

Spring Symposium is March 31

Fostering collaborations instead of competition

By Natalie Gelb Solfanelli

One of the most successful programs of the Lackawanna Heritage Valley is the monthly Heritage Roundtable, a meeting of the directors and managers of historic sites, cultural and educational partners. The members of the Roundtable share information about their respective activities, discuss common interests and seek ways for their organizations to complement one another.

For some partners, such as the Lackawanna County Convention and Visitors Bureau, promoting and attracting tourists from outside the area is the primary goal. For historic and museum partners, such as Steamtown National Historic Site, the number of visitors determines financial and programmatic sustainability. Each organization relies on public support, membership, enrollment and/or visitation to assure its ability to provide services to the region.

The success of each entity impacts the success of all, because it is the quality of our cultural, historic and civic life that attracts people to work, visit and live in the region. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

The LHVA Heritage Roundtable serves as a model for other heritage areas in fostering collaboration rather than competition.

In practical terms, LHVA is a community and economic development agency. Tourism is the second largest industry in Pennsylvania and it is an essential component for economic growth.

Northeastern Pennsylvania boasts an impressive number of authentic historic attractions and natural resources, such as lakes, streams, and mountains that offer unique educational and recreational opportunities. The architecture of downtown Scranton, the Lackawanna Coal Mine Tour, the turntable and railroad shops at Steamtown, the Scranton Iron Furnaces, the Gorge at Nay Aug Park, and the ethnic communities up and down the Lackawanna River, are places that cannot be replicated.

Heritage tourism, a category of tourists who travel to learn and enjoy unique experiences, is growing rapidly. Heritage tourists are generally older, have more disposable income, and stay longer. In the Anthracite region, known for its close family ties, many visitors stay with friends and relatives. Often, they are interested in the way of life of their parents and grandparents, and they are curious to know more about their personal histories.

LHVA, particularly through its Ambassadors Program and other educational activities, has worked to create a heightened awareness and appreciation for the significance of this area in the history of the nation. We

are proud to have had the opportunity to support the production of WVTA's two outstanding documentaries in 2007- "Lbaldo," the story of Jessup's Race of the Saints, and "The Extraordinary Journey" the , poignant and insightful three-part film that explores the stories of the multitude of Eastern European immigrants who settled in northeastern Pennsylvania in the past century.

Studies show that heritage tourists spend an average \$54 per visitor per day. In 2007, more than 250,000 tourists from all over the country and many foreign countries, visited Steamtown National Historic site, the mainstay of our historic attractions. Visitors to the area's historical and/or cultural sites generated more than \$13.5 million last year. They also enjoyed the many recreational opportunities that the area offers. They spent money on admission fees, as well as food, gasoline, merchandise, lodging and various other services. The indirect economic spinoff is jobs for local residents who are employed to provide these services.

With this in mind, LHVA will sponsor the first annual Heritage Valley Roundtable Spring Symposium, entitled, "Through Our Visitors' Eyes," on March 31, at the Theatre of Steamtown National Historic Site. The Symposium, meeting from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., will be a workshop for paid and volunteer staff at cultural, environmental and heritage sites.

John Veverka, a noted international consultant specializing in heritage interpretation and heritage tourism planning and training, will be the main presenter. Mr. Veverka, a resident of Michigan, has provided interpretive consulting services in Europe, Canada, Mexico, Korea, Malta, and throughout the United States, for the past 28 years. He is entertaining, informative, and insightful, and he will share first-hand experience and advice on what does and does not work in designing, operating and marketing interpretive exhibitions. The event is open to representatives from neighboring Heritage Areas, museums, historic properties, cultural and environmental organizations, visitor attractions, nonprofit and community organizations. Registration forms and workshop information are available online at www.LHVA.org. The cost is \$20 per person and includes lunch. Registration deadline is March 25. Steamtown Theatre can accommodate 250 people and we hope to fill each seat!

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