

# PRESERVATION

# *information*

*One in a series of Historic Preservation Information Booklets*

## Welcoming Visitors to Your Community: Training Tour Guides and Other Hospitality Ambassadors

*by Kathleen Lingle Pond*

Visitors to new geographic locations are often inclined to tour historic houses, stop at a descriptive roadside marker, and choose scenic roads over expressways. Yet do these same visitors take time to discover historic attractions in their own communities? Do they know enough about the heritage of their city or neighborhood to direct tourists to interesting museums and historic sites? Furthermore, do those in hospitality industries—hotels, restaurants, gift shops, tour agencies—understand the importance of local history and historical attractions in enticing new and repeat visitors? The answer to these questions is often—to a surprising degree—“no.”

It could be said that the United States still lingers in its adolescence in its development of domestic tourism. Although Americans have been frequent travelers to many points around the globe since World War II, we

*In Philadelphia, a ranger from the Independence National Historic Park helps a visitor find her way by locating sites on a map.*



Photo: Larry Salese



National Trust for Historic Preservation

remain as a nation somewhat naive about hosting people in our own country and in our own communities. This is ironic since our country—its people, history, culture, natural resources, and inventions—has had a profound impact on the world, especially in the 20th century. Further adding to the irony is the fact that Americans as individuals are known for their outgoing, open natures. Yet, if visitors from another country, or even from a neighboring town, were to grade many of us on hospitality, quality of service, and knowledge of our heritage, we would surely get mixed reviews.

Why is this so? The answer is partially the tendency of human nature. No matter how often people travel, many individuals simply overlook the traveler's perspective when it comes to their region. Further, many residents fail to really explore their own region's history or the significance of nearby historic sites.

To better acquaint those who work in service industries with local and regional history, preservationists need to interact directly with the local tourism agency. This kind of cooperation is not only possible, it already exists in exemplary ways in communities around the country. In Providence, R.I., a dynamic partnership launched in 1977 brought together a preservation organization, tourism industry personnel, and academia to boost tourism in that city. *Positively Providence*, a free, four-hour course in customer service and destination marketing for individuals who serve business and leisure travelers, is offered by the Providence Preservation Society, The Providence Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau, and the University of Rhode Island College of Continuing Education. "*Positively Providence* is designed to educate, but, perhaps even more important, the program is intended to foster a sense of pride in the community," says Martha Sheridan, vice president of Tourism and Community Marketing for the Providence Warwick Convention and Visitors Bureau. "The more that the front-line personnel

know and understand about what Providence has to offer, the more they will want to share this knowledge with visitors."

Recognizing the importance of hospitality training, participants in Pennsylvania's Oil Heritage Region undertook a series of workshops in 1997 to encourage employees and volunteers in the hospitality field to take a fresh look at their communities and become more knowledgeable about sites, activities, special events, and facilities of interest to visitors. The Oil Heritage Region, a collection of sites focusing on the industrial heritage of northwestern Pennsylvania, did not stop at simply educating attendees about historic attractions. Trainers also worked to reinforce good hospitality habits, suggested ways to answer frequently asked questions, and encouraged participants to think about ways of gleaning more information from guests to help find the activity or attraction best suited to their taste.

Training materials from these workshops and other programs around the country are presented in this booklet to help communities, organizations, and sites conduct similar programs to train tour guides, docents, and other

hospitality workers in welcoming visitors in more professional, educational, and enjoyable ways. By offering training and educational materials to those individuals who have direct contact with visitors, historic attractions can gain visibility with residents and tourists alike.

The first part of the booklet addresses the tangible and intangible benefits of tourism; why people are every region's best asset; why hospitality awareness and instruction are important; and ways for communities to identify and analyze their training needs. The second part offers practical information about who should participate in the program; topics to include in training sessions; how to evaluate the program's success; and how to continue to improve programs and services.

### *What is the Value of Tourism to a Community?*

The benefits of tourism to historic preservation are tremendous. Using historic resources as the central focus of tourism efforts is one way that communities can make the rehabilitation or maintenance of historic structures economically viable. In many ways it is the same philosophy espoused by the

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For more information on the National Trust's Heritage Tourism program call (303) 623-1504 or write Director, Heritage Tourism, Mountains/Plains Regional Office, 910 16th Street, Suite 1100, Denver, CO 80202.

National Trust's Main Street Program. By identifying viable and sustainable economic uses for historic structures, communities encourage private investment in historic resources. Furthermore, showcasing such buildings can also attract additional funding. In Texas, for example, staff at the Missions of El Paso found that attracting both private and public funding for the missions was easier once a strong heritage tourism program was under way. The community, government agencies, and private funders could understand the connection between having well-maintained and interesting cultural sites and attracting tourism dollars.

Tourism dollars affect communities in many ways. Businesses benefit most directly when visitors purchase transportation, food, lodging, gifts and gas. Thus, visitors literally provide jobs. According to the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA), tourism is one of America's largest employers, directly and indirectly employing 15.8 million people in 1997.<sup>1</sup> Communities also benefit through the local taxes tourists pay: sales, lodging and occupancy, food and beverage, and amusement taxes, if a region has these.

Tourist dollars also affect a community via the "multiplier effect," in which a visitor's money is re-spent many times in the community. A simple explanation for the multiplier effect is to remember that a traveler's expenditure becomes a community member's income. The resident then spends part of his or her income, and so on. Dollars spent repeatedly in your community contribute to overall growth—new schools and businesses, more recreational activities, police and fire protection—and thus improve the quality of life there.

Apart from the considerable economic advantages of tourism, another less tangible but extremely valuable outgrowth of tourism is the inevitable surge of community pride which results. Strong regional tourism programs inspire citizens to work toward a common goal and learn more about

Photo courtesy of the Philadelphia Convention and Visitor's Bureau



*A guide dressed as Benjamin Franklin directs two children in Philadelphia's Independence National Historic Park.*

their shared heritage. Residents gain a new appreciation of the uniqueness of their community. Thus, tourism yields educational, cultural, and diplomatic rewards.

Dramatic as they are, the benefits of tourism are not always clear to residents and business owners. Community leaders, especially those in the tourism industry and in local government, should remind residents and all who play a role in hospitality services, of the ways that tourism can benefit them personally. This idea should be a primary goal and point of departure in any hospitality training program.

### *People—The Key to Hospitality*

If your goal is to attract visitors to your site or region, and have them want to return, how do you do that? What is it about places that makes people want to go there and return, sometimes again and again? Why are some locales better at attracting visitors and making them feel welcomed than

others? What is hospitality? Is there really such a thing as southern hospitality? Can it be taught? Or learned? What can we do—as preservationists, businesses, and communities—to be more welcoming to visitors?

Hospitality training is more about *awareness* than anything. It is about showing people the importance of visitors, reminding them how travelers like—and do not like—to be treated, and giving people the confidence and support they need to shine as hosts. Tourism in its purest and best sense is about experiences. It is about people meeting people. For everyone, everywhere, in any kind of service-related job, it is easy to lose a sense of freshness about daily work. It is easy to forget that while it may be the hundredth time you have explained how adobe is made, it may be the first and only time your visitor has heard about the process. Put yourself in the visitor's shoes.

## Training Exercise

### Handling Difficult People and Situations

This is an invaluable and fun exercise for any kind of hospitality training session. Individual participants are called in front of the group and given a scenario typical of one they might encounter. The list of possibilities is endless.

1) Create a list of some of the typical challenging situations that your employees encounter in your business. For example, a tour guide is late in arriving, tickets for a historic house and garden tour are sold out, or visitors bring food into a historic home.

2) Give employees, one at a time, one of these scenarios and have them respond. Afterwards, ask others in the group how they might handle the situation.

Another twist on this activity is to have a person or persons act out a typical, knee-jerk response they would have if they assumed the visitor was a difficult person and a chronic complainer. Next, act out their response if they assumed the guest was a normally reasonable person having a legitimate worry or complaint.

### Travelers—Who Are They?

Most people love to travel, but almost no one likes to be called a tourist. In fact, few creatures bear more ridicule than the tourist. A “tourist” is always someone else, and the popular conception of a tourist—played out over and over in movies, books and thus, in our consciousness—is the disheveled, disoriented, bumbling, camera-toting person or family, always taking pictures and asking too many questions.

Worst of all are *groups* of tourists. Tourists en masse crowd restaurants, create lines at historic attractions, and jam traffic. All too often groups are seen and treated as faceless herds. If we happen to work or live in a popular travel destination, we can count on them to ask the same questions, again and again, to our amusement and frustration. We forget that they are all, in fact, individuals.

We might think we like people to visit our area, but in truth, many of us have hidden biases about “tourists” and do not welcome them in any conscious way. The term “tourist” has become so derogatory that many in the industry have responded by substituting the words “traveler,” “visitor,” “guest,” or “explorer.”

In reality, travelers are as ordinary or as different as the people who make up your community. They may be businessmen or women, convention delegates, families, single travelers, senior citizens, groups with a common interest or purpose, or even children. Tourists come in all shapes and sizes, have varied backgrounds and motivations for traveling away from home, have different needs, and expect different experiences from their visit to a destination.

Think of the last time you were on vacation. What do you remember most? Was it the scenic beauty of the area you visited, an interesting walking tour, or the place you stayed? If you had a good time, you hold pleasant memories of the vacation or business trip. Often, your good memories are linked to people: the friendliness

of the staff at your bed and breakfast; the interesting comments of the guide at a museum or historic house; the pride and attentiveness of a food server. As a result you are likely to encourage others to visit the place you enjoyed. If you had a negative experience, however, the situation might be entirely different. You may not even remember the historic town you visited; instead, the actions of a rude sales clerk or guide might overshadow the pleasant moments. You leave disappointed and dissatisfied, ready to tell friends and relatives about your poor experience.

People make all the difference, and everyone counts in tourism. When you travel, you register impressions about a place based on anything you see or anyone you meet, not just a tour guide or someone in a visitor’s center. Similarly, guests may make a judgment about your community and your business based on you and the quality of service you give them. With this in mind, one Canadian province adopted the slogan, “Smile, You’re a Tourist Attraction.”

What image do you and others in your community present to visitors? Are you glad they are there? Do you welcome guests in clear, deliberate ways? Do you understand and consider their needs? How can you as an individual, an organization, or a community evaluate your level of service and improve upon it?

It is easy to blame frustrating encounters on the visitor, particularly the “difficult” one. Outrageous and humorous “war stories” of those who regularly work with the public are legion. While most people could admit to moments of impatience, tardiness, or otherwise inelegant behavior, few would ever want to be typecast by those situations.

Likewise, branding people as “tyrants” or “badmouthers” or using otherwise disparaging epithets is to ascribe more to them than is usually known or is productive to assume. The more equitable—and productive—perspec-

tive for anyone who regularly works with the public is that people sometimes exhibit difficult behavior. San Francisco guide and tour manager Janice Holliday says, "I've learned to look beyond the personality and deal with the person."

The difference between these two perspectives—difficult people and difficult behavior—may seem subtle, but is significant in the service world. For example, a visitor might approach a guide to report something she does not find satisfactory. Assuming that the person is a "complainer," the guide unconsciously adopts a defensive stance ("Here she goes....I need to let her know that I'm not going to put up with her constant complaints...."). Thus, the guide begins the trip frustrated with an annoyed visitor, while the visitor begins the trip with the perception that the guide is cold, short-tempered and indifferent.

If, however, the guide operates from the belief that this is a reasonable person who is momentarily unhappy, the encounter begins on an altogether different tone. The visitor perceives and appreciates the guide's concern and feels grateful for the support. Thus, a spirit of cooperation is established from the outset of the tour.

It is not a coincidence that some people experience congenial encounters with visitors, while others seem to attract "difficult" people. When people speak of southern hospitality or the aloha spirit in Hawaii, they are referring to the intangible but real quality of warmth and service that stems from the longstanding value these regions place on simple courtesy and the effort to please visitors.

### *The Seven Sins of Service and Moments of Truth*

Often it is easier and more instructive (and more fun) to talk about poor service and lack of hospitality than it is to define hospitality. As consumers we are regularly assaulted by what

Karl Albrecht, a leading force in the service industry, calls the "seven sins of service."

- Treating visitors with apathy. People will forgive many shortcomings in service but apathy is not one of them.
- Brushing visitors off. A byproduct of apathy, brushing customers off offends and alienates quickly.
- Being indifferent to visitors. Again, no one likes being treated coldly. The friendliness—or coldness—of one person at an information center can make all the difference in how hundreds of people a day feel about a place.
- Treating visitors with condescension. Although talking condescendingly is irritating, it is quite common, and those who talk in a

## Training Exercise

### Moments of Trust in the Cycle of Service

Think of each visitor who comes in contact with your historic site. First list all the ways in which a visitor interacts with you or any aspect of your site or organization. (*Examples: Visitor...drives into the parking lot...walks into interpretation center...talks to the docent...follows map to historic marker... Last on the list might be "guest arrives home; receives a thank-you note with return visit discount coupon."*)

Next, draw a circle and fill in all of the visitor's possible "moments of truth" on that circle, so that you can look at it as a cycle of service that a potential guest experiences with your organization.

As you look at the circle, what moments of truth do you think are the most critical? What moments of truth are usually the first impressions a visitor experiences? In what areas do you experience the most complaints from visitors? What moments of truth are constant challenges to you and your co-workers? What elements frustrate you most in attempting to carry out your job? Does your organization have policies or procedures that actually stand in the way of prompt, individualized service? Have you pointed these out to your supervisors?

Identify the moments of truth you would like to improve upon or change. How might you be able to make changes that work better for you, your fellow employees, your organization, and visitors? These would be ideal subjects to discuss as an organization in a training session. Remember to always consider the interests and needs of your visitor. Thus, you are less likely to commit any one of the sins of service.

## What Are Your Moments of Truth?

What is it about your site (product or service) that makes people decide they like it, want to buy more, and even want to return later? The answer is probably much more complicated than you think. For example, if your attraction is a historic operating mill, the first “moment of truth” for visitors might happen before they ever see the mill, when they call for directions and hours of operation. If they are put on hold for a length of time, or talked down to, or treated rudely, they could easily decide against coming. If you have the most interesting site in the region, but your parking lot is littered with trash or the buildings desperately need a paint job, those things may well keep away visitors. In short, there are many, many “moments of truth,” some of them very subtle, that might determine your success or failure.

1) Imagine you are a stranger in town and you first learn about your site (seeing an ad, referral from hotel staff, etc.) Follow through all possibilities of encounters and impressions at every level of contact that visitors might have with your business. Be as specific as possible.

2) Make a list of those areas in which you are consistently doing well. Read them aloud and congratulate yourself and each other.

3) In which areas might there be a glitch or lapse in service? Note that if the moment of truth involves a person, there could always be lapses, as even the best employees are imperfect; they could have the day off, or have gone on a break, or just be having a difficult day.

4) What can you do in all or any of these areas to ensure more consistently positive moments of truth?

Good areas to pay attention to are cosmetic changes (perhaps the easiest), and any areas that involve people. An important and powerful question for managers to ask is, “In what ways can I empower my employees so that they can better serve visitors and our organization?”

Managers should keep this worksheet and compare/contrast it with their employees’ responses. Since many employees are often the true front liners in a business, their perspective is critical. They see the glitches, the bottlenecks, hear the complaints, etc.

condescending manner are usually completely unaware of it. Such habits as talking loudly and slowly, assuming every senior citizen has a hearing impediment, or that every child will have difficulty understanding suggest to visitors that you are out of touch with them. A simple solution is to pay closer attention to people and their needs, asking them questions, and listening well.

■ Working like a robot. The “I can do this with my eyes closed and my mind miles away” attitude is conveyed more readily—and disliked more intensely—than many people realize. Canned, singsong spiels by tour guides and hasty restaurant service, offensive and all too common, are examples of this.

■ Getting hung up on the rulebook. This can be extremely frustrating for visitors, particularly when their request seems simple and the rule an employee is following seems arbitrary and beneficial only to the company. Many service industry gurus of the 1980s have brought this issue into the spotlight and have offered subtle but dramatic alternatives. They propose that managers try, whenever possible, to put power in the hands of front-line service employees. Before proclaiming, “Sorry, I can’t do that. Our policy is...” they recommend that an employee be given the power to analyze the situation to see if straying from the rule book poses a problem to anyone. Often it does not, and, in fact, reshaping the rules creates a better solution for everyone involved.

■ Giving visitors the “runaround.” This has happened to everyone, and it is important for those who work in a service-oriented capacity and, indeed, for everyone living in a region that attracts tourists, to recognize that they might be doing this. Each time someone asks a question and we respond, “I don’t know,” or even, “I don’t know; they can probably help you at the

gas station... (or the front desk, or the information center...), it creates a "runaround" scenario for someone. You can make a difference by simply taking a moment to find the information—looking up a telephone number, placing a quick call to someone you know, or showing the visitor clear directions on a map. Even in cases in which you have little time to spare, it's important to put guests in touch with people who you know can and will give them answers.

Success or failure in the service industry depends upon "moments of truth," a term coined by Jan Carlzon, president of Scandinavian Airlines (SAS). Carlzon defines a "moment of truth" as "that precise instant when the customer comes into contact with any aspect of your business and, based on that contact, forms an opinion about the quality of your service and, potentially, the quality of your product."

As president of SAS, Carlzon inherited a fledgling company with low morale and dwindling sales. He recognized that the critical moments of truth for customers of the airline occurred not with SAS's corporate executives but with the ticket agents, flight attendants, and other "front-line" employees. Carlzon adopted a philosophy for his company then considered revolutionary and since adopted worldwide. Since these front-line employees took part in the critical "moments of truth" for SAS, Carlzon reasoned, they should be empowered to make company decisions in the interest of serving customers. Thus, many annoying roadblocks one typically finds in the service industry—such as perfunctory responses like "I don't know; that's not my job," "I don't make the rules, I just follow them," or "I'll have to refer you to my supervisor"—are eliminated. According to Carlzon, this philosophy places the emphasis and priority where it belongs, and addresses the most important and basic questions, like "Is the customer satisfied right now with our service?"

The results of this paradigm shift at SAS, in terms of customer response, sales, and employee morale, were overwhelmingly positive. Since the publication of his book, *Moments of Truth*, Carlzon's concept has registered an immeasurable effect on the service industry.

### *Creating a Hospitality Training Program*

Hospitality training programs are usually established in cooperation with a local business, community college, or other appropriate education/skills training entity. In Pennsylvania's Oil Heritage Region, for example, training was done in cooperation with the local business community. In Providence, the preservation society, the convention and visitors bureau, and a university continuing education program formed a partnership.

Preservationists should first investigate if states, universities, or convention and visitor bureaus offer this type of training locally. If so, preservationists might find out if they could add a component to create an awareness of the area's heritage as part of an existing training program. If no program exists, preservationists might develop one on their own or in partnership with other local organizations. Even something as simple as offering the tourism industry a local historic site as a venue to host hospitality training sessions creates a stronger awareness of nearby heritage attractions.

Considering the demands on everyone's time, and the fact that a community or organization can rarely afford to pay participants to attend hospitality training sessions, organizers must take care to offer a program that people will want to attend.

The ideal program should do the following:

- Be accessible to the participants. Since most people will attend on their own time, or attend at the suggestion (or possibly the

expense) of an employer, it is important to choose a convenient time. If large numbers are involved, scheduling different times of day might be best (such as a morning program and an evening program) to accommodate the schedules of many.

- Be engaging and enjoyable. In fact, there is no excuse for it to be otherwise. The process of hosting visitors and showing off one's region should be, after all, enjoyable for everyone. One of the most beneficial and enjoyable aspects of training is the opportunity to meet and work with others in the community. Respecting people's time and keeping programs as brief as possible is important as well. Keeping these ideas in mind will make participants want to return to other programs.
- Encourage and empower participants. The primary goal in the training is to have participants understand their importance and the ability they have to influence visitors' understanding of and feelings about the region.
- Be educational and relevant. Hospitality training is about enlarging people's awareness of visitor needs and their awareness of their own community, its history, and the best that it has to offer.
- Connect people to their past. Most people who attend these kinds of programs are delighted to learn more about the history of their region. Keeping a strong heritage and preservation focus in tourism and hospitality training is important on many levels. Participants in these programs might become not only excellent interpreters of their communities but might also be inspired to work toward local preservation efforts.
- Offer incentives for attending. In the *Positively Providence* program those who complete their four-hour seminar receive a lapel pin

and Providence Passport. The passport provides graduates with reduced-rate or free access to numerous venues within the city and encourages participants to learn first-hand about what these attractions have to offer. Graduates who visit eight or more destinations receive gift certificates to local restaurants, theaters or sporting events. Companies that have one-third or more of their front-line employees complete the program receive a Positively Providence window decal for display in their business.

- Encourage cooperation among community members. Tourism promotion works only when there is cooperation within a region. Thus, everyone becomes word of mouth advertisement for everyone else. Cooperation sounds easier to realize than it sometimes is. In cities and towns new to tourism development, many businesses might be slow to see how promoting other establishments ultimately benefits their own business and the community as a whole.
- Be ongoing. A single training program is not sufficient. A telltale sign of the effectiveness of your

programs will be if people want to continue to attend and if they offer suggestions for additional topics in meetings. Program participants and all local businesses and organizations who are interested in promoting themselves and the region should continually be encouraged to participate and add to the content of programs. In addition, hospitality training needs to be offered regularly because of high turnover among front-line employees.

In addition to the content—history, stories and other information that is specific to each region—hospitality training can include any or all of the following more general topics. Many of these lend themselves as ideal subjects for ongoing lectures.

- General background of the travel industry
- Leadership and social skills
- Presentation and speaking skills
- Conducting various kinds of tours: walking tours, driving tours; tours about art, or architecture, the natural world, history, etc.
- Working with travelers from a variety of backgrounds and ages
- Working with travelers with special needs
- Basic safety and first aid

## Nelson County, Virginia's Annual Pig Picking

It would be difficult to find a hospitality training session that more appropriately and successfully educates and serves a community than the Pig Picking in Nelson County, Va., a rural, stunningly beautiful county in the center of the state that comprises eastern foothills and the eastern part of the Blue Ridge, including part of the Appalachian Trail and the Blue Ridge Parkway.

The largest and best known attraction in the county is Wintergreen Resort, a successful and growing skiing, golfing, and residential community. Besides Wintergreen, there are many smaller attractions, including three vineyards; historic homes; a working mill; and the Walton Mountain Museum, which documents the life of Earl Hamner, creator of "The Waltons."

Monticello, Thomas Jefferson's home, and the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, 30 minutes to the north, along with the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Shenandoah Valley, have long drawn visitors to the region. Still, no organized tourism promotion efforts were in place until 1992, when Frankee Love was hired as the direc-

*Board members of the Nelson County Hospitality and Travel Association meet at the Acorn Inn in Nelson County Virginia. Holding training sessions at a historic site or inn is a good way to remind hospitality workers about nearby historic resources.*



Photo: Kathy Plunket Versluis

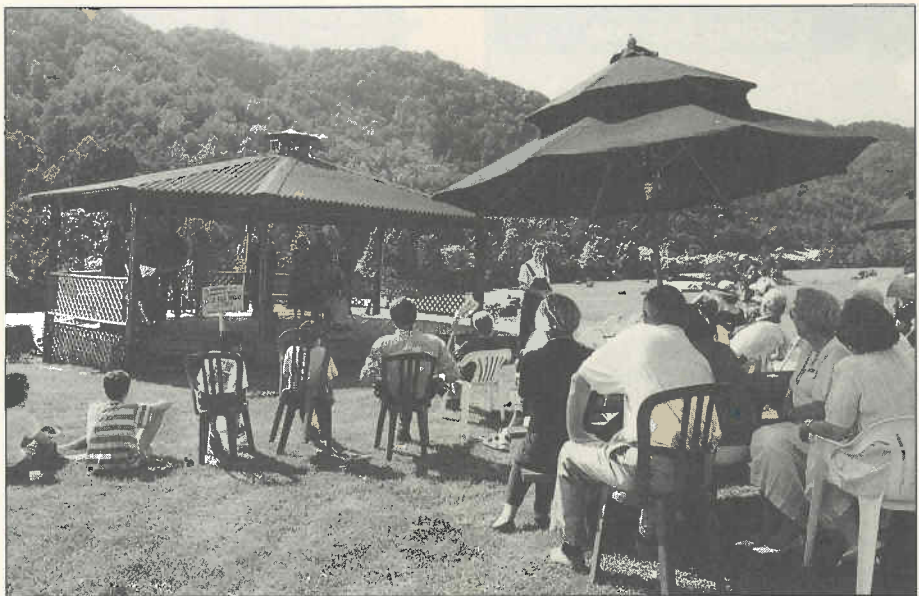


*Visitors and local residents gather at one of the many hospitality events held at Mountain Grove Vineyards in Nelson County, Virginia.*

tor of community development, with an emphasis on tourism. Love quickly worked to educate and unite all interested tourism related organizations and businesses in the surrounding region.

Created to fulfill a requirement of the Virginia Tourism Accreditation program for Hospitality Training, the Pig Picking began in September 1993. The initial intent was to train front-line personnel in tourism-related businesses. Frankee Love explains, "Our objective was to make those individuals who come into direct contact with tourists (i.e., wait staff, convenience store clerks, gas station attendants, etc.) mindful of the abundant attractions and points of interest within the county. We also wanted to impart some 'initial contact courtesy' tips as well as information on the art of giving directions."

"According to the accreditation guidelines, the intent was that the program be in a classroom type of environment," says Love. The first obstacle they encountered was whether or not employees would be allowed to attend on company time (and therefore, businesses would need to pay them) or on their own time. Since most of the businesses in Nelson County are small two- and three-person operations, it presented a hardship for the business owners to allow staff to go on company time and it became evident that staff would have to go on their own. That being the case, the program organizers wanted to make it as pleasant an experience as possible, so they had it in an outdoor setting with a picnic-type atmosphere instead of a classroom one. They called it "the Pig Picking" to convey to everyone that it was a non-threatening, fun event.



Love asked local businesses to participate, and the response from many was immediate. A local winery offered to host the event and food was provided by local restaurants, including the Blue Ridge Pig, a popular barbeque restaurant, which obviously supplied the main course.

Following a buffet dinner, participants were asked to introduce themselves, talk briefly about their business and what they offer to visitors. At the end of the evening, everyone participated in a trivia contest about sites around the county. Thanks to the generosity of local businesses, winners received handmade or local items as prizes—bottles of wine from the vineyards, free nights at a bed and breakfast. Not only were the prizes a hit, they also allowed businesses to further acquaint people with their products.

According to Love, of those who attended the Pig Picking the first year, about half were the targeted audience of front-line staff. The other half were the owners, who were often themselves at the front counter, since the businesses are so small. The following year, Love again made a great effort to get more front-line staff, but drew even more owners

instead. Business owners explained that they really enjoyed the opportunity to network with other area businesses and hear the discussions since there was no other forum in the county where this could occur. By the third year, Love says, they had re-tooled and have since let the Pig Picking be what business owners wanted, an information sharing and networking opportunity for entrepreneurs in the tourism industry, and it has been extremely successful ever since. Each year the event is held at a vineyard or bed and breakfast or other county location, with generous contributions from area businesses.

Still wanting to meet the needs of the front-line workers, the Nelson County tourism office created the Local Events and Attractions Program (LEAP). This mobile program is presented directly to the staff, one business at a time, and it can be customized to suit individual needs. LEAP includes a video, slide show, hand-out materials, and about 25 minutes of discussion. The presenter gives a quiz before the program to test awareness of tourism attractions and events. At the end of the program, participants take the quiz again, and before and after scores are compared. Scores always improve

## Training Exercise

### Goal Setting Contract

The purpose of this activity is to have participants leave your training program with the understanding not only that they can make a difference but how they can make a difference. Your sessions should make them feel committed to making a difference. All too often we leave a conference or finish a motivating book with good intentions, only to find that little actually changes. This activity is a chance for everyone—managers, policy makers, and those who work directly with the public—to say: “This is something I can do to make a difference,” and then do it.

Examples of these actions are plentiful. They might be very subtle changes. They might be a “Moment of Truth.” Most workers already know just where the lapses in service usually are, or where there is always opportunity to improve.

The first part of this exercise is brainstorming: listing possible actions you could take to enhance service. The second step is to choose actions to which you will commit. They should be stated in measurable ways (i.e., rather than a hotel front desk person saying “I’m going to be friendlier to guests when they check in,” the stated goal might be, “I’m going to ask every guest checking in a question about themselves, such as ‘Where are you from?’ or ‘What brings you to the Oil Heritage Region?’” The third and final step is filling out the contract.

Photo: Robert Carwin



*Hospitality training programs should target front-line employees such as hotel employees, restaurant workers, gas station attendants, retail workers and others who come in contact with visitors.*

dramatically, and participants appreciate getting to better know their county and neighbors.

The Nelson County Pig Picking and LEAP offer enjoyable, educational, supportive ways to promote tourism while costing the organizers and business owners very little but their time.

#### **Who Should Participate in the Program?**

The answer to this question may seem obvious: tour guides, visitor information staff, hotel front desk clerks, concierges, and all “front-line” tourism personnel.

Yet, as discussed earlier, anyone with whom visitors come in contact at a site or in a community becomes part of their impression of a place. Thus, organizers of hospitality programs should attempt to reach as many people in the community as possible: all hotel employees, restaurant and deli workers, gas station attendants, local government workers, retail workers, and everyone who is interested or has contact with visitors. Clearly, anyone who walks down the street in his or her community is potentially a visitor information service or a “tourist attraction.” The deeper into a community you can go in spreading the message, the better. The Positively

### My Hospitality Contract

I, ( name ) recognize that the following actions will improve the level of service in my work. Further, I am now committing to including these actions regularly as part of my work.

#### MEASURABLE ACTION (S):

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

#### STATEMENT OF GOAL (in measurable terms):

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

Providence Passport program includes—at no cost—tour guides, docents, hotel and restaurant personnel, as well as cab drivers, mounted police officers, city bus drivers, retailers, and all who potentially interact with visitors.

As shown in the Pig Picking example, owners and managers of businesses are generally interested in these programs. They have a clear incentive and understand the value of training and promotion. The greater challenge is getting front-line workers to attend. Yet the more participation within a community, the better the programs will be. This engenders good morale, and it's also good business. Another reason for encouraging wide community understanding and involvement in tourism is that it may lead to greater political support when tourism issues arise.

### Pennsylvania's Oil Heritage Region

The Oil Heritage Region in Pennsylvania, in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Heritage Tourism Initiative, has put together workshops and training materials to help hospitality workers better welcome visitors to the region. Most of the Oil Heritage Region Hospitality Skills workshops conducted to date have included front-line personnel from attractions, retail stores, and hospitality providers. Custom sessions (restricted to one employer or volunteers from one site) meet the needs of such groups as the Oil Creek & Titusville Railroad crew/guides, Waterways Conservation Officer trainees for the whole state, high school students considering careers in hospitality, and chamber of commerce members. While instructor teams adjust the exercises, examples, and emphasis to suit the interests of the workshop attendees (and wishes of their employers who are asked this

ahead of time), they typically spend two hours on good hospitality habits and 90 minutes on discovering the diverse attractions, activities, and amenities found in the Oil Heritage Region.

Pennsylvania's training manual, called *Hospitality! The Most Effective Marketing Tool*, includes many of the concepts and activities suggested here. Organizers created several editions of the manual—one for managers and one for employees. Additional training materials were created for workshop instructors.

The Pennsylvania Center for Travel, Tourism, and Film Production liked the manager and employee versions of the workshop manual so well, it reproduced both (plus instructors' notes) as a notebook to be distributed to all officially designated tourism promotion agencies across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.



*Employees and volunteers in the hospitality field become more knowledgeable about sites, activities, special events, and facilities of interest to visitors after attending workshops sponsored by the Pennsylvania Oil Heritage Region.*



Photos: Oil Heritage Region, Inc.

## *Tour Guides, Docents, and Hospitality Staff*

It is often said that tour guides, docents, and other interpreters are the most important front-line employees. In addition to providing basic hospitality services, they are educators, interpreters, and companions. A tour guide's role extends well beyond welcoming and informing visitors. Indeed, guides are entrusted with the purest of public relations missions: to interpret the essence of a place; to be a window onto a site, city, region, or country; and even to create a mirror for visitors, enabling them to better understand their link to the history and culture of their hosts. The task of interpreting the story of the site or the region requires much preparation and study. Many visitors today are knowledgeable and well traveled and have come to expect guides and docents to be experts in their areas.

### **Paid or Volunteer Guides?**

This question is often answered by necessity. For many sites, organizations, and communities, funds are not available, especially in the early stages, to pay tour guides. In light of the common dynamic of two working parents today, it would seem that volunteers would be difficult to find. In the 1950s and 1960s, volunteers were often women whose husbands provided the family income. Yet according to Esther Hall, author of *Investing in Volunteers: A Guide to Effective Volunteer Management*, "volunteerism is very much alive in today's busy world."<sup>2</sup> Nearly every other American spends an average of four hours a week volunteering, she says.

Many of today's volunteers are retirees and senior citizens, who, on the whole, are ideal guides. In addition to a more open schedule, senior citizens offer invaluable life experience. If they have lived in the area for a considerable time, they can offer stories, recommendations, and per-

spective. If they have lived in or traveled to other places, this knowledge is also an asset.

Hall points out that volunteers are not free help, since successfully managing volunteers requires both financial and human resources. Training, scheduling, and administering volunteer programs take time and money.

The disadvantages of using volunteers are obvious: without the incentive of a salary, commitments are sometimes not as strong; there can be a high turnover rate and limited accountability and control, resulting in excessive time required for training and supervision; and firing a volunteer is sometimes difficult. These aspects can create low morale within an organization. Hall points out that a volunteer's commitment to an organization will only be as strong as the organization's commitment to that individual.

There are many advantages of volunteer guides. Aside from saving an organization money, a dynamic docent program can offer a fulfilling educational and social outlet for many people in a community. Volunteers create and strengthen ties to the community. The quality of tours and the morale among guides is not necessarily better in those places where guides are paid. In fact, some of the finest interpretive training programs anywhere in the country are those designed for volunteers in museums. In the best of these cases, docents are involved with an excellent educational program that they value; they are thus treated with respect, and there is, by nature of the institution and/or the high quality of their training, a great degree of pride in being a docent.

At some museums, docents are required to attend extensive lectures for many months before they are considered competent to conduct tours. The quality of some docent education programs is far superior to programs in many colleges and universities. Some of these programs are so appealing and popular that the volunteer posi-

tions are highly competitive and museums are in the enviable position of interviewing and choosing from a well qualified pool of applicants.

### **The Chicago Architecture Foundation (CAF)**

As the Chicago Architecture Foundation sees it, "All of Chicago is a museum....Nowhere else will you find so many great works by America's most renowned architects together in one place." The Chicago Architecture Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing public interest and education in architecture and design. To this end they have, since 1972, offered architectural tours, exhibits, lectures, and a variety of programs to local children and adults and to visitors to Chicago.

The foundation has one of the most revered docent education programs in the country. CAF's Volunteer Coordinator Barbara Hrbek says, "As I put together the docent education program for the upcoming training class, I get a rush of excitement knowing that soon I will initiate a new class of 50 enthusiastic men and women from many different backgrounds. I'm always amazed that people wait in line to join this program each year. In the next 10 weeks, they will be working on homework for two hours each night, spending approximately four hours each week outside looking at buildings, and practicing, revising and practicing again."

At the Chicago Architecture Foundation, all docents are required to take a 10-week training program held once a week from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. They are assigned a "sponsor," an experienced docent who mentors them through the entire process from the first day of class. Lectures, tour demonstrations, tour practice, exercises, games to solidify facts, and interpretation techniques are all part of the training. Each week, docents-in-training have homework to help

Photo courtesy of the Chicago Architecture Foundation



*A volunteer docent from the Chicago Architecture Foundation points out architectural details during a walking tour in downtown Chicago. Before leading tours, volunteers must complete a 10-week training program.*

them develop and write their own tours. The sponsors are responsible for certifying the new docents.

Since CAF's intense program began in 1971, more than 1,000 docents have completed it. Three hundred thirty-five docents are active each year, fulfilling their required 30 tour hours.

### **Recruitment and Hiring**

In some cases, volunteers are not standing in line, and organizations need to recruit and hire guides. Where can you find good people, and what are the most important qualities? Topping the list would be enthusiasm for people and for the region or site. Gabriel Cherem, professor of interpretation at Eastern Michigan University and a leading force in the field, suggests that "a gregarious or malleable temperament is more important than formal training. The ideal image of the interpreter," he says, "will be the knowledgeable, fluent, charming individual who can captivate the imagination and emotion of an audience. The personality appeal of an interpreter should be so strong as to evoke the response from the visitor, 'I want to be near that individual.'"<sup>3</sup>

Of course, guides must be interested in and willing to learn about their region in depth. Successful guides also need good communication and leadership skills. They need to demonstrate flexibility and be able to work with different personalities and perform under pressure. Guides and hospitality staff face many demands, and as Cherem says, achieving a high level of quality as an interpreter is a long-term process.

### **Training**

Training of guides and docents varies throughout the United States. Established national standards for guides or docents do not exist, unlike in most European countries where guides have required college level instruction. In many regions, it is difficult for guides to find training programs. This has been changing slowly over the last decade. In major cities and in some specific places (such as National Park Service sites and Colonial Williamsburg), guide instruction is widely available and even required. For example in New York, Washington, D.C., Charleston, S.C., and New Orleans, guides are required by law to have licenses, procured by meeting certain standards and taking a test about the city. Guide certifica-

Photo courtesy of the Providence Preservation Society



*The role of tour guides extends well beyond welcoming and informing visitors; they must be educators, interpreters, and companions. In Providence, R.I., a tour guide leads a group of visitors down Benefit Street.*

tion, usually an optional professional designation administered through local associations, is available in Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and several other cities.

At many historic homes and museums, guides have required in-house training. At Thomas Jefferson's home, Monticello, guides attend two full days of training, followed by a two-week, self study "practicum," during which they are expected to study training materials and read about Jefferson and Monticello. Following that, guides return to observe and then give tours on their own. During their first tours they are evaluated. They are expected to participate in ongoing lectures given by historians, curators, and administrators.

Topics to be covered in training sessions depend on the site. The emphasis might be on historical events, the natural environment, or a personality in history. For example, in a city like Philadelphia several themes emerge: colonial America, the American Revolution, significant African Americans, Quakers, Ben Franklin, William Penn, and so on. The Oil Heritage Region celebrates its important role in the development of oil and the first oil well; it also stresses recreational activities such as bicycling, boating, fishing, and hiking as well as its antique shopping and ghost towns. Nelson County, Va., promotes hiking and other outdoor activities, the Appalachian Trail, the Blue Ridge Parkway, and the Shenandoah Valley.

At the Chicago Architecture Foundation, the overriding theme is architecture and man's impact on his environment. Even here, the larger story of Chicago's history inevitably enters all interpretations, since for many visitors the CAF tour is their only tour in Chicago. Although architecture is presumably a key interest for participants, they always have questions about Chicago's general history and contemporary scene.

### Philadelphia's African-American Heritage Tourism Program

The Philadelphia African-American Heritage Tourism Program is a joint effort of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, the Pennsylvania Center for Travel, Tourism and Film Promotion of the Pennsylvania Department of Commerce and Economic Development, the Heritage Parks Program of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. In 1995, with the cooperation of the National Trust, program planners produced *Philadelphia's African-American Heritage: A Tool Kit for Tour Guides & Interpreters*. The tool kit is not a script for tour guides, but rather a series of "building blocks" that enable them to put together their own tours. The tool kit includes a section on interpretation and tour guide techniques as well as one-page profiles of people, events, and sites that play a significant role in Philadelphia's African-American history. The Heritage Tourism program also offered a training session that included historical background, interpretive training and a practice overview tour of African-American sites. The tool kit was created to fill a need for more accurate and accessible information about Philadelphia's African-American tradition as part of a tour guide training "curriculum" for the Multicultural Affairs Congress.

Interpreting Philadelphia's African-American heritage is important in two ways, according to the *Tool Kit*: "One, telling the untold story about the past unveils the connectedness of the African American to the total quest for freedom that all who came to the United States were in search of; and two, the visitor or tourist to the city is ready to learn about the stories of the past that were not a part of their formal schooling."

### *Interpretation: Bringing a Place to Life*

In the 1950s, Freeman Tilden, a former serial writer, playwright and reporter, opted for a career change and began working for the National Park Service investigating how visitors interact with historic and natural sites. In 1957 Tilden published his observations in a book called *Interpreting Our Heritage*, which is regarded as the seminal book on this subject. As defined by Tilden, interpretation is "an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by first hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information."

The "objects" Tilden refers to encompass any resource and raw material that visitors might encounter. For the museum docent, they may be paintings; for the park ranger, the shed antlers of a deer; for the city guide, a monument; and for the interpreter in a historic building, the architectural ornamentation.

Regardless of the type of object, Tilden proposed that effective interpretation is based on the following six principles:

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
2. Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
3. Interpretation is an art which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical, or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
4. The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.

5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part and must address itself to the complete man rather than any phase.

6. Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of 12) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best, it will require a separate program.

As Tilden and others have pointed out, interpretations of sites and regions are as diverse as the people who give them and who participate in them—and well they should be. Rather than expecting or hoping for guides and hospitality staff to present the same information, in the same way, to every visitor, the ideal pro-

gram offers an abundance of materials and support and encourages local people to interpret the region in their own way.

*Philadelphia's African-American Heritage: A Tool Kit for Tour Guides & Interpreters* suggests the following goals for interpretation.

- to foster proper use and develop advocates for a site;
- to enhance the image of the agency or host organizations and to encourage public participation in the management of the site; and
- to provide recreation, heighten awareness and understanding of the natural and cultural environment; and inspire and add perspective to the visitors' lives.

### Interpreters: Who Are They?

*"On the street whatever comes to my mind I say it, if I think it will be good....And the main requirement for that is mood. You gotta be in the mood. You got to put yourself in it. You've got to feel it. It's got to be more an expression than a routine."*  
-Kingfish Smith, as told to the Federal Writers' Project in 1938

Kingfish Smith was not a guide in any traditional sense. He was, however, a superb interpreter, for he understood how to engage people spontaneously with their surroundings. Powerful interpreters who can capture the essence of a place, person, or idea and infuse it in others abound in many fields. Virtually everyone is a potential interpreter, including writers, film-

## Training Exercise

### Interpreting Your Region for Visitors

The following exercise helps to pinpoint some of a region's hidden attractions. Invariably, experiences and concepts about a site or region emerge that would not normally be included in a tour. Ask participants to imagine that they have had a life-long pen pal from a far away, exotic place, a place very much unlike this region. Over the years, they have both been faithfully describing their very different worlds, sending photographs, sharing personal information. Now, as adults, they regard this person almost as family.

The time has finally come when the pen pal is able to visit for a week or so.

Describe what, other than family members, participants are most looking forward to sharing with the person. This could be a waterfall, a vista, a concept (like, "I'd love to take him to one of our Senior Center lectures, so he has a chance to see the interesting people we have and the strong sense of community we share"); a seasonal event, a person at work in his or her studio, or a historic house museum. Try to be as specific as possible and to veer away from the obvious—just listing the typical sites—unless

they are truly the most meaningful to participants (and, if they are, describe why).

Each person has a few minutes to speak, and should, at the minimum, share a few sentences.

This is usually a favorite exercise and it is effective on many levels. Invariably, participants are eager to share their thoughts with the group. It causes people to think and talk about (and sometimes beam about) what is most meaningful to them. Out of that comes passion, which is everything in interpretation. When people think about what is most dear to them—rather than simply thinking in terms of tourists and attractions, they often experience a paradigm shift. They share what they love rather than what they think they should share. We need to remember that people care about the small and subtle things we love about our towns and cities as places to live, not just visit.

Another positive outcome of this exercise is that it often introduces others in the group to special places or perspectives about the area with which they were not previously familiar.



*The Oil Heritage Region celebrates its important role in the development of oil and the first oil well. It also stresses recreational activities such as biking, boating and hiking.*

makers, sculptors, songwriters, architects, teachers, singers, cartoonists, naturalists, interior designers, and fashion designers. At the core of all successful interpreters is passion for a subject, a desire to share it with others, and a wide array of communications skills.

Clearly, one key ingredient is the interpreter's own enthusiasm. A visitor will be much more inspired and inclined to listen to a person who is enthusiastic about his or her subject—even a difficult or unfamiliar one. At Monticello, although guides cover the basic information as they lead people throughout the house, there is no script, and guides are encouraged to talk about aspects of Monticello and Jefferson that are most interesting to them. This assures their commentaries are fresh and unique.

Indeed, the scripted tour, the “spiel,” is universally disliked by travelers. Not only is it monotonous to listen to, it violates at least two of Albrecht's Seven Sins: Acting Like a Robot and Treating Customers with Condescension. Visitors instinctively have little tolerance or respect this kind of presentation and are likely to drift away.

Choosing what to interpret or talk about is not as simple as it may appear. One curious aspect of tourism is that we often consign visitors to tired, traditional tourist attractions, forgetting that the real heritage of the region—the places where locals eat, gather, play, dance, debate and make decisions—are what define our communities, make them home to us, and make them memorable to a visitor. Often, when we look beyond what we deem our “tourist attractions,” (a local amusement park, or the city's oldest building), and really think about what we most love about our community, we will see that we fail to reveal to visitors the more hidden, off-the-beaten-path, or “down home” aspects of our region. Examples of these include our local library and its programs for children or for adults that highlight regional writers or culture, community centers, general

stores, artist cooperatives, lesser known historic sites and homes, and regional festivals.

### Interpreting Sites by Theme

In planning interpretive training programs, organizers must gather relevant information about the place and make it available to everyone and give guides, docents, and all hospitality workers freedom to interpret the region in their own way.

In addition to including historical information about people, events, and sites that are significant to Philadelphia's African-American heritage, the *Tool Kit for Tour Guides and Interpreters* also offers guidelines to develop individualized thematic tours.

First, interpreters should choose a theme. The theme might be an event, a person, or a concept that is rooted in that region. They should ask the following questions:

- Can my theme be stated in one sentence?
- Does my theme tell an important story about this site, person, or event that will enrich the visitor's experience?
- Will my audience relate to this topic?
- Is this a theme I personally care about? Do I have the resources for research?
- If a visitor were asked what my talk was about, would they be able to identify my theme?

Once a theme is chosen, the interpreter should be able to express it in a single sentence. In the *Tool Kit*, the Underground Railroad was chosen as the theme. “Because of its location, its large free black population and Quaker roots, Philadelphia was actively involved in the Underground Railroad.” The next step is researching the theme. For the authors of the *Tool Kit*, there were a variety of libraries and resources around the city.



Then the interpreter must identify the audience. Sometimes, as with pre-planned tour groups or convention participants, an interpreter will know something about the background of the group before meeting them. Otherwise, you must assess the visitors when you meet them. You can do this by asking them questions such as: Where are you from? Have you been here before? How long are you staying in the region? What else have you seen?

With a sense of who the visitor is, a theme that the interpreter feels passionate about, and the desire to share it, a successful interpretation is virtually assured.

### *Keeping Pace with— or Steps Ahead of—New Trends*

As managers, it is essential to understand and anticipate trends and visitor needs. This keeps new ideas flowing and helps to stay in step with—or steps ahead of—your competition and to continue to redefine your business.

Current and future national trends in tourism include some of the following:

- an aging population
- a more multicultural society
- more well-traveled visitors
- a greater number of travelers
- more international visitors
- more families traveling
- more people with disabilities traveling
- more people interested in “the real America:” countrysides, small towns, rural life, etc.
- demand for more professionalism and professional services in the tourism industry
- demand for authentic and very adventurous experiences

All of these trends present sites and communities with challenges and new opportunities. Individual companies that anticipate and respond to the changing needs of visitors will realize the greatest success. Your state tourism office or local convention and

visitors bureau may have more information about changing travel trends in your area.

### *Challenges in Tourism Promotion Within Communities*

Not all members of a community or organization will welcome tourism development. Some may oppose it because it is simply a new industry that they know little about. Some will fail to see the value if it doesn't seem to affect them directly. The challenges you face may be unique to your region or shared widely. In Nelson County, Va., when local tourism officials proposed a meals tax to help fund tourism advertising, many locals protested. As in many jurisdictions around the country, meals taxes affect everyone in a community who dines out. Many felt that if any tax were added for tourism advertising it should come from the pockets of the tourist themselves rather than taxing the local citizens

that tourism was supposed to benefit. The strong feelings engendered in this debate seemed at one point to threaten the support of the tourism program in general.

Tourism often imposes real pressures on a community's resources. Visitors inevitably need restaurants, accommodations, and public restrooms. If local people feel that their own facilities are being overrun and no longer as available to them, they will see tourists as intruders. In rural regions, some residents might fear that popularity with tourists will bring unwelcome hotels, fast food restaurants, and congestion in streets, parks, attractions, and retail establishments.

Another kind of conflict among residents is the manner in which a region's story is told. When Oregon celebrated the Sesquicentennial of the Oregon Trail in 1993, Native Americans and others felt that celebrating this event ignored the effect

## Exercise

### Using Current and Future Trends to Enhance Your Business or Site

Often the best people to spot trends and suggest improvements for your site are front-line employees. For this reason, they should be included in the following developmental exercise.

Examine national trends in tourism and choose one or more and ask yourself:

- 1) Will this trend affect our region and/or my business?
- 2) If so, how?
- 3) What, if anything, can I do about it? In what ways could I alter our current business practices to answer this need? The examples here are endless:

What are you doing to cater specifically to children or senior citizens?

Could you suggest or offer some outdoor activities?

Is your site accessible for handicapped people?

Do you know where to locate a translator if you needed someone to speak Spanish, French, or ASL (American Sign Language)?

It is important that employees do this exercise, and that managers consider their responses. As noted earlier, since employees usually have first contact with guests, they are often even more aware of visitor needs and ways in which their business can improve.

on native population groups and failed to tell the whole story. The Philadelphia African-American Heritage Tourism Program shows what can occur when people see what is overlooked in an interpretive program. The *Tool Kit* that came out of that project benefits everyone—visitors and locals alike. It educates and enlightens us about an important, but often neglected, aspect of Philadelphia's heritage.

It is important that guides and docents communicate, as much as possible, all viewpoints, even the less flattering sides of our history. When developing hospitality and interpretive programs, it is wise to remember that conflicts and disagreements can ultimately strengthen and validate the program.

### *Evaluating Your Program's Success*

Once the program is in place, how does a community or an organization know if the program is a success? Certainly you will wish for and hopefully realize such tangible factors as an increase in business in hotels and area

attractions. Sometimes the economic impact is immediately obvious. Sometimes changes take much longer to unfold than you might like.

Success only occurs if it benefits residents *and* visitors. Therefore, one of the best ways to gauge success and continue to improve upon your services is to ask visitors and staff to give their opinions. Encourage employees to ask visitors what they like most and how services can be improved. This allows you and others to see where your accomplishments are, so that you can congratulate and encourage. It also allows you and others in the community to see where you need work, where you are not meeting the requirements or expectations of tourists and what you can do that could enhance people's visits (and thus your business).

### **Tracking Customer Service**

Surveying visitors, community members, tourism employees and workers, and local business owners can be an

effective way to gain invaluable information. Suggestion boxes kept at prominent places can also be helpful. Survey results need to be recorded, shared, and analyzed on an ongoing basis. Surveys should also be kept on file, as they can serve as support for more funding for tourism ventures.

Visitors might be averse to the time and energy it takes to fill out surveys, so site managers might consider offering a thank-you gift, such as a coupon for reduced admission to a site or a small memento of the region, for each completed survey.

Documenting the successes and areas for improvement in your hospitality efforts is vital if you wish to continue to reap the benefits of tourism. Surveying the members of your community to understand their needs and opinions is also essential. After all, the most effective and enduring way to welcome visitors to your community is to be prepared and eager to host them.

## **Training Exercise**

### **Create a Survey**

Ask visitors to complete a questionnaire as a way to record opinions about customer service in your region or at your site. Analyze the findings to determine areas for improvement. Also use this survey as a way to track and measure customer service improvements. The more you know about your visitors and what they want, the better you can serve them.

#### **QUESTIONS TO ASK**

- Where did you first hear about this community?
- How much time did you plan to spend here?
- How much time will you have actually spent here?
- How would you rate your overall experience in this community?
- How would you rate the people you have encountered in this community on the following?
  - Knowledgeable
  - Friendly
  - Pride in their community
  - Willingness to help others
- How likely are you to return to this community?

## Acknowledgments

Kathleen Lingle Pond has worked independently as a tour guide, guide trainer, consultant, and writer since 1981. Since 1987 she has taught courses for tour guides and hospitality personnel at Northern Virginia Community College, The George Washington University, and for various organizations around the world. She is the author of *The Professional Guide* published by John Wiley & Sons (1993), several guidebooks, and numerous other publications. Her company, Behind the Scenes, in Charlottesville, Va., offers writing, tour and event planning, and tourism consulting.

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*Oil Heritage Region Hospitality Handbook*, published by the Oil Heritage Region in conjunction with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1995.

*Philadelphia's African-American Heritage: A Tool Kit for Tour Guides & Interpreters*, published jointly by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, the Pennsylvania Center for Travel, Tourism and Film Promotion, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 1995.

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## Endnotes:

1 *Tourism Works for America, 1997 Report*.

2 Hall, *Investing in Volunteers*, 1.

3 Gabriel Jerome Cherem, "The Professional Interpreter: Agent for an Awakening Giant." *Journal of Interpretation*, 2:1 (August 1977).