

Pensacola's History Will Still Attract Visitors

Now that all of the formal celebrations and special events associated with the 450th Anniversary of Pensacola's founding are over; and we are on to number 451, what have we learned or gained from that magnificent milestone. I think there are several lessons and takeaways of note from the just completed united effort to celebrate and remember from whence this community came. For starters, we are not the only ones that think the history and heritage of Pensacola is interesting and intriguing. Visitors from all over the globe traveled to Pensacola during the last year to be a part of the 450th Anniversary festivities. For those that didn't, hundreds of millions more heard about it or saw reports about it via the electronic news outlets or traditional broadcast mediums. As a result, even more visitors will be coming in the future; and we have to be ready to help them stay as long as possible.

By the way, "Historic" is still the overwhelming number one attribute that "locals" within the three county region use to define Downtown Pensacola. It is still the place where all of us bring visitors to experience the "real Pensacola". These realities have not been lost by the DIB and other entities hoping to draw more tourists and visitors to Historic Downtown Pensacola.

We also know that visitors to the beaches on our eastern and western flanks will seek out genuine experiences and places that offer real local color on days when the weather is not sunny or when they have gotten too much sun because of our close proximity and ease of vehicular access. But we have to tell them what is here before they come and help them find the locations that interest them when they arrive if we are to capitalize on such opportunities. Towards that end, several initiatives are underway to make the downtown more tourist friendly during the coming year.

The Pensacola Bay Area Convention & Visitors Bureau is promoting a self-guided tour that encourages visitors to follow in the footsteps of the King & Queen of Spain during their recent visit to this long-ago colony. The CVB has also just opened a satellite visitors booth in the lobby of the Old Escambia County Courthouse on S. Palafox to help visitors navigate the numerous historical offerings of downtown.

The Downtown Parking Management District is about to debut a new series of wayfinding signage for pedestrians and vehicles that when installed at the end of 2010, should make it much easier to find the major historical attractions of downtown as well as nearby public parking for each such site.

West Florida Historic Preservation, Inc. has moved the all-day parkers out of its off-street parking lot along S. Tarragona Street and designated it as visitor and short-term free parking for those utilizing the Pensacola Historic Village just across the street. This move should facilitate easier access and more visitors to that significant historic attraction.

At the Community Maritime Park along the bayfront, the Admiral John Fetterman Florida Maritime Museum is about to break ground. That magnificent state facility will when completed and opened tell the story of over 450 years of our rich maritime history.

The DIB is continuing its aggressive marketing of downtown to tourists via area visitor guides and other annual tourist oriented publications. In all such mediums, the focus of the marketing representations is on the rich history and unique local offerings found in the downtown.

In the Belmont DeVilliers area of downtown, there are two efforts underway to tell visitors about the history and contributions of that neighborhood. A local group is promoting the establishment of a Music Makers Hall of Fame centered around the current location of the Belmont Arts Center. Just across the street, the Florida Black Chamber of Commerce in cooperation with several local promoters is putting together a DeVilliers Cultural Heritage Museum.

I for one believe that the 450th Anniversary Celebration last year awakened the realization that our history and the elements that remain from it can be a vital avenue for future growth and prosperity. Let's keep the momentum going. History –our history – sells.

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DIB Executive Director