

Subject: 2016 Growth Report
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Tourism... A Major Player in the economic growth of Mercer County

2016 looks to be an exciting time for tourism in Mercer County. WaterFire Sharon is returning this summer on July 16th, Aug. 20th, and Sept. 24th. Sharon, PA is one of the very few places in the world where you can view this fabulous multi-sensory event. In addition several large conferences and celebrations are coming to Mercer County. The 2016 Elks National Bowling Tournament will be in Mercer County from March to May. They expect over 1000 participants to attend. Also the National Church of God Association is celebrating their 100th year anniversary in Mercer County and are also expecting about a 1000 people.

New trails are under development throughout the county and in the next five years we should have an increased network of hiking and biking trails to add to our outdoor assets. The Mercer County Trails Association is working on completing the first phase of a 14 mile trail that will travel from the Shenango River in Greenville, passing Pymatuning State Park to the Ohio State line. In the Grove City area of the county, Springfield Township is working on the first phase of a multimodal trail that will travel from the Grove City Premium Outlets location to Lawrence County, PA. These trails will be a great addition to our outdoor assets which presently includes a 23 mile water trail, skydiving and numerous outdoor recreational activities at Maurice K. Goddard State Park and Pymatuning State Park.

One of the main challenges we faced this year was the strength of the American dollar against the Canadian dollar. This issue continues in 2016. Each year Mercer County welcomes a large number of Canadians who travel to the county for shopping, golf and overnight stays. Estimates are that about 20% of the 6 million visitors to Grove City Premium Outlets come from Canada. However with Canadians receiving only .75 cents on our dollar, traveling to our area has become less affordable. We are addressing this problem by offering value added deals and continuing to promote to the Southern Ontario Canada market. Our hope is that the Canadian dollar will gain strength under initiatives of their new prime minister and we will continue to draw increased Canadian visits to Mercer County.

A new initiative for 2016 is our Tourism Bucks Giveaway. VisitMercerCountyPA is planning to conduct social media events throughout Mercer County called "Mercer County Tourism Bucks Giveaway". For this event we will give \$100.00 in Mercer County Tourism Bucks to the first 50 adults from outside of Mercer County who successfully complete our social media challenge. These tourism bucks can be used to purchase goods, services or gift certificates from participating shops, attractions, restaurants or lodging in the Mercer County area. This social media campaign will begin this Spring.

Tourism brings in well over \$400 million in spending in Mercer County and has an employment impact of over 4000 jobs. With several new attractions and accommodations locating in county, tourism expansion in 2016 is forecasted to continue at a stronger rate than last year. The future of the tourism industry in Mercer County looks good. Tourism is big business in Mercer County, PA.