

How Tourism is Developing By Peggy Mazyck, Executive Director VisitMercerCountyPA (2014-06-01)

I recently heard a speaker talk about “quality of place” as central to economic development in a community. To develop quality of place, regions need attractive communities with green spaces, public parks, arts and culture, outdoor recreation and culturally diverse restaurants. Mercer County is making strides in this direction.

According to the U.S. Travel Association, shopping is the Number One activity of tourists worldwide. This fact is also true in Mercer County, where six million shoppers flock to Grove City Premium Outlets and tens of thousands travel to downtown Sharon to purchase shoes and apparel at Reyers and The Winner.

The Mercer County area has great diversity, offering Amish quilt and crafts shops along its rural roads, family-owned chocolate candy companies, and unique specialty and boutique stores in its downtowns.

Kraynak’s in Hermitage attracts thousands on weekends during its Christmasland and Easter Bunny Lane displays. One of Mercer County’s most popular travel destinations, Wendell August, opened a new, state-of-the-art facility near Grove City in 2013. For a jewelry experience like no other, the Carlo Giulinno collection at Joden Jewelers, also in Grove City, is amazing. And who would not want a proposal at the Springfield Falls, home to Bruno Fine Jewelers?

Golf is also strong in Mercer County with a great selection of golf courses within a half hour drive of each other. In 2003, Mercer County was ranked the 10th Best Little Golf Town by Golf Digest, which posts the rankings every two years. The county was ranked among the top 100 in 2005, when the Youngstown-Warren area was ranked fourth. A variety of accommodations are centrally located to the golf courses, and the area has a fabulous selection of restaurants and bars.

Emerging on the horizon are also a couple new players in town. Outdoor recreation has always been a strong component of what we offer, but over the last five years this asset has received renewed attention. For a long time we’ve had great hiking and biking trails and outdoor recreation options at numerous state parks, but now we also have the Upper Shenango River Water Trail. Our lakes and waterways are great for fishing. In addition, the adventurous can enjoy skydiving at the Grove City Airport or rental kayak, canoe or bicycle in Greenville.

Another tourism asset that is gaining momentum is arts and culture. Arts and cultural activities are taking front and center in several of our downtowns with exhibits and performances. Concerts and musicals abound throughout the summer months. Galleries are locating in our downtowns, and wonderful murals and sculptures are gracing our streets. WaterFire Sharon, a multi-sensory arts event, drew approximately 70,000 visitors over three events in its first year in 2013.

Tourism is an extremely competitive industry, and having diverse and quality attractions is key in keeping Mercer County in the forefront of travelers’ decision making. Our agency developed the Tourism Attraction Development Grant (TAG) to address this need.

TAG was started to assist with capital expenses of new tourism-related developments and expansions. VisitMercerCountyPA funds the program. Projects that have received funds through TAG this year include Terra Nova House Bed and Breakfast for its expansion, WaterFire Sharon for capital expenses related to the event, Shenango River Watchers for access points along the Upper Shenango River Water Trail, and Brewtus Brewery for assistance with opening a brewery.



These are exciting times for the tourism industry in Mercer County. The Greenville area is moving to be the outdoor recreation “capital” of Mercer County. Mercer is celebrating its 200th birthday. The Shenango Valley is attracting new businesses, and a new downtown Sharon is emerging. Olde Town Grove City showcases a charming, old-fashioned downtown center with unique shops, delicious dining and even a nostalgic movie theater. For more information on events and attractions in Mercer County contact VisitMercerCountyPA at 724-346-3771 or check us out at www.visitmercercountypa.com.

MERCER COUNTY FUN FACTS

World’s largest Shoe store: Reyers, Downtown Sharon

World’s largest candy store, 700-pound chocolate rabbit and 400-pound chocolate turtle: Daffin’s Candies, Sharon.

North America's largest wood carving: Slovak Folk Crafts, Grove City

World’s largest switch engine. Engine 604, Greenville

Largest specialty shop in one location, 30,000-square-foot factory and 4,000-square-foot chocolate shop: Philadelphia Candies, Hermitage

Interesting inventions: Invention of the parachute by Stephan Banic in the Greenville area of Mercer County

Unusual sights: Ducks walk on the backs of fish at Pymatuning Spillway, Pymatuning State Park

Avenue of Flags: Hillcrest Memorial Park is home to the Avenue of Flags, one of the largest display of American flags in the world, dedicated to the honor of the American hostages held in Iran in 1979 and 1980.

For more information about events in Mercer County, log onto www.VisitMercerCountyPa.com or call 1-800-637-2370.