



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VISITOR CENTER BOASTS SUCCESSFUL SEASON

Uniontown, PA – From dining to hiking, history to architecture, countless attractions drew visitors from around the globe to Fayette County in 2018.

Almost 5,000 of those visitors checked in at the new Fayette County Visitor Information Center between May and October.

Following a successful 2017 trial season, the Fayette County Visitor Information Center celebrated its official grand opening this past spring, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and open house.

Located at 3738 National Pike in Farmington, the center was created through a cooperative effort by The County of Fayette, Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau, Fayette Chamber of Commerce and Nemaquin Woodlands Resort.

The planning process began in late 2016, at the same time as the change in hotel tax collection from 3 percent to 5 percent.

The former Joe Dagg's hotdog stand was transformed to create the visitors' center, which promotes both the county and region. It is staffed by Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau employees to assure one-on-one conversation and provide each visitor with a unique, personal experience.

Last year, the Fayette County Visitor Information Center had 1,800 visitors from 34 states during its soft opening. Additionally, almost 50 international visitors from such places as Taiwan, Belgium, China and South Africa stopped by.

In the 136 days comprising the 2018 inaugural season, visitor registration totaled 4,997 - but the actual number could be much higher, as not everyone formally checked in upon arrival.

The center's geographic reach also expanded, as visitors from 46 of the 50 states stopped by. Topping the list were Pennsylvania (2,138 visitors), Ohio (711), Maryland (405), West Virginia (384) and Virginia (291).

Of the inquiries recorded, information on local dining and hiking venues remained atop the list for most requested.

General attractions, Frank Lloyd Wright's architectural marvels and lodging were also highly requested.

Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau Director of Public Relations and Community Outreach Anna Weltz said information center staff members reported many visitors who came during early summer for a quick stop returned later in the season for a full visitor experience.

“Friendly, knowledgeable staff is critical to the success of the visitors’ center,” Weltz said. “The team has created awesome binders with helpful information about sites, events, camping and factoids. Staff can print directions, provide brochures, maps and more.”

In addition to staff members, Weltz said, other contributing factors to the facility’s success included a beautiful landscape; cleanliness; big-screen televisions displaying maps, weather updates, videos and websites; accessibility and “location, location, location!”

“Many of the Nemaquin resort guests stop for information,” Weltz said.

Although the information center was only open on weekends from Labor Day until the end of October, the tourist flow remained steady in Fayette County throughout the entire fall season.

“Visitors to our area love to enjoy the vibrant fall foliage in so many ways,” Weltz said. “Hiking in Ohioopyle State Park with a stop at Baughman Rock to admire the view; biking along the Great Allegheny Passage under the canopy of colors; sipping some sweet or dry wine at Christian W. Klay Winery and soaking in the view; exploring the yummy food and crafts at a bevy of fall festivals and, of course the stunning palate of colors at Kentuck Knob and Fallingwater are must-sees.”

Fayette County Commissioner Chairman Vince Vicites said visitors come to see “all of our world-class tourism sites,” including Nemaquin Woodlands Resort, Fort Necessity and more.

“Many others come to see the leaves change color in the beautiful Laurel Highlands,” Vicites said. “Our mountains are wonderful to see in the fall and keep people coming back year after year.”

Commissioner Dave Lohr also said the beautiful, colorful foliage, especially along Fayette’s rivers and bike trails, are a huge tourism draw.

“There are also rafters, hunters and people coming to enjoy a good meal at one of our great restaurants this season,” Lohr said.

“Fayette County’s mountains and trails provide residents and visitors recreation at no cost, and a way to enjoy the outdoors, be it for fitness or relaxation,” Commissioner Angela Zimmerlink said. “Walking, hiking or biking, then stopping by one of our friendly and charming shops can make for a great fall day.”

Not far from the information center, Backyard Gardens Market also keeps track of national and international visitors to Ohioopyle.

While passing through, adventurers put pins in a world map, marking the states and countries from whence they came. Last year, the shop saw visitors from all 50 states and 50 different countries.

But the information center and tourism offerings aren’t reserved for only international visitors. Locals can find something new and exciting, no matter how long they’ve been here.

Weltz said Fayette County residents are very fortunate to live in such a diverse region with “four beautiful seasons, incredible landscape with towering trees, deep river gorges and rolling mountaintops, amazing culture and truly friendly residents.”

“Sometimes in our day-to-day lives, we get caught up in the minutia and put on blinders to the things around us. It’s important to slow down, take a breath and enjoy the events and attractions our

neighbors and friends work so hard to coordinate and operate,” Weltz said. “Local festivals, for instance, are a great way to see your hometown in a whole new way, try new foods or savor some comfort food, learn about our local culture and history, find beautiful gifts, chat with friends and neighbors and, most importantly, create special memories with our children and grandchildren.

“Visitors come to the Laurel Highlands to do just that, driving from near and far.”

For more information, visit www.laurelhighlands.org, www.fayettechamber.com or www.nemacolin.com.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.FayetteCountyPA.org.

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