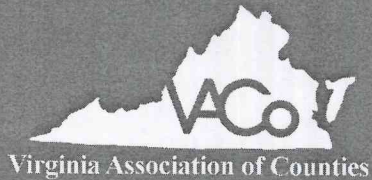


Recognizing the Best in County Government Programs!



2014 Achievement Awards



2014 VACo Achievement Awards

Deadline: June 2, 2014

Application Form

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 2, 2014.**

Program Information

Locality Henrico County

Program Title Visit Henrico Initiative

Program Category Parks and Recreation

Contact Information

Name Dawn Miller

Title Tourism Supervisor

Department Recreation and Parks

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Signature of county administrator or chief administrative officer

Name John A. Vithoulkas

Title County Manager

Signature 

Call for Entries

2014 VACo Achievement Award

Visit Henrico Initiative

Henrico County, Virginia

Abstract/Short Description

Visit Henrico is an initiative that the Henrico County Board of Supervisors implemented as a result of the overwhelming success of the county's 400th Anniversary Commemoration.

Although the county was represented through a regional Convention & Visitors Bureau, the Board identified a need for a focused, permanent program to elevate its tourism efforts and directly promote its rich history and incredible sporting venues and tournaments.

Located in the heart of the U.S. Atlantic Coast, Henrico County's central location offers easy access to major highways, making it a breeze to get here. Half of the U.S. population is within a day's drive. Henrico is also home to the recently-expanded Richmond International Airport (RIC) and the busiest Amtrak station in Virginia. More than 500 restaurants are located within Henrico and more than half of the region's hotel rooms. This winning combination makes Henrico County a desirable location for both residents and visitors.

The tourism program, publicly launched in March 2013, serves to focus solely on driving tourism expenditures to Henrico through a new brand campaign including an independent website, tourism identity, collateral material, advertising and community outreach campaign, new and expanded sporting events, and a new avenue to increase travel expenditures revenue.

Problem/Need for the Program

In 2011, Henrico County commemorated its 400th anniversary with a variety of special events, educational programs and projects. This year-long celebration and the information it generated helped educate both citizens and visitors about Henrico's 400 years of history as well as its many assets. Coupled with a wealth of modern amenities such as fine dining, retail and recreational facilities and events, Henrico County is truly able to offer something for everyone. Although part of a regional Convention & Visitors Bureau, Henrico has a unique message and appeal, so the Board of Supervisors and County Manager established the tourism office to directly market county assets.

Description of the Program

Objective: The objective for Visit Henrico is to drive tourism expenditures to the county by branding Henrico as a premier destination for sports, leisure and heritage travel with its central location, outstanding amenities and great weather. The mission of this initiative is to not only attract more visitors and sports tournaments, but encourage them to stay longer to take in all that Henrico has to offer.

Henrico provides a wealth of activities for every budget and has become a premier destination. Nearly 4,000 acres of beautifully-maintained green space, 50-plus scenic parks, an 18-hole PGA Championship golf course, public boat landings, canoe launches, horse trails and a nature center/aquarium all help make it a haven for outdoor enthusiasts. Top-notch recreational centers and sports facilities continue to attract youth and adult sports tournaments and events

every year. Henrico also offers countless cultural activities as well as historic sites and museums, many are nationally recognized. In partnership with its businesses and residents, Henrico County is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for all who live, work and visit here.

Timeframe: One lead staff person (Tourism Supervisor) was hired in February 2012. One part-time position was added in October 2012, and one additional full-time position was filled in July 2013. The first year (February 2012 – February 2013) was spent developing the tourism identity and marketing campaign, preparing the launch of visithenrico.com and traveling both in and out of the county to share the goals and purpose of this new entity. Throughout 2013 to the present, staff has been focused on developing its new presence and expanding its sports tournament business.

The Board of Supervisors, County Manager John Vithoukias and Deputy County Manager for Community Operations Tim Foster have been integral to the establishment and vision of “Visit Henrico.” The Board receives regular updates on Visit Henrico’s progress, its programs and its economic impact. Mr. Vithoukias and Mr. Foster have been involved in many of the decisions that have made Visit Henrico a tremendous success in its first year. And there are even more exciting and innovative plans on the horizon to make it sustainable long-term.

Responding to an Economic Downturn

Throughout the economic downturn, Henrico County has maintained its highly-coveted AAA bond rating due to the Board and County Manager’s fiscal leadership. The county has looked

outside the box for ways to increase revenue streams to maintain first-rate services for its residents. Visit Henrico is the perfect example.

County officials recognized that youth sporting tournaments are fairly recession proof. During challenging times, families were cancelling their vacations to Disney World or to the beach, but they were not cancelling trips to their children's sports tournaments.

Wisely, the Board of Supervisors took action to capitalize on this trend and allocated funding for the Tourism Section of the Division of Recreation and Parks with the goal to expand current sports events and to recruit new ones. Not only can Visit Henrico and the tourism staff help families plan their tournament trips to Henrico with a wealth of helpful information, but they can provide numerous reasons to extend their stay to experience all the county's diverse attractions and resources.

Use of Technology

The following technology has been used to implement Visit Henrico:

1. Internet
2. Websites (visithenrico.com and civilwarhenrico.com)
3. Database from Richmond Region Tourism
4. Mobile website
5. Software (Adobe Creative Suite, Expression Engine, Microsoft Office)

6. Computers, smartphones, iPads
7. Email blast to hotels, sports organizations, media

The Cost of the Program

The annual budget for the Tourism section is approximately \$286,000. When full and part-time staff salaries and benefits are subtracted, the operational budget is \$77,000 per year. With this small operational budget and 0.8% overhead, the county now has a focused staff and resources to market the county to visitors throughout the United States and beyond.

The Results/Success of the Program

Since last year's launch, there have been nearly 20,000 visits to the websites, nearly 65,000 page views within the sites, and people from all 50 states and 73 countries have "visited" Henrico County. Staff has recruited new, revenue-generating sports tournaments and is creating new events to attract visitors to stay and play in the county. This fall, Visit Henrico will host the largest reenactment in the Richmond region for the Civil War Sesquicentennial Commemoration. More than 1,500 Civil War reenactors and 10,000 spectators are expected for this once-in-a-lifetime event.

With little investment and less than 12 months in time, Visit Henrico has generated more than \$4 million in additional sports revenue since its launch. This growth will continue to expand as the brand establishes Henrico as a premier destination for leisure, sports and heritage travel.

Worthiness of an Award

The Visit Henrico initiative is worthy of an award for a number of reasons. One, the county's proactivity to increase revenue through its already outstanding tourism products helped maintain the high level of services its residents rely on during challenging economic times. Second, the Board of Supervisors and County Manager took great care to determine its strengths within the tourism community and placed the new Visit Henrico office in the Division of Recreation and Parks. Although many counties routinely place this office in their Economic Development Authorities, Henrico realized the evergreen value of its history and sporting venues, and placed tourism staff with these assets so that it could achieve the greatest success. With little investment, Visit Henrico has generated more than \$4 million in additional sports revenue since its inception.

Henrico is known for making prudent decisions that create sustainable programs, and Visit Henrico is just another example of their successful economic development programs.