

Momentum continues for tourism industry

By Karl Pietrzak, President and CEO

It's probably too soon to predict that we won't have a return of a COVID outbreak in the future, but Destination Gettysburg is confident, however, that Adams County has made a strong comeback from the pandemic that significantly impacted travel to our community and continues to affect destinations around the world.

Adams County, as it turns out, became an attractive destination for many, who – for almost two years – put off their travel plans due to uncertainty with health risks and safety protocols. Positioned as a small-town community with plenty of outdoor options gave Adams County an advantage as destination marketing organizations around the world competed to bring back visitors into their communities.

Like many business sectors – 2020 was an anomaly in an otherwise steadily growing tourism industry, as visitation came to a grinding halt in March of that year and struggled to gain serious momentum until early 2021. Spending by visitors to Adams County – as reported by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development – dropped 36 percent (to \$480.5 million) in 2020 after reaching an all-time high of \$750.7 million in 2019.

But good news would soon come.

Destination Gettysburg receives sets of weekly, monthly and annual data from Smith Travel Research (STR), the world's leading company for lodging analytics. Typically, our team looks at this report for three important measurements – occupancy rate, which calculates the percentage of rooms booked; the average daily rate at participating hotels in the report; and the overall demand for lodging. This data is submitted to STR by 17 participating hotels in Adams County.

This lodging data shows that over the past two years – 2021 and 2022 – Adams County has made significant strides toward not only a return to pre-pandemic levels, but in some cases, setting all-time records among overnight stays in our community.

In 2021, occupancy increased 48.5 percent over 2020, the average daily rate increased 27.7 percent, and demand grew by 52.3 percent over the previous year. Each of these key performance indicators assured the tourism community that the industry was indeed heading back in the right direction.

A few weeks ago, Destination Gettysburg received its year-end numbers for 2022, and I am proud to say that the rebound continues as Adams County posted strong numbers in all categories, but has increased both revenue and average daily rate over 2021 and 2019 levels – both significant given the high gas prices, inflation and other economic concerns throughout the year. The occupancy rate was slightly down from 2019 but remains strong.

While each of these categories individually represents an important measurement in the success of tourism, perhaps the best evidence of the industry's collective strength is through a report issued by the

Adams County Treasurer's Office, which collects the county's 5-percent lodging tax. That report showed that in 2022, more than \$63.65 million was spent on lodging, nearly \$10 million more than in 2019.

As we know, the economic concerns of 2022 linger today, as do health worries for many travelers, but Destination Gettysburg will continue to position Adams County as a close-by, safe community to visit for the nearly 70 million Americans living in within a 300-mile radius.

A rebound for the travel industry isn't just important for Destination Gettysburg and the hundreds of businesses in Adams County that rely on visitor spending; it's good for everyone as the industry brings substantial revenue into our community, supports thousands of jobs and generates millions of dollars in federal, state and local taxes.

For more on the tourism industry in Adams County, visit www.GettysburgTourismWorks.com.

Karl Pietrzak is President & CEO of Destination Gettysburg. He can be reached at karl@destinationgettysburg.com.