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For immediate release

Hunterdon Tourism Study Recommends Investment in Destination Marketing

FLEMINGTON - The Hunterdon Freeholders, at the December 3rd meeting, were advised on tourism strategies, including that investment in destination marketing is a strategic need, when the Board received the County Tourism Research Initiative final report, prepared by Stockton University's Lloyd D. Levenson Institute of Gaming, Hospitality, and Tourism.

"Hunterdon attracts tourists already, but the report accurately points out that there's still so much potential to grow the industry locally" commented Freeholder Board Director Suzanne Lagay. "We're now firmly committed to a comprehensive effort to get the word out about the county's many cultural and recreational destinations."

According to Economic Development Director Marc Saluk, "The 3-phase report, initiated in late 2017, included a comprehensive analysis of the tourism industry's impact on the Hunterdon economy, data from extensive interviews with county visitors, and recommendations on how to capitalize on tourism-related opportunities going forward."

The report confirms that Hunterdon County is a "spectacular tourism destination" that "has an abundance of brand assets that have resulted in delighted customers". Residents would likely not be surprised to learn some of the leading drivers of Hunterdon's appeal were determined to be its historic roots, majestic beauty, and small-town charm.

Stockton University Professor of Business Studies, Marketing, Dr. Jennifer Barr, who conducted and presented the Phase 3 report, noted trends strongly indicating future success.

"The number of visitors who report high satisfaction with their visit to Hunterdon, combined with the extremely high percentage stating that they would return, really bodes well for tourism in Hunterdon," commented Dr. Barr.

Interviews with visitors to the county in Phase 2 of the initiative revealed that 94% of tourists express satisfaction with their Hunterdon experience and that 91% indicated they intended to return. Dr. Barr noted that many visitors have a "strong emotional bond to the region leading to a strong repeat visitor base".

To capitalize on the potential, Dr. Barr recommends the county undertake a number of action items including the establishment of a dedicated tourism entity and of an umbrella brand, coupled with a significant marketing effort.

In November, freeholders approved the creation of the Hunterdon County Tourism Partnership. The Partnership will be a new non-profit focused exclusively on promoting the entire county as a tourist destination.

“The idea is to tie all of our tourism assets to a distinctive umbrella brand and to the Hunterdon name” explained Economic Development Director, Marc Saluk, whose office is working to launch the independent tourism effort. “We want to augment the good work towns and business are already doing to market themselves, not replace it.”

The Tourism Research Initiative, funded through a grant from the NJ Highlands Council, was also supported by the Hunterdon County Chamber of Commerce and Delaware River Towns Chamber of Commerce. It is available for public viewing on both the Hunterdon County Freeholders and the Hunterdon County Economic Development websites.

Those interested in learning more can contact Marc Saluk at msaluk@co.hunterdon.nj.us or by calling 908-399-1108.