

Northwest Tennessee Tourism Works Summit Held at Discovery Park of America

Stakeholders in Tourism and Economic Development Gathered for Summit to Explore the Economic Benefits of Growing Tourism Revenue for Rural Communities

[Discovery Park of America](#), one of the largest attractors for tourism in this region, was the location of the Northwest Tennessee Tourism Summit held Tues., Sept. 24.

A reception for attendees took place on Monday evening at [Blue Bank Resort](#).

The event was organized by State Representative Mark White; Rob Mortensen, president of the [Tennessee Hospitality and Tourism Association](#); Marty Marbry, West Tennessee division manager of the [Tennessee Department of Tourism](#); Lindsay Frilling, CEO at [Obion County Joint Economic Development Council](#); and Scott Williams, president and CEO of Discovery Park of America.

Around 100 tourism and government stakeholder attended the event that focused on working together to increase revenue from tourism for rural communities in West Tenn.

Panelists included Colleen Coury, public affairs coordinator with the State of [Tennessee Department of Agriculture](#); Mark Ezell, commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development; and Sammie Arnold, assistant commissioner of community and rural development for the [Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development](#).

Weakley County Mayor Jake Bynum joined organizers Mortensen and Marbry in moderating the panel.

Williams led a breakout session in which attendees worked in teams to answer questions relating to the challenges of growing tourism in northwest Tennessee and how we should go about doing it.

During the panel discussion, Commissioner Ezell pointed out that investing in tourism pays off in additional sales tax and other revenues for rural communities. Mortensen agreed sharing a metaphor featuring sunflowers. He said if you have a bag of sunflowers, you can eat them and they are gone, or you can plant them and grow more sunflowers.

Sponsors of the event included Discovery Park of America, the [University of Tennessee at Martin](#), the West Tennessee Economic Development Caucus, the [Tennessee Hospitality and Tourism Association](#), the [Tennessee Department of Tourist Development](#), the [Tennessee Department of Agriculture](#), [Leadership Tennessee](#), the [Northwest Tennessee Development District](#), the [Southwest Tennessee Development District](#), the [Memphis Area Association of Governments](#) and the [Northwest Tennessee Tourism Association](#).