

Visitors bureau, Google partner for virtual tours

By Centre Daily Times (State College)

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Jerrilynn Cipar knows many of her potential customers make decisions while looking at their mobile devices.

Cipar, leasing and marketing manager for The Retreat at State College, a housing complex at 300 Waupelani Drive, said virtual tours are a great way to connect with apartment-hunting Penn State students — especially those who might be elsewhere for the summer.

The Retreat was among the local businesses to sign up for a virtual tour through a partnership between Google and the Central Pennsylvania Convention and Visitors Bureau.

“We think this is going to be tremendous for us for leasing,” Cipar said. “A lot of kids and their parents can't really come here for a tour. This is the next-best thing.”

Google's “Street View” program has been available in the State College market for some time, but the CPCVB program was established in April, pulling the tours together in one spot.

Visitors to CPCVB's website, www.visit pennstate.org, can click on the “Google Virtual Area Tour” link to see 360-views of more than 40 local restaurants, retailers and other businesses and attractions. About a dozen of those have been posted since the partnership began.

“When we were approached with this opportunity, we figured, ‘Why not make this available to our member businesses,’ ” CPCVB Executive Director Betsey Howell said. “It really seemed like a good project that would help fulfill our mission of promoting the area.”

Google's Jim Hilker connects with local businesses from his home base in Ithaca, N.Y. He expects to be back in Centre County in early June to add more businesses to the tour list.