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'09 tourism off in most area counties

Caverns campaign helps swell Schoharie's visitor numbers

By Edward Munger Jr. (Contact) Gazette Reporter

Friday, June 18, 2010

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CAPITAL REGION - All but one local county saw a drop in tourism revenue in 2009 when guests spent roughly \$183 million less than the year before, according to recent research.

Tourism spending was down by more than 10 percent in many counties, but in Schoharie County, where Howe Caverns undertook a new marketing campaign, tourism revenues saw a double-digit increase.

The research, compiled in a report titled "The Economic Impact of Tourism in New York State," was undertaken by Philadelphia-based Tourism Economics, a firm at Oxford University's business college.

Two area-specific studies, provided by Empire State Development, break local counties up into two zones: the Capital-Saratoga and the Central-Leatherstocking regions.

In the Capital-Saratoga region, which encompasses Albany, Fulton, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady and Washington counties, visitor spending dropped by 10.9 percent between 2008 and 2009, with total spending estimated at about \$1.4 billion.

Albany County saw the greatest drop in visitor spending, estimated at roughly \$797 million compared with \$908 million in 2008, according to the report.

People are less apt to take trips and spend money at a time when job losses, business closings and an overall dismal economy are daily topics, said Greg Dixon, vice president for tourism at the Saratoga County Chamber of Commerce.

That was the case last year, he said.

"People were so uncertain ... This year there's a little better news," Dixon said.

Tourism-related revenues in Saratoga County dropped by 8.8 percent last year, according to the study, with a total of \$357.5 million compared with \$392 million the year before.

In Schenectady County, revenues dropped by 11.8 percent last year, with \$178 million in tourism spending compared with \$202 million in 2008.

Montgomery and Schoharie counties are included in the Central Leatherstocking Region, which includes Broome, Chenango, Herkimer, Madison, Oneida and Otsego counties.

Between 2008 and 2009, tourism revenue in Montgomery County fell by 11.5 percent, dropping from an estimated \$37.3 million to \$33 million.

In a release issued this week, Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce tourism director Gina DaBiere-Gibbs asked locals to encourage friends and relatives to visit the area.

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Music in the clubs: See complete calendar Friday, June 18, 2010 Tom Olsen Quartet 9 Maple Avenue 9 p.m. \$2 Pumping Madonna Bayou Cafe (Albany) 10:30 p.m. \$5

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"By encouraging visiting friends and family to utilize local services, you help with economic sustainability," DaBiere-Gibbs said in the release.

Local and state government revenues are impacted by tourism receipts as well, DaBiere-Gibbs pointed out.

For the Capital-Saratoga Region alone, 2009's dismal tourist season reflected a loss of approximately \$12 million in taxes, according to the study.

Unlike all other local counties, Schoharie County realized an increase in tourism spending. The 12.9 percent increase brought in an estimated \$47.3 million compared with \$41.9 million in 2008.

Schoharie County Planning and Development Director Alicia Terry, whose office took over tourism promotion efforts just last year, said she can't take credit for the increase. She said the county's program is just gaining steam.

It's the major shift in advertising and promotion at Howe Caverns, Terry said, that's most likely responsible for the increase.

Tourism promotion is changing as the economy changes, she said, and attractions have to change their approach to adjust to it.

"It's a matter of marketing. Travel is changing. You're no longer just competing with other tourist attractions, you are also competing with the Internet, electronic gaming, et cetera," Terry said.

Howe Caverns "absolutely" saw an increase in guests last year, general manager Bob Holt said.

The attraction's marketing efforts last year included cooperation with the popular Orange County Choppers as well as a new television ad and an entirely new campaign on the Internet, Holt said, which has not been done in the past.

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Brian Patneau	The Stockade Inn 7 p.m. Free
Ska-Magdeden, Smittix	The Dublin Underground 9 p.m. \$5
Even the Odd	Dozer's Bar & Grill 8 p.m. Free
Patrick Porter, Soopermart	Moon & River Cafe 8 p.m. Free
Dona Oxford	The Van Dyck 7 p.m. \$10 - \$12
Worship Night featuring Driven Worship	The Lighthouse Cafe 7 p.m. Free
Backdraft	Pinhead Susan's 9 p.m. Free

[See Complete calendar](#)

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