

Pike County hooks tourists

By Dave Richardson
Times Herald-Record
d Richardson@th-record.com

Milford, Pa. – Huge stretches of green. Clusters of historic sites. Cozy inns.

Tourists looking for a change of pace from the traditional Pocono Mountains diet of ski resorts, golf courses and lavish entertainment are increasingly looking to Pike County.

"There's definitely been an increase in ecotourism and heritage tourism to Pike County," said Sean Strub, co-founder of the Pike County Visitors Bureau. "We've seen that in increased visits to parks, hotels and bed and breakfasts. We're seeing that around the whole county."

Tourism is big business in the county.

In 2004, tourists dumped more than \$220 million into Pike, bringing \$53 million in taxes and supporting about 7,000 tourism-related jobs, according to statistics from state tourism officials.

Pike's tourism success is echoed around the region. Nearby Orange, Sullivan and Ulster counties are also seeing tourism growth. In addition, recent years have seen an increasing symbiosis between Pike County and Orange and Sullivan counties, with their common Delaware River boundary. The area along the Delaware is being promoted as the "Delaware Highlands."

"Our hotel sales tax revenues just keep going up, and that's a very good sign," Susan Cayea, director of Orange County's tourism office, said.

Marketing Pike County's local charm and unique identity is key to boosting tourism. So is working to protect the fast-growing county's green spaces from intense development pressure, Strub said.

In November, Pike County voters overwhelmingly passed a \$10 million open-space preservation bond issue, which was widely supported by tourism-oriented business leaders like Strub.

The Pike County Visitors Bureau is working hard to promote the county as a destination for the environmentally minded, history buffs and especially businesses seeking venues for meetings and conferences.

The bureau is working to attract filmmakers to the region, organizing conferences to bring together leaders in the tourism industry and their government counterparts from around the region, increasing the region's presence on the



Mike Dilonardo, manager of the Hotel Fauchere in Milford, Pa., stands in front of the building last week. The hotel is going through a ground-up renovation aiming to draw high-end tourists to the area.

Photo by Michele Haskell

Internet and brainstorming ways to promote its varied outdoor activities and historic locales.

"We have the kind of assets and attractions that will lead to a thriving tourism industry in the future – if we don't pave it all over," Strub said.

"We're creating an image of a place that's almost magical, but one that respects environment and works hard to maintain the individual character and charm of the place," he added.

Strub said there's no organized effort to focus on gay tourism – a growing industry regionwide. But the market in Pike County, which Strub said has the

second-largest concentration of same-sex households in Pennsylvania outside of Philadelphia, is definitely there.

Strub has reason to be hopeful about the future of tourism in Pike County. He's putting the finishing touches on a ground-up renovation of the landmark Hotel Fauchere in the heart of downtown Milford.

The five-year, \$5 million-plus project will include 16 high-end guest rooms, conference facilities and a five-star restaurant. Strub hopes the hotel will attract business meetings as well as weekend tourists, bringing much-needed weekday foot traffic to Milford's business district.

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