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2019 tourism revenue reached \$136 million in Harrisonburg

HARRISONBURG, Va. – The Friendly City sure was a favorite spot for tourists last year.

Tourism revenue for Harrisonburg reached \$136 million in 2019 – a 3.7 percent increase over 2018 – according to data released by the United States Travel Association (USTA). Local tourism-supported jobs totaled 1,234, while local tourism-related taxes were almost \$5 million – a 3.6 percent increase from 2018.

“2019 was another growth year for the tourism industry in Virginia,” Rita McClenny, president and CEO of Virginia Tourism Corporation, said. “Travel continues to play an indispensable role in Virginia’s economy, creating vibrant communities and economic vitality across the Commonwealth.”

Tempering the good news from 2019 are expectations for 2020 tourism numbers, which have seen serious negative impacts related to COVID-19. But Harrisonburg Tourism and Economic Development experts have been hard at work to mitigate those impacts as much as possible.

“In 2019, tourism grew in Harrisonburg and four new hotels were planned for the area. At that time, we had every reason to believe 2020 would be even stronger,” Harrisonburg Tourism Manager Jennifer Bell said. “In 2020, COVID-19 has significantly impacted the local tourism industry which has worked to adapt to all the changes and received support through Economic Development initiatives. Last month, Harrisonburg saw the opening of a Tru by Hilton on 111 Pleasant Valley Road which is already receiving many bookings, which is an encouraging sign.”

Throughout the pandemic, Harrisonburg Tourism has worked to continue to drive customers to local tourism businesses. Harrisonburg Tourism first developed and placed “Think Local” signs around the community to promote support for local businesses. Promotion of local businesses continued through Facebook, Instagram, the Harrisonburg Tourism website and through outreach to travel writers.

Harrisonburg Tourism placed advertisements promoting Harrisonburg in numerous publications including Blue Ridge Outdoors and Northern Virginia Magazine. Harrisonburg Tourism also developed a new community promotional video



(Above) Harrisonburg Tourism has placed signs encouraging shoppers to Think Local across the city to support businesses impacted by COVID-19.

using existing footage which has been promoted on Youtube and Facebook, much of which was made possible through a \$10,000 Virginia WanderLOVE marketing grant.

Harrisonburg Tourism currently has plans for advertisements using CARES Act funds on Trip Advisor, in Virginia Living and Northern Virginia Magazine, in Recreation News, on IHeart radio and others. Harrisonburg Tourism will soon be launching a new community scavenger hunt and will soon be adding an itinerary builder to the tourism website.

“Harrisonburg has much to offer tourists and residents year-round,” Bell said. “Right now, there are so many things to do even while practicing social distancing from dining al fresco to take-out and enjoying picnicking, walking, biking and hiking in local parks. Many people are also enjoying the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum and the Virginia Quilt Museum among other attractions which are currently open.”

Harrisonburg Tourism is also adapting its media outreach to the current situation and conducted their first Virtual Familiarization Tour for Canadian Media last week as part of a VTC effort to showcase the Shenandoah Valley via Zoom.

The City of Harrisonburg is centrally located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. It is home to approximately 54,000 people. More information about the City of Harrisonburg is available online at www.HarrisonburgVA.gov.



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