

Chapter 8

Tourism, Recreation and Leisure

Tourism in Pikeville and Pike County has become an important source of economic activity and cultural pride. Over the last eight years the availability, accessibility and diversity of tourism, recreation and leisure opportunities has expanded greatly. There are several contributing factors to this expansion:

1. Ongoing investment in tourism and recreation infrastructure;
2. Development of recreational opportunities, especially outdoor recreation; and
3. Development and investment in arts and culture.

In addition, the separation of Pikeville and Pike County Tourism allows each group to narrow its focus on the particular geographic area while also collaborating as appropriate.

Tourism & Recreation Infrastructure:

Since the 2005 plan, the 7,000 seat East Kentucky Exposition Center has opened, and, after several years of difficulty is now under City oversight (with a 99-year lease) and is one of 65 stadiums managed by SMG Worldwide Entertainment and Convention Venue Management Company. This affiliation with SMG ensures knowledgeable management, access to a variety of events, and credibility to potential tours and shows. While the facility is not yet turning a profit, it is no longer hemorrhaging money and is able to break even. More importantly, it is active and provides a steady stream of diverse offerings and activities for the community.

The facility can seat 7,000 in arena-style seating, and has the flexibility to host sporting events (the UPike Champion Basketball Team plays here as well as the East Kentucky Drillers, an arena football team, and the regional high school basketball championships), ice shows (Disney on Ice), the circus, music shows (including Tim McGraw, Martina McBride), popular acts (e.g. Larry the Cable Guy), expositions (automotive, tractor, Monster Truck), rallies & speakers (including former President Bill Clinton), as well as smaller theatrical productions (Moscow Ballet's *The Nutcracker*). The 24,000 square foot arena and 5,000 square foot ballroom may also be divided to accommodate conventions, conferences and gala events, with full services in-house catering provided. Conveniently located downtown next to free parking and within walking distance of local hotels and restaurants, the Expo Center has great potential to continue to expand its offerings and serve the community. Future directions should include the active marketing of the facility for small conventions and conferences, especially those related to local industry and regional interests (e.g. natural resources, medicine, higher education, economic development, and Appalachian arts, culture and heritage).

Improvements in hospitality infrastructure are also evident: the recommendation for a 120-bed hotel from the 2004 Hotel Feasibility Study has been implemented with the opening of the Hampton Inn. This hotel has been extremely successful, exceeding expectations in both quality of lodging and bookings: The hotel provides a luxurious stay for a very reasonable price, and stays nearly full all year round with both business and recreational travelers. The Hampton Inn has fulfilled many of the recommendations in the 2004 study, including providing an array of business services and conference/meeting rooms, offering luxury rooms at a moderate price, and maintaining non-smoking rooms. In fact, this success has led to the construction of a second 120-bed facility, a Hilton Garden, right next door which will double the availability of high quality rooms in the City. This is especially important given the conversion of the Landmark Inn from hotel to designated family lodging for patients at Pikeville Medical Center, as well as the anticipated increased demand for rooms with the expansions of both Pikeville Medical Center and the University of Pikeville. In addition, the opening of the seven room Historic Mansion Bed & Breakfast has added a charming alternative for visitors, and a second Bed & Breakfast on Chloe Road offers additional rooms. For those leisure visitors who travel by RV, the Pikeville RV Park at Bob Amos Park offers an economical full-service alternative.

Pikeville now has business meeting and conference facilities available at the Eastern Kentucky Exposition Center, the Hampton Inn and the Garfield House, with additional business options available soon in the Hilton Garden. The Expo Center, the Hampton Inn and Hilton Garden and the Garfield House are also available for social events, including fundraisers. In addition, the new Jenny Wiley Theatre starting construction on Second Street will be a flexible space that will be able to host meetings, conferences, workshops and receptions.

The City also collaborated with the Pike County Chamber of Commerce, the Pike County and Pikeville Tourism Boards, and the Southern and Eastern Kentucky Tourism Development Association to provide training for hospitality workers and guidance for hospitality managers in the region. Although the Hampton Inn and Hilton Garden are shining examples of improvements in hospitality in Pikeville, there remain some areas of concern: while consumer reviews are consistently high (4.8 of 5 stars on Expedia and 4.5 of 5 on TripAdvisor), some travel services have given lower rates because of the lack of amenities necessary in larger cities such as in-room dining and in-hotel dining. Both amenities will be available in the new Hilton Garden hotel which should rectify this perceived availability problem. Of greater concern are the poor ratings given to older motels and hotels in the area, with problems noted ranging from incompetent or rude staff to roaches, unsanitary linens and lumpy pillows and beds. These concerns are worthy of ongoing attention by Pikeville City Tourism as well as the Pike County Health Department.

Another infrastructure improvement since 2005 is the opening of the multi-story free parking garage and the addition of more than 100 parking spaces in the downtown area. Parking, however, remains a concern for downtown businesses, residents and tourists alike. Efforts to secure funds to construct an additional parking facility should continue and will benefit the city in myriad ways. The addition of street parking adjacent to the new Pike County Judicial Center is a small help and more opportunities for downtown street parking should be identified. The proposed parking structures at Pikeville Methodist Church and in the Riverfill Parking lot should be seriously considered to alleviate downtown parking limitations.

The accessibility of the City of Pikeville has long been a concern in attracting tourists and visitors. Efforts to secure commercial air service at Hatcher Field are ongoing and improvements to the airport to make it more attractive to commercial carriers have occurred: the area is properly secured with perimeter fencing, the access is improved, and the runway has had improvements. Despite the 38,000 motor vehicles which pass daily only a few miles from the airport, population demographics continues to be a barrier to securing commercial service. The efforts of the City of Pikeville, Pike County and the Kentucky Congressional Delegation are ongoing and committed to securing commercial air traffic.

Tourism and recreation are also benefitting from the ongoing success of existing restaurants and the introduction of five new restaurants to the downtown area, providing an array of choices in the downtown area from fast food (a newly renovated McDonald's) to sandwich shops (Subway) to casual bar food (Bank 253 and the Main Street Bar & Grill) to full course meals (Chirico's) and unique fine dining (The Blue Raven). The Hilton Garden will also include an in-house restaurant and room service. New restaurants in other parts of the City have also proved highly successful including the Texas Roadhouse (already planning an expansion), Penn Station, FROG Frozen

Yogurt, Steak and Shake, and others on Thompson Road. Additional eateries are planned in the next phase of the Thompson Road development for retail, service and residential multi-use. A feasibility study focusing on location and projected success of sit-down restaurants was completed and is available to potential restaurateurs and economic development groups to facilitate restaurant planning. An ongoing challenge for marketing the City of Pikeville is helping potential investors to understand that the usual parameters for population may be too conservative for eastern Kentucky: in this region people are willing to travel from quite far away to reach a destination for shopping or eating. It is important that online resources about Pikeville stay current to be able to provide prospective visitors and potential residents with an accurate listing of culinary options. The success of national chain restaurants including Applebee's and Texas Roadhouse should assist the City in explaining this phenomenon to future potential investors.

Other infrastructure improvements include the new signage throughout the Downtown area for tourism and recreation sites, the publication and availability of downtown maps for vehicular and pedestrian traffic, with hospitality and tourism sites easily identified, and the improved maintenance of sidewalks and parks. Exploration of a possible pedestrian mall or covered downtown shopping district found that neither is feasible for the near future. Public transportation availability within the City and between Downtown and other locales was provided on a trial basis and was barely utilized, certainly not enough to justify ongoing provision of such services. These two concerns should not be pursued further at this time.

The creation of Pikeville City Tourism has been beneficial for the City and the entire region. The effective utilization of internet and social media technology is critical to tourism and recreation and Pikeville City Tourism's website is accessible, easily navigated, and includes a calendar of events in the City and County, as well as resources for lodging, dining and activities. Maintaining a current listing of hotels and restaurants is critical to informing and attracting tourists and potential residents and should be a priority. This could be part of the overall marketing plan which is being developed by Pikeville City Tourism and will be implemented with state funds slated for release in 2014. This plan addresses the inclusion of Pikeville in regional tourism materials such as the Country Music Highway (already included) and the Discover America (in process) websites. The City has improved the availability of materials for visitors once they arrive with a new Gazebo Visitor Station Kiosk at the base of Bob Amos Road providing pamphlets on local and regional attractions and events. Visitor information is also available at the Eastern Kentucky Exposition Center and announcements of upcoming events are displayed on the LED sign on the walkway from the parking garage across Hambley Boulevard.

Many of these improvements occurred through the cooperation of the City and the local Planning and Zoning Board to carefully examine existing zoning and make adjustments

as needed. Rezoning allowed the construction of both the new hotels. This cooperative approach to zoning change and improvements is essential for thoughtful and beneficial development within the City of Pikeville. Collaboration with Pike County and other regional entities, as well as public-private partnerships are also critical to creating, sustaining and maintaining the necessary infrastructure for tourism, recreation and arts and culture in the City of Pikeville.

Recreational Opportunities:

Improvements in infrastructure have been accompanied by increased recreational opportunities over the last eight years. Growth in the outdoor sports recreation activities include the development of Bob Amos Park to now include a football field, a track, soccer fields, tennis courts, baseball/softball fields, basketball courts, a cross country running trail, a pedestrian/cycling path, two playgrounds and a horse trail slated to open in Fall, 2013. In addition there is now a sidewalk running the entire length of Bob Amos Drive, and numerous picnic shelters, several with grills, and two with a scenic view of Downtown Pikeville and the cut-through from the Overlook. Bob Amos Park is well used by sports teams and leagues: UPike, Pikeville Independent and other schools use the fields for football, soccer, baseball and soccer, and the cross country course and track are used for most regional meets. Individuals also make use of the walking track and tennis courts in large numbers, and the YMCA is always busy. However, there are concerns from residents, including young people, that at times when there are no organized sports activities or large numbers of people present, the park is not welcoming and does not always feel safe. While this is a common concern for public areas after dark or at non-peak usage hours, the City should do what it can to promote a safe and welcoming environment at all times the park is open. The recent closing of the overlook after dark may help to reduce problems and minimize the presence of those not using the park for athletic facilities or activities. Options for additional lighting to promote safety after dark should also be explored.

Opportunities for outdoor eco-tourism and recreation have also increased dramatically since 2005. Hatfield-McCoy River Tours rents kayaks, canoes and tubes and ferries river-travelers back to their cars after an 8.3 mile tour down the largest Cut Through in the country. In 2011, the second year of operation, more than 800 people took a river tour. Pikeville City Lake has been dramatically improved since 2005 with decorative fountains providing ongoing aeration, and paddle boats, a dock, fishing, picnic areas and a playground. Other outdoor activities are also thriving: the six mile multi-use bike/walking trail is well used and an extension is planned; a 2.3 mile horse trail is slated to open in fall, 2013; and a hiking trail of nearly eight miles is in the planning stages. Urban trails include the Healthy Living Walking Trail and the Downtown and Historic Downtown Walking Trails. Stream fishing is currently available, but there is interest in developing local venues for fly-fishing as well.

Promotion of the Pikeville Cut-Through, the “eighth wonder of the world” (New York *Times*) experienced from above at the Bob Amos Overlook, or from the river bed via boat must be ongoing. The City must also continue to support and promote regional outdoor recreational attractions including the Breaks Interstate Park, Pine Mountain Trail, Fishtrap Lake and Grants Branch Park. There has been great interest in development of outdoor activities such as a zipline or water park; they are being explored, but both require substantial investment in infrastructure that is not currently available. Exploration of possible public-private partnerships to develop these activities with Pikeville Tourism should be pursued.

The number and diversity of downtown recreational activities has also exploded over the last eight years. Muscle on Main, the monthly summer cruise-in, burnout drag race and car show, draws thousands of participants and visitors each month, and has won three awards. The event has expanded to be two days each month, with a block party preview that provides entertainment and food on Friday evening and the cruise-in and races on Saturday. Summer also brings the biweekly Main Street Live! celebration at the Billy Johnson Stage adjacent to the Expo Center featuring live, local music and food and drink available for delivery from local restaurants. These activities are clearly successful at bringing repeat and new visitors to the City, and Pikeville City Tourism and Pikeville Main Street should be commended for this success. The current balance of two ongoing scheduled events (Muscle on Main and Main Street Live!) and two yearly festivals (Hillbilly Days and the Hatfield McCoy Festival) appears to be very good and should be continued.

Culture, Arts & Heritage:

The Big Sandy Heritage Center Museum continues to offer visitor information and exhibits about the history of the Big Sandy Region, including Pikeville and Pike County, in the old Railroad Station in downtown Pikeville. Two walking tours are now available as recommended in the 2005 plan: the Historic Pikeville Walking Tour features 53 historic buildings in five historic districts while the Downtown Pikeville Walking Tour traces the roots of Pikeville’s business district. Both have guided maps available for walkers to follow.

Hillbilly Days, the annual festival to benefit the Shriners Children’s Hospital held in April each year, continues to be a huge tourist attraction with an average of 14,000 people attending over the three days each year. Arts and crafts, food booths, music, a carnival and impromptu parades of Shriners on miniature vehicles of every ilk, keep it fun and entertaining each year. This event is a huge boost to the City and County, and the City’s preparation and support including road closures, police presence, trash and sanitary maintenance are integral to the success of the festival.

The greatest expansion in tourism, however, has been over the last eighteen months: Since the airing of the documentary *Hatfields and McCoys* on the History Channel the interest in this local feud has exploded and the number of visitors to the area has surged. The City of Pikeville, as well as Pike County and neighboring areas in West Virginia, have seized this opportunity and collaborated to provide visitors with a variety of cultural tourism opportunities. Pikeville City Tourism offers a two-hour guided van tour of Feud sites within the City, and a self-guided tour of sites throughout the region is also available. The first annual Hatfield McCoy Heritage Festival is planned for Labor Day Weekend 2013, and a series of related historic dramas are being developed by Jenny Wiley Theatre in Pikeville and Artist Collaborative Theatre in Elkhorn City. The response to this demand demonstrates the success that comes from collaborative relationships between City and County government, public and private entities, and across state lines. The City's ability to respond quickly to respond to the sudden interest in the Hatfield McCoy feud is a testament to the foresight, creativity and flexibility of the staff and leadership.

The integration of arts and culture has been found to be important to both the overall quality of life as well as to the property values and economic life of communities (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). The City of Pikeville has recognized the importance of this new "creative placemaking" and is developing public-private partnerships to promote the integration of arts and culture into the fabric of City. For several years the City has supported the Pikeville/ Pike County Artisan Alliance in its efforts to promote arts and offer arts education opportunities, most recently collaborating with the Artisan Alliance on the Bear O'Fair project of artist-painted UPike bear mascots around the City. This partnership should continue with similar projects and support. The construction of a new theatre which will be leased to Jenny Wiley Theatre for year round performances and arts education, is another importance move towards creative placemaking and is a model of public-private partnership to benefit quality of life, economic development, tourism and recreation. This will make Pikeville an even more desirable and attractive community for potential physicians, health care workers, professors, professional and graduate students and university staffers being recruited by Pikeville Medical Center and the University of Pikeville. The City's support of arts and culture extends to those activities in the county and region, including Artist Collaborative Theatre, the Country Music Highway and Museum, Jenny Wiley Theatre, and the Mountain Arts Center, among others. These efforts are beneficial economically as well: National statistics report that audiences to non-profit arts events spend \$24.60 per person per event. This is similar to Jenny Wiley Theatre survey results indicating that half of respondents traveled more than 50 miles to attend the show, and spent a minimum of an additional \$25 in the community while there. The City of Pikeville should continue to seek partnerships and opportunities to promote and support arts and culture in the region for the benefit of all who live, work and visit Pikeville.

Tourism, Recreation and Leisure Goals and Objectives:

Goal: The City of Pikeville will continue to support and promote a range of recreational, leisure, tourism and entertainment activities for residents and visitors

- Promote Tourism in the City:
 - Maintain the visitor kiosk at the bottom of Bob Amos Park
 - Support the Big Sandy Heritage Center
 - Promote the Downtown and Historic Downtown Waling Trails
 - Maintain enhanced signage in the Downtown District
 - Continue to expand the number of downtown parking spaces available
 - Support Pikeville Tourism marketing activities

- Continue support of outdoor recreation activities:
 - Maintain support and oversight of Bob Amos Park and recreational facilities
 - Collaborate with Police to increase law enforcement presence at Bob Amos Park at times when organized activities may not be occurring to promote safety and discourage unwanted behavior
 - Continue support of Pikeville Tourism boating, hiking, horse-back-riding, fishing and biking activities, including new horse-back riding and hiking trails
 - Monitor and maintain improvements to Pikeville City Lake
 - Monitor and maintain improvements to all City Parks and Playgrounds

- Continue operation of the East Kentucky Exposition Center:
 - Support and oversee administrative activities
 - Promote EKEC as a small conference center
 - Support Main Street Live! and other regular activities

- Continue to promote and support Hillbilly Days
 - Continue to provide infrastructure support each year
 - Support and promote through Pikeville Tourism and other marketing and outreach

- Continue development of Hatfield McCoy activities
 - Develop the annual Hatfield McCoy Festival starting September 2013
 - Promote guided and self-guided tours
 - Collaborate with Pike County and West Virginia to promote activities
 - Collaborate with local organizations to promote related activities (e.g. historical dramas)

- Continue public-private collaborations to support arts and culture:
 - Continue to collaborate with the Pikeville/Pike County Artisan Center on public art projects
 - Complete construction of the theatre on Second Street in collaboration with Jenny Wiley Theatre, slated to open spring, 2014
 - Seek new opportunities for collaboration in the area of arts and arts education with the University of Pikeville
 - Continue to identify and promote opportunities for collaboration and cooperation with arts entities outside the City including Artists Collaborative Theatre, the University of Kentucky Arts Extension program, the Mountain Arts Center and Kentucky OPRY, and the Country Music Highway Museum

Goal 2: The City of Pikeville will continue to support and promote high quality hospitality services and choices for residents of and visitors to Pikeville:

- Support high quality lodging opportunities:
 - Support the completion of the Hilton Garden hotel
 - Support all community efforts to promote the highest level of hospitality services through training, support of careful public health monitoring, and marketing
 - Support existing lodging providers including the Hampton Inn, the Garfield House and the Chloe Road Bed & Breakfast
- Support high quality restaurants in the City:
 - Support incorporation of restaurants as part of the Thompson Road Development
 - Address zoning variances to support establishment of restaurants in the Downtown District and elsewhere as needed
 - Support existing restaurants as possible
- Promote Pikeville as a Tourism Destination:
 - Support Pikeville Tourism Marketing activities
 - Collaborate with Pike County and other regional entities to promote and market the entire region
 - Maintain visitor support services including kiosks, maps and signage
 - Maintain downtown sidewalk and City Park improvements
 - Maintain seasonal decorations