

Derby Museum was hit hard by virus pandemic

By Keith Lawrence
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The coronavirus pandemic hit the Kentucky Derby Museum in Louisville hard last year, Katie Fussenegger, the museum's vice president, told the Owensboro Rotary Club on Wednesday.

Revenue dropped from \$8.2 million in 2019 to \$3.3 million last year.

And the number of visitors dropped 74% from the 242,000 who toured the facility in 2019.

But Fussenegger said the museum has a "sizeable endowment" to dip into in times of need and also received federal funds.

She said in 2018, the museum completed a \$6.5 million expansion and renovation — adding 11,000 square feet and renovating 5,000 square feet.

New exhibits include the legacies of trainer D. Wayne Lucas and jockey Bill Shoemaker.

Fussenegger said the museum had 102 employees before COVID-19 hit.

That number dipped "really low," she said, but is back to 83 now.

Fussenegger said the museum has a traveling exhibit that will launch in June.

While the museum isn't part of Churchill Downs, it does offer tours of that facility, she said.

Owensboro has a connection to the Derby and the museum, Fussenegger said.

Spend A Buck, born on a farm in eastern Daviess County, won the 1985 Derby.

He was the 111th Derby winner in a time of 2:001/5 minutes.

Secretariat holds the record at 1:59:40.

Fussenegger said the museum has a new larger exhibit about the Derby's African American connection.

Fifteen of the first 28 Derby winners were ridden by African Americans, she said.

Fussenegger said the Derby, in normal years, has a \$227 million economic impact and the Kentucky Derby Festival adds another \$150 million impact.

She is chairwoman-elect of the Kentucky Tourism Industry Association and was president of the Kentucky Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus in 2017.

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