources where they are most needed right now. In the age of consumers’ growing reliance on technology, maintaining a large physical presence is not where our focus needs to be.”

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Smith said the youth sports market is one example of visitation activity that will boost local recovery, and one that is already having a positive impact on weekend hotel occupancy rates in what have historically been “need” months for visitation. The industry is a priority for the HVAB moving forward.

“The Board believes this is the right move for the long-term success of the local economy and the organization,” said HVAB Board Chairman Edward Tubbs. “From a public point of view, it’s certainly a big change, but internally, it is one that will set the stage for even greater things in the future.”

Smith said the move will also give the Adventure Bureau time to map out a strategy to best provide access to information to all visitors to Happy Valley.

Of the 55,808 people who entered the Visitor Center in 2019, 66 percent, or about 37,000 people, did so on just the eight football Saturdays.

“We feel a downtown State College location will meet the needs of those in Happy Valley for Penn State-related reasons, while we work to enhance services throughout Happy Valley to further grow visitation,” Smith said.

Future plans being considered are additional satellite visitor centers at key entry points into the county and in outlying communities, in addition to the existing satellite visitor center at the Bellefonte Train Station.

The lease on the new office space runs through 2023. At that time, the HVAB will re-evaluate the location of its administrative offices and visitor services. In the meantime, current visitor center highway signage will be relocated to direct visitors to downtown State College, and additional signage will be placed to elevate awareness about the Bellefonte satellite location.

“This past year has forced many businesses to rethink how they operate,” Smith said. “As much as the pandemic has been difficult in so many ways, there have been many positive lessons learned. We need to be nimble in our efforts throughout Happy Valley. This move is a starting point.

“As the official destination marketing organization for Centre County, the HVAB is embracing this time of change because we have a vision for the future. We look forward to working with our members and community partners in this promising next chapter.”

Smith said the HVAB enjoyed a great working relationship with Penn State during the time that it operated the Visitor Center on university property.

“The HVAB looks forward to future continued collaboration with the University on a number of fronts,” he said.

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