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Better collaboration called for to grow \$2.5 billion tourism business in DuPage

Growing competition cutting into market share, tourism still economic giant

OAK BROOK – The DuPage Convention and Visitors Bureau (DCVB) today announced the backbone of its new strategic plan which calls for better internal cooperation between all tourist related organizations, new and better integrated product offerings and stronger outreach to both the business and leisure tourism markets. "GPS: A Tourism Roadmap" was unveiled during the DCVB annual state of the industry meeting. The plan underscores that greater collaboration among the 38 communities in the county is critical if DuPage is to capture new market share and grow into the future. Also critical is a unified and recognizable image of DuPage County.

Executive Director Beth Marchetti said that although DuPage tourism continues to grow and remains second in size only to Chicago, competition is more fierce than ever and new and stronger partnerships must be forged that make better use of resources to grow DuPage's \$2.5 billion tourism industry.

"There is no question that tourism is an enormous economic driver in our county," Marchetti said. "Recently released state numbers show that local communities derived \$42 million directly from tourists coming to DuPage. That translates into \$1300 a year less that each family here paid in taxes thanks to visitors."

New state numbers also reveal that tourism accounts for nearly 22,000 jobs in DuPage with a payroll of \$600 million making it an enormous economic driver. Conversely, the data also shows that while tourism in DuPage County grew during 2015, market share fell slightly. The market loss translates to \$27 million that was not spent and \$500,000 in tax revenue that was not collected in DuPage County. DCVB is confident they can restore and grow that number with stronger collaboration and even modest new funding.

"Our statistical numbers are staggering when compared against other industries in the county and we should celebrate this success and strive to do all we can to nurture and grow it," Marchetti said. "But we also must keep pace with our competitors."

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The state of the industry report also demonstrates that while business travelers continue to comprise the majority of visitors coming to DuPage County, the number of leisure travelers is a growing sector that demands more attention. Business travelers, group meetings and conferences have long been the staple of the tourism industry, but the leisure market including international tourists cannot be overlooked.

The first phase of the "GPS Tourism Roadmap" launched during this past July involved one-on-one interviews between DCVB consultants and key stakeholders in DuPage. Additionally, three workshops were conducted in Elmhurst, Naperville and Glen Ellyn to gather input from residents and business owners in the county. Comments were also accepted online. In total, input was received from more than 200 individuals and entities including business owners, hoteliers, restaurateurs, recreational experts and government leaders.

DCVB tourism consultant Mitch Nichols, who authored the report leading up to the new strategic plan, said the keystone of the DCVB's efforts demand stronger collaboration among every tourism marketing agency.

Nichols said, "With such a diverse and large county, event planners are often overwhelmed due to fragmented efforts in DuPage County. A stronger more unified identity is a critical component of this plan." To that end, the DCVB hopes to use the "GPS Roadmap for Tourism" to unite agencies, municipalities, businesses, governments and all other interested parties to present easily understood packages to interested visitors and groups.

"The truth is every person in this county represents and benefits from tourism," Marchetti said. "And all that tourism not only helps drive our economy, it frequently creates new economic development opportunities. I believe that short-term visits can translate into long-term businesses for DuPage."

DCVB will now take those broad themes and issues and work to refine them into tactical objectives and outreach initiatives over the next two months.

"By years' end we will have a comprehensive blueprint to successfully and strongly move tourism into a new era of growth and prosperity for all of DuPage County," Marchetti said.

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The DuPage Convention and Visitor's Bureau is the official sales and marketing organization for DuPage County. The DCVB was formed to attract business and leisure travelers to DuPage County's 38 communities and is responsible for generating billions of dollars in revenue every year in the form of hotel nights, tourist attractions, meals and more. The DuPage CVB is the only Illinois State certified not-for-profit organization authorized to represent DuPage County's tourism and convention business.