

## **Chapter 8**

### **Tourism, Recreation and Leisure**

#### *Current Status:*

Tourism in Pikeville and Pike County is becoming a more important source of economic activity and will continue to grow in significance with the opening of the Eastern Kentucky Exposition Center later this year. In 2003 Pike County expended nearly \$45 million in tourism activities, employing 937 people, and ranking it second in the region and 27<sup>th</sup> in the state for tourism expenditures and employment. The City of Pikeville has several tourist attractions: the Big Sandy Heritage Center, the Historic Downtown Pikeville Walking Tour, Hillbilly Days, the Mountain Top Lights, the Pikeville Cut-Through, the Country Music Highway, the Hatfield-McCoy Reunion Festival, Dils Cemetery, and the Acknowledged Stomping Grounds of the Hatfield-McCoy Feud. Within the city there are also numerous opportunities for recreation and leisure activities: the Pikeville Area YMCA, Bob Amos Park, the July 4<sup>th</sup> festival, and the Pikeville High School fields. The City parks are well maintained by Veolia.

Pike County and the surrounding area offer even more in both tourist attractions and recreational activities: Natural beauty abounds, and the Breaks Interstate Park, the “Grand Canyon” of the east, and the newly designated State Park, Fishtrap Lake, provide visitors with opportunities for hiking, camping, rafting, boating, fishing, horseback riding, swimming and nature education. Whitewater rafting and kayaking in the Russell Fork is among the best in the Southeast, with rapids from Class I to Class IV. The development of the Hatfield-McCoy Historical Attractions include a driving tour, homeplace, killing fields and hideout restorations, and the establishment of the Hatfield–McCoy reunion Festival include locales in the County as well as the City, and the coal

camp at Stone, presently undergoing restoration, offers a historic attraction. There are additional attractions in the surrounding region that can benefit tourism in Pikeville: in Floyd County, Jenny Wiley State Resort Park, Jenny Wiley Theatre, the East Kentucky Science Center and the Mountain Arts Center all draw visitors and in Johnson County, Loretta Lynn's birthplace at Van Lear, the Mountain Homeplace, Paintsville Lake State Park and the annual Apple Days Festival all draw tourists.

Pikeville's inclusion in regional tourism marketing and promotional materials is imperative to growth of the tourism sector. Inclusion in the Route 23 Cultural Heritage Corridor maps and brochures will be helpful. The new National Geographic Discover Appalachia website which went online March 15, 2005, currently does not include any Pikeville or Pike County sites on the map, although links to several attractions are available by clicking on the Kentucky link and then clicking on areas of interest.

At present, Pikeville has four hotels within the City, the Pinson Hotel, Landmark Inn, the Days Inn, and the SuperEight Motel, and one bed and breakfast. There are an additional three hotels in the County, the Daniel Boone Motor Inn, and the Breaks Interstate Park. The number of restaurants is also relatively low: while there are numerous fast food providers and sandwich shops within the City and surrounding area, the number of sit down restaurants is limited, and even among those many are chain restaurants or franchises and very few feature true cooked-to-order meals or creative menus.

The charm of Pikeville is seen in the Pikeville/Pike County Tourism Commission, which is located in the Downtown area in a restored train car and immediately provides visitors with a sense of the history of the City. Development of historical buildings and facades in the Downtown District for use as tourism support services should be explored.

#### *Future Needs:*

The Eastern Kentucky Exposition Center (EKEC) is expected to increase tourism dramatically: with 7,000 seats, a 24,000 square foot arena floor and a 5,000 square foot ballroom, the state-of-the-art facility will be able to host everything from sporting events to the circus to popular music concerts to conventions and market shows. The February 2004 *Pike County Master Tourism Document* recommends that the City of Pikeville, as well as Pike County, Pikeville/ Pike County Tourism and the Pike County Chamber of Commerce work closely with the EKEC in order to ensure its successful establishment. Most immediately, this will require subsidies as the projected operating deficits from a 1997 feasibility study are between \$250,000 - \$500,000 per year initially. As of this writing the operating budget has not yet been updated, but the deficits are projected to be in the \$400,000 - \$500,000 range. This investment in EKEC will be returned in the

increased economic activity the Center brings to the City and surrounding region: The *Master Tourism Document* reports that even during the construction phase there is an expected \$30 million annual impact and approximately 130 jobs created. Once the EKEC opens, projections include over \$6.5 million of revenue from out-of-state visitors, and \$2.4 million in monies presently being spent on recreation out-of-state that will be recaptured, for a total of over \$10 million of economic activity each year.

Other forms of support to EKEC are also vital to its success. Most importantly, the supporting services to provide lodging, meals, parking, recreation and shopping to visitors are critical. The Hotel Feasibility Study completed in July 2004 determined through comprehensive analysis that a 120-room hotel facility should be constructed one block from the EKEC to serve the range of visitors expected, including business travelers, tourists attending EKEC and regional attractions, motorists traveling through the area and family and friends of local residents visiting for personal or community events. This study recommended that the facility include luxury budget oriented rooms, some suites, non-smoking and handicapped-accessible rooms, a restaurant/coffee shop, business services (internet hook-up, facsimile and photocopy services, free local phone calls), meeting rooms, vending machines and a gift shop. The manifestation of this recommendation will require a zoning variance for the proposed site adjacent to the new Parking Facility, and this should be approved as soon as possible (please see Land Use section for more information about this).

However, the construction of a new hotel is not the only improvement in lodging for the future: existing hotels and motels must also make changes. Current ratings and reviews of Pikeville hotels available online (i.e. travelocity.com, tripadvisor.com. and yahootravel.com) are overall very poor: although there are a few favorable reviews, they are overwhelmed by the greater number of extremely poor reviews which describe area hotels as filthy, dirty, having mold and water leaks, lacking basic linens, noisy and staffed by rude personnel. Several reviews refer to hotels as “dumps” and tell potential visitors “to skip it altogether”. Clearly, close work with the Pike County Health Department to monitor hotel and motel conditions, as well as work with the Chamber of Commerce, the Pikeville/ Pike County Tourism Commission and the Southern and Eastern Kentucky Tourism Development Association (SEKTDA) is indicated. The *Master Tourism Document* states clearly that without renovation there will be no returning visitors. The *Master Tourism Document* also recommends training for hotel and restaurant personnel to be able to handle larger crowds, and such training is available through SEKTDA and should be strongly supported by the City, the Chamber and the Tourism Commission. Another way to improve hospitality services would be for the Tourism Commission and the Chamber to develop a simple survey placed in rooms, restaurants, the Chamber and Tourism offices, EKEC and all tourist attractions asking for traveler feedback and including specific questions about hotel and motel accommodations, and then printing the results to create some motivation for improvements among hotel owners. Another avenue could be to develop a rating

system and periodically rate all existing hotels and motels and publish the results, again to create an incentive for owners to maintain hotels to the highest standards.

Increasing the availability of quality restaurants within the City, particularly within the Downtown area, is another means of supporting EKEC and tourism in general. Currently, there are only four non-fast-food eateries within the Downtown area, and relatively few in the remainder of the City and immediate surroundings. Further, several of the Downtown restaurants are not open for dinner. The ability of the City to accommodate and attract visitors for business and leisure pursuits will be enhanced by the establishment of quality dining throughout the City, but particularly in close proximity to the EKEC and the planned hotel.

Parking in Downtown remains a challenge that the City is well aware of and continues to address. The new 680-space City Parking garage located one block from the EKEC and adjacent to the proposed hotel is a tremendous improvement. However, an additional 300-400 parking spaces in the Downtown area will be needed to accommodate the anticipated visitors for EKEC events. (Please see Transportation Section for more details.)

Pedestrian traffic is also important for the development of a vibrant tourism economy. The recent Downtown Streetscape improvements have restored and improved sidewalks throughout the downtown area. Sidewalks should be extended to allow comfortable, safe, well lit and wheel-chair accessible walkways between EKEC, the Parking Garage, the proposed hotel and the Downtown area. This will also support participation in the Downtown Walking Tour.

The Downtown area will also need to expand its available retail offerings to provide tourists with convenient opportunities for shopping for mementos, unique gifts, local products and regional crafts and artisan work. These specialty items might best be accommodated in small boutique-like shops that are open and inviting and allow pedestrians to see goods easily. A pedestrian mall has been discussed at various times, and while closing even a portion of a street to motor traffic might be unrealistic, the same effect could be accomplished with the development of a small indoor pedestrian mall in the downtown area. This mall should capitalize on the historic facades of this area by retaining existing facades but renovating the interior of several attached buildings to house shops and eateries and provide covered green-space or even exhibit space. The extension of the existing trolley service providing free transport between the Parking facility and Downtown, to include EKEC and the hotel, Pikeville College, and any malls, restaurants, shops or other attractions in the Downtown or adjacent area, is also critical.

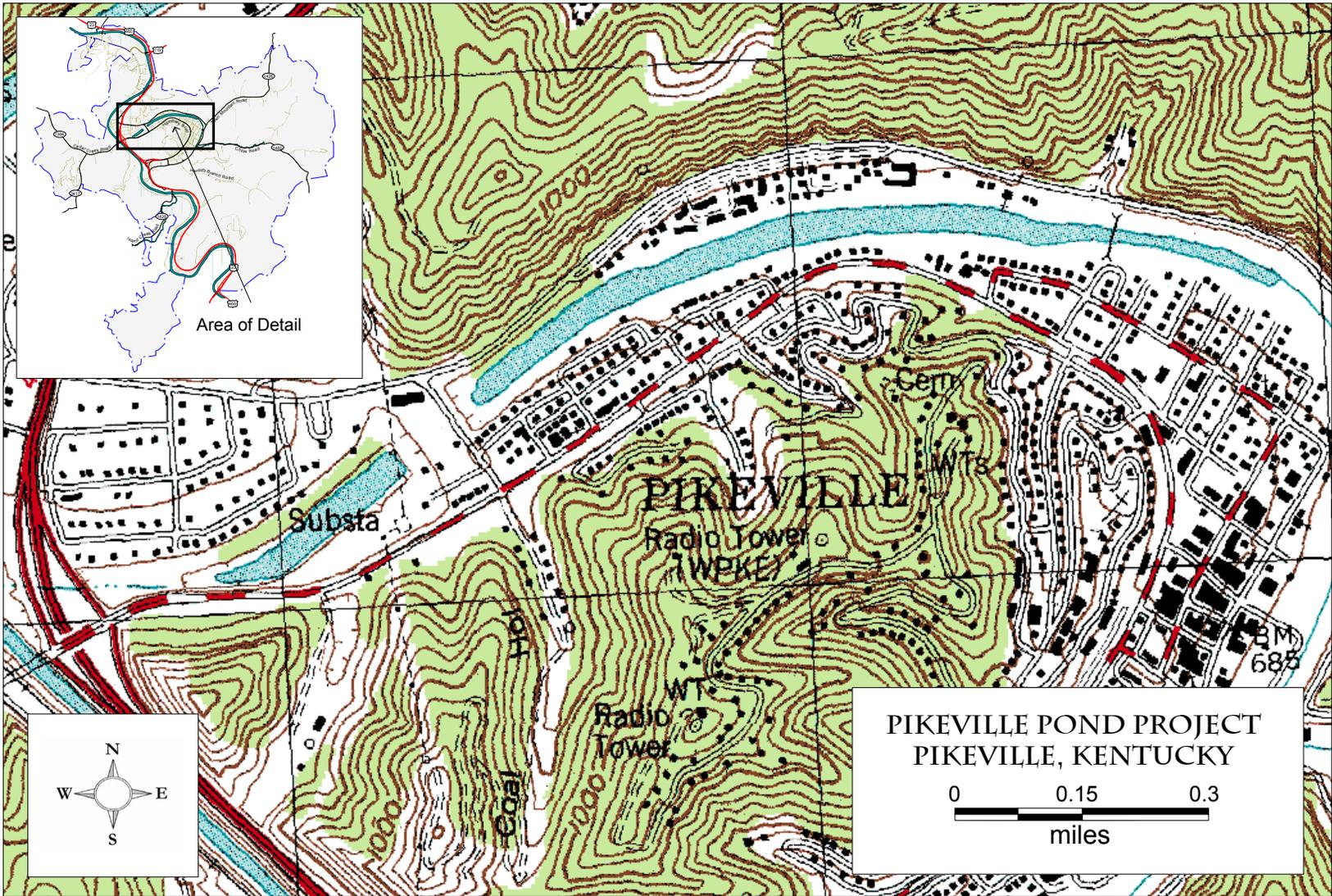
Finally, the need for clear, attractive signage and tourist maps will enhance the development of tourism in general, and support the EKEC. Uniform and distinctive

signage, with clear directions and mileage, should be placed throughout the downtown area as well as throughout the County. This will be especially helpful for tourists unfamiliar with the area who wish to visit attractions outside the City or who wish to go on the driving tour. Clear, attractive and easy to read walking and driving maps will also be essential, and again a uniform design that relates to the design of the highway signage and markers is recommended.

Other support to EKEC will come in the form of additional police and fire services required around events, and traffic flow improvements on roads with access to EKEC and downtown. Obviously, ongoing cooperative and collaborative work with Pike County, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Tourism Commission will be critical to EKEC's success.

Additional needs for the City include improving recreational opportunities, particularly at Pikeville Pond, which should be done in collaboration with Renaissance on Main. While the water quality in the Pond has improved as a result of Renaissance on Main's efforts to date, additional clean up is necessary to bring it to the highest standards of water quality required to allow for recreational use. This includes the installation of pumps to serve the dual purpose of providing flood control when needed, but also aerating the pond on a regular basis. Recreational use at Pikeville Pond could include boating, picnicking, walking, and a park. A dock will need to be constructed, as well as picnic shelters and tables, walking paths and benches, and the area will need landscaping. In addition, paddle boats, canoes and rowboats and playground equipment will all need to be purchased. The Pikeville Pond could become an attractive, convenient and enjoyable area of recreation for both residents and visitors. (See Map page 119.)

Plans are underway for \$100,000 of improvements to Bob Amos Park including a sidewalk the entire length of Bob Amos Drive, with informational kiosks, resting areas and picnic and family recreational areas. Another future recreational site within the City will be the Golf Course development at Marion's Branch. This will provide the City with its first Golf Course within the City limits, and it will be the newest golf course in the county and region, providing state of the art design and maintenance. The growing popularity of golf makes it a wonderful attraction for tourists and business travelers, as well as conventions and conferences. A final potential for recreational growth is with the addition of a second gymnasium for Pikeville High School. The Board of Education hopes to be able to add a second gymnasium to allow for multiple athletic events to occur simultaneously. This would also enable more recreational use of the facilities when they were not being utilized for school athletic events or training, especially by young people. Multiple athletic venues will also increase the number of visitors to Pikeville for athletic events, boosting some areas of economic activity, particularly restaurants, convenience stores and gas stations.



The Pikeville High School Auditorium and the Booth Auditorium at Pikeville College are both important venues for arts activities within the City and will continue to provide an arena for smaller events even after the EKEC opens. These spaces are all well suited for drama, dance and classical and acoustic music, as well as lectures and panel discussions. Both facilities should be supported by the City to ensure the availability of smaller, more intimate and theatrical venues. Collaboration with the state's (in fact the nation's) first Extension Agent for First Arts, Stephanie Richards, should also be pursued to ensure the ongoing development of and support for fine arts activities throughout the City.

Another area of potential downtown recreational development is the Cut-Through. The Cut-Through has the makings of a tourist attraction: as the largest cut east of the Mississippi River, the *New York Times* called it the "eighth wonder of the world." The cut itself is an impressive landscape, and the addition of a Riverwalk, landscaping at the base of the cut, and some small and tasteful development has been suggested. Again, this type of development would provide recreational opportunities for both residents and visitors, would enhance the appearance of and quality of life within the City, and could become a tourist attraction in the future.

Visitor kiosks outside and within the City should also be established to provide tourists and business visitors with accurate and comprehensive information in a convenient and easily identifiable location. The *Master Tourism Document* recommended four kiosks along major arteries into the City, a Visitor's Bureau within the EKEC, and additional tourism information centers in other parts of the county. Visitor Kiosks could serve all these purposes and should include information about tourist attractions, recreational facilities, EKEC events, lodging, restaurants and shopping within the City and surrounding area; maps and brochures; and a large display map identifying major attractions map with a "you are here" indicator.

By its very nature, tourism must encompass the region and not just the City. Thus, as part of developing tourism and recreation, the City should partner with the many other tourist attractions and recreational activities in the surrounding area, too. Partnering could occur in a number of ways: mutual advertising and publicity; cooperative marketing and promotion; regional incentives to tour operators; the creation of package deals and special discounts; and links between websites. The assumption must be that the promotion of one activity or attraction can benefit all the other attractions and activities as well. Some of the other attractions that should be considered for active partnering outside the City include the Breaks, Fishtrap Lake Resort Park, Whitewater Rafting at Russell Fork, the Hatfield-McCoy Driving Tour and History Sites, the Mountain Arts Center, Jenny Wiley Theatre, Jenny Wiley State Resort Park, the East Kentucky Science Center, and the Country Music Highway.

Ongoing marketing efforts are critical to the growth and success of the tourism sector for the City and surrounding region. The City of Pikeville and Pikeville/Pike County Tourism should continue to work with the Route 23 Cultural Heritage Corridor Project and have all historic and cultural attractions be included in their promotional materials. In addition, the City and Tourism Commission should contact the Appalachian Regional Commission and National Geographic Magazine to be included on the National Geographic Discover Appalachia website as soon as possible. A number of Pikeville and Pike County attractions including Hatfield-McCoy historic sites and driving tour, Hillbilly Days Festival, the EKEC, Breaks Interstate Park, white water rafting and the Cut-Through should be included. Finally, the completion of the Pikeville Pike County Tourism Marketing Study later this year will provide the City with valuable information on where and when to target tourism and business travel promotional materials.

***Tourism, Recreation and Leisure Goals and Objectives:***

*Goal: The City of Pikeville and surrounding region will become an easily accessible, thriving tourist destination, recreational area and business destination, offering a variety of cultural, natural and entertainment attractions and high quality lodging, restaurants and shopping venues.*

- Support the completion and operation of the East Kentucky Exposition Center:
  - Provide subsidies to help offset expected operating deficits
  - Approve the zoning variance from C-1 to C-2 to enable the location of a 120-room hotel with conference facilities one block from EKEC (see Land Use Section)
  - Increase downtown parking by 300-400 spaces with an additional parking facility (see Transportation section)
  - Support any efforts to secure commuter air service to Hatcher Field
  
- Improve the quantity and quality of lodging within and around the City:
  - Support the development of the 120-room hotel and conference facility on Hambley Boulevard
  - Work with the Pike County Chamber of Commerce, Pikeville/ Pike County Tourism and Southern and Eastern Kentucky Tourism Development Association (SEKTDA) to improve hospitality services, including training for hospitality workers and a rating system for area hotels
  - Support the existing Bed & Breakfast and the development of any additional B & B's
  
- Improve the quantity and quality of restaurants within and around the City:

- Increase number of restaurants and choices within City, particularly downtown area, including dinner options
  - Support the development of a small covered mall or pedestrian mall in the downtown area to include restaurants, including some outdoor or atrium seating
  - Conduct a feasibility study to identify the need for, best location of and projected success of sit-down restaurants within the City and particularly within the Downtown District
- Improve the quantity of specialty and tourist shopping within the Downtown area:
- Support the development of a small covered mall or pedestrian mall in the downtown area to include shops
  - Continue to address and increase the availability of convenient parking in the downtown area
- Make the City of Pikeville more “user-friendly” for tourists and business visitors:
- Increase signage from all major routes into the City identifying significant tourist and recreational attractions
  - Develop an easy-to-read map for both pedestrian and vehicular touring within and around the City identifying tourist attractions, recreational facilities, lodging, restaurants, shopping and other places of interest, as well as providing basic information about these sites.
  - Develop a maintenance and inspection program for sidewalks, parks and other public spaces to ensure the highest standard of upkeep
  - Increase availability of safe, convenient and free parking within the City, particularly within the Downtown area
  - Increase the availability and frequency of public transportation between locations within the City, including the parking structure, the new hotel, EKEC, shopping areas or malls, Pikeville College, Pikeville Pond, Bob Amos Park and other tourist attractions and recreational facilities.
- Increase opportunities for recreational activities within the City:
- Convert Pikeville Pond into a recreational facility: improve water quality, install pumps for aeration and flood control, build dock and picnic shelter, landscape, purchase boats and recreational equipment
  - Complete improvements to Bob Amos Park
  - Develop golf course at Marion’s Branch as planned
  - Study the feasibility of developing the Cut-Through into a Riverfront Walk and Recreational Area
- Develop Visitor Kiosks within and around the City, specifically:

- Along major arteries into the City (Routes 23, 119, 80 and 460) and from all directions
  - At or near tourist attractions in the surrounding area
  - Inside the EKEC
- Foster and sustain mutually beneficial relationships with area tourist attractions for tourism marketing, advertising, promotions, incentives and website linkages
- Increase opportunities for Tourism Marketing
- Continue to work with the Route 23 Cultural Heritage Corridor Project and be included in their maps, brochures and other materials
  - Work with the Appalachian Regional Commission and National Geographic to be included on the interactive online map Discover Appalachia at [www.nationalgeographic.com/appalachia](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/appalachia)
  - Complete the Marketing Study to identify areas for targeted promotion
  - Work with the Pike County Chamber of Commerce, Pikeville/ Pike County Tourism and SEKTDA to establish a unique and identifying identity for Pikeville that can be used in all marketing, promotions and signage