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HVAB details summer marketing campaign successes

Commissioners pledge additional American Rescue Plan grant support for winter effort

State College, PA, Nov. 16, 2021 – Federal pandemic relief provided to The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau (HVAB) by Centre County Commissioners helped to boost visitation and hotel occupancy in Centre County in late summer, as well as raise overall destination awareness for the future. Today, commissioners pledged a second American Rescue Plan grant for a 3.5-month winter campaign.

Prior to the announcement, HVAB officials presented commissioners with the results of the two-month summer campaign – funded by a \$250,000 American Rescue Plan grant that was awarded in July. The campaign was designed to further drive post-pandemic economic recovery through increased visitation.

HVAB President and CEO Fritz Smith said the campaign was necessary to compete for visitors’ attention at a time when the majority of Americans were ready to travel; compete with other Pennsylvania counties, and other states, that were making significant investments in destination marketing; and capitalize on domestic and “stay-cation” travel trends, for which Happy Valley was and is perfectly positioned.

“Because of the pandemic’s detrimental impact on our own organization, this grant enabled the HVAB to effectively market the county at a critical time for our hospitality industry,” Smith said. “We greatly appreciate the commissioners’ investment in tourism promotion and their recognition of the importance of sports, leisure and business visitation to the local economy. We are pleased to present to them and the community some positive and encouraging results for that initial investment.”

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Key campaign highlights include:

- Increased hotel referrals via HappyValley.com 62 percent over 2020, and over pre-pandemic 2019 and 2018 levels
- Generated 44.3 million total impressions, about 77 percent higher than the campaign target
- Generated 1,918 room nights and \$315,556 in room revenue via third-party bookings (Expedia and Adara)
- Increased HVAB website traffic, including sessions, users, pages per session and page views

Elaborating on some of the results, Smith said co-op marketing with Visit PA generated 9.5 million impressions alone, with the “agent” videos performing the highest for overall click-through-rate among the Pennsylvania Tourism Office’s 15 summer co-op partners. In addition, TravelZoo members spent on average more than 7 minutes on Happy Valley content. Referrals driven to HVAB website member pages were 121 percent over the campaign target.

The ARP grant also funded the production of a destination marketing video and related “sizzle reels” that showcase the best of Happy Valley to potential visitors. The videos will be used in advertising, shown at various industry conferences and for other promotional purposes.

“The Centre County Board of Commissioners applauds the HVAB staff and members for their perseverance and dedication to making Centre County a tourism destination,” said Centre County Commissioner Chair Michael Pipe on behalf of fellow commissioners. “During mid-year 2021, the commissioners recognized the need to support and invest in a special marketing campaign funded by the American Rescue Plan Act to attract visitors to Centre County. The impressive success of the campaign was evident through job retention and increased visitor spending.

“The Commissioners are excited to announce another investment of \$250,000 into tourism and marketing efforts, through the HVAB, to support the thousands of employees and dozens of small businesses that make up our vibrant and cherished tourism community,” Pipe added.

The winter campaign will run through March 15, covering a historically slower time for visitation. Smith said the campaign will focus on couples, empty nesters and solo travelers, and will be strategically directed at Pennsylvania audiences, western and central Pennsylvania in particular.

“This bridge campaign will help get us to spring, where activity across multiple fronts is expected to pick up dramatically,” Smith said, noting that both campaigns are elevating awareness about Happy Valley, and building it into a four-season destination for leisure, sports, and business travel.

“Traffic to HappyValley.com saw a considerable uptick from this and prior campaigns, which is promising. We also have some significant announcements forthcoming with regard to the sports tournaments, conference and meeting, and group tour markets. I do think we are beginning to see an exciting new era of visitation – and the benefits that will come from greater visitor spending – in Happy Valley.”

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About the summer campaign

The multifaceted campaign reached key drive markets in the Pittsburgh area and East/Southeast, both in- and out-of-state. The campaign was carried out through 18 advertising outlets across multiple platforms, including broadcast, print, social media, digital, and static and moving billboards. Target audiences were 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.