



## New and improved sites in Pennsylvania

By Pam George



Courtesy PA Dutch CVB

The state's smaller cities are seeing an uptick as new hotels open, existing ones improve and more visitors come to town.

One of five counties in the Greater Philadelphia area, Delaware County is peppered with small towns and big businesses.

Philadelphia International Airport, situated off Interstate 95, sits on the county border. Convenience to the city is a plus, yet Delaware County is far less congested.

Those factors, plus an improving economy, have led to a 4.5 percent increase in hotel occupancy between the first quarters of 2012 and 2013. At least six new properties will open in the next two years.

"These projects are coming on fast and furious," said Barbara Lehman, director of communication for Delaware County's Brandywine Conference and Visitors Bureau.

Delaware County is in good company. Many small markets in Pennsylvania are seeing an uptick in properties and services, and most of the cities are within easy reach.

From the western border with Ohio to the Delaware River, which separates Pennsylvania from New Jersey, the state possesses a well-developed network of highways, railways and airports.

### New and improved properties

In Delaware County, the Springfield Courtyard Marriott is scheduled to open this summer near Media, a small town off I-476 and I-95.

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The hotel is being built by owners of the Springfield Country Club and will have four ballrooms, from 4,000 to 14,000 square feet.

Last fall, Pennsylvania awarded \$1.25 million toward the development of two hotels near I-95 in Delaware County. The franchises have yet to be announced, but the jointly owned properties will share a community center with event space.

"This will be a dynamic hospitality center and a great addition to the county," Lehman said. Perhaps those developers are witnessing the success of two jointly owned properties on the Delaware River. The Holiday Inn Express Airport, which has 1,200 square feet of meeting space, is "just crushing it" with regard to occupancy, Lehman said.

It and its sister property, the recently renovated Airport Waterfront Inn, are adjacent to the Deck, a restaurant and nightclub with a marina.

About 20 minutes up I-476 and just off the turnpike, the \$30 million Sheraton Valley Forge in King of Prussia opened in October. The hotel, with 25,000 square feet of function space, is in Montgomery County, also the home of the Greater Philadelphia Expo Center and the new Valley Forge Casino Resort.

Within walking distance of the expo center is the new Hilton Garden Inn Valley Forge, with 4,000 square feet of meeting space.

Both Montgomery County and Delaware County cozy up to Chester County, which last summer welcomed the Hotel Warner. Built in West Chester, the hotel has 80 rooms and meeting space for 40. The Warner is across the street from the Chester County Historical Society, an offsite venue for up to 300 people.

North of Philly, urban development gives way to upscale Bucks County, which has managed to retain its rural flavor despite encroaching development.

Although the county is known for charming inns, there are larger properties such as the Radisson Hotel Philadelphia Northeast, which recently upgraded its 20,000 square feet of meeting space and its 273 guest rooms.

To the west, the Hershey-Harrisburg area has sweetened its appeal with the June opening of the Hampton Inn and Suites Harrisburg North, near the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex and Expo Center in Harrisburg.

In nearby Lancaster, the upscale Cork Factory hotel recently added the 2,555-square-foot Warehouse, an event space outfitted with cork-lined walls and antiques hardwood floors.

In central Pennsylvania, the Penn Stater Conference Center Hotel, owned by Pennsylvania State University, continues to make improvements. The most recent focused on the restaurant.

In Butler County, part of the Pittsburgh metro area, two hotels opened in the past year. Meeting space at the Hilton Garden Inn Pittsburgh/Cranberry includes a 2,400-square-foot ballroom. The Courtyard Pittsburgh North/Cranberry Woods has a 930-square-foot meeting room.

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