



EDA Update



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A River Runs Through It: Economic Development through Heritage Tourism

Community leaders across the United States are embracing their past in order to stimulate their future. Heritage tourism creates this economic development opportunity while allowing both residents and visitors to enjoy the very essence of a community and its culture. Heritage tourism initiatives can enhance the quality of life, build community pride and protect cultural, historic and natural resources. Such programs aim to strengthen local and regional economies through commercial revitalization, business development and job creation.

Louisiana's Natchitoches-Cane River Region Heritage Tourism program exemplifies how heritage preservation promotes tourism while creating economic opportunities for local businesses and the region's workforce.

Natchitoches, a 40,000-person city in northwestern Louisiana, was established in 1714, incorporated in 1819 and is the oldest permanent settlement from the Louisiana Purchase territory. Also in the region is the Cane River, a 35-mile water body situated to the south of Natchitoches, which was formed from the main channel of the Red River and serves as a recreational area. Preserving the heritage of this region and strengthening the local and regional economies were the driving forces for creating the Natchitoches-Cane River Region Heritage Tourism program, consisting of the Natchitoches Main Street program and the Cane River National Heritage Area.

In the late seventies, then Mayor Robert DiBlieux (1976-1980) recognized that declining neighborhoods promise few opportunities for economic growth. This led to establishing the Natchitoches National Historic Landmark District, a 33-block historic site within the Cane River National Heritage Area that hosts many historic homes and buildings, churches and commercial structures.

In the early 1990s, the Natchitoches Main Street program was created on the recommendation of the Louisiana Historic District Development Commission. Among others, its purpose was to foster greater collaboration and strong partnerships with city officials, economic development practitioners and tourism organizations. As a result of the program, nearly 80 new businesses moved to the commercial district, creating 210 new jobs. The commercial district revitalization efforts since 1993 have proven successful, with \$15 million in public support and \$48 million in private investments.

Today, the Natchitoches Main Street program is even more impressive. In the past three years, over 150 new businesses have located in the commercial district offering a variety of services, including five shopping centers. The city's Economic Development Commission focuses on developing, retaining, and attracting high-quality industry and enhancing tourism development. With over one million visitors annually, increasing retail sales and a low vacancy rate, the Landmark District and Main Street programs promote a vibrant and stable economy for the region. Likewise, the Cane River National Heritage Area, a largely rural part of northwestern Louisiana, provides a unique experience and encourages tourism through its cultural heritage programs.

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APA's Tools-of-the-Trade Part Four: Strategy three — Business Attraction and Retention

Many state departments of community development, tourism bureaus and regional chambers of commerce employ a variety of business attraction and retention techniques as a matter of course. APA's Tools-of-the-Trade ([Website](#)) features how local and regional governments may undertake them, highlighting direct marketing techniques and business operation tax incentives.

Federal Funding Opportunity Notice Available for EDA's American Recovery Program

EDA is soliciting applications under its \$150 million American Recovery Act Program, to create jobs and boost development in parts of the country hit hard by the recession. The deadline for receipt of applications under the Recovery Act Program is June 30, 2010. All other information and requirements for the EDA American Recovery Act Program may be found in the March 10, 2009, *Federal Register* notice (74 FR 10232) and the companion federal funding opportunity announcement on EDA's [Website](#).

COMING SOON!

May 21, 2009

APA's Centennial Symposium;
Washington, DC
[\[Website\]](#)

June 1-4, 2009

IEDC 2009 Technology-Led Economic Development Conference and IASP World Conference on Science and Technology Parks; The Research Triangle Park, NC
[\[Website\]](#)

June 1-3, 2009

NARC 43rd Annual Conference and Exhibition, Denver, CO [\[Website\]](#)

Louisiana's only national heritage area, the Cane River National Heritage Area gives the visitor a detailed look at the history of French, Spanish, African-American, American Indian and Creole ancestries. Save America's Treasures, one of many ongoing projects, was established in 1998 and fosters pride in American heritage through educational programs and preservation. Additionally, the Texas Pacific Depot is a rehabilitation project of the historic two-story rail depot, which will convert the space into a heritage center for exhibits and displays commemorating the region's African-American culture.

The story of the Natchitoches-Cane River Region Heritage Tourism uniquely expresses how the region thrives from its cultural preservation initiatives. Recognizing the links between heritage tourism and economic development is important for economic development practitioners, some unique lessons learned include:

- promoting a region's local heritage creates a unique, authentic tourism experience that can be an economic engine and drive further economic development;
- heritage tourism integrates economic development principles into the social and cultural fabric of community life;
- collaborative and diverse partnerships are essential to heritage tourism and economic development efforts;
- reinvesting in a downtown commercial district spurs new business development and job creation; and
- heritage tourism and economic development preserve the sense of place and quality of life within a region or community.

Tourism and Career Ladders (Brooklyn, N.Y.)

In Brooklyn, N.Y., an interesting experiment in tourism promotion and career development has been underway for several years. When thinking of tourism in New York City, most observers think of traditional Manhattan-based attractions such as the Empire State Building or Times Square. But, Brooklyn, N.Y., is also developing a strong tourism and hospitality cluster. Recent research from the Initiative for a Competitive Brooklyn found that the local tourism and hospitality cluster employed more than 20,000 people. This analysis also found that Brooklyn's tourism and hospitality sector was poorly served by local support institutions and that the "quality" of the Brooklyn experience could be upgraded.

Project Welcome, an effort developed at Brooklyn's Kingsborough Community College, seeks to link local residents to these emerging career opportunities. With support from DOL and New York City's Department of Small Business Services, Project Welcome trains local residents for careers in the fields of tourism and hospitality. The program is free of charge and is available to the unemployed, career changers or local residents with interest in the field.

Project Welcome presently trains students in three disciplines: food service, hospitality management and event planning/management. This training is tied to a career pathway model developed in cooperation with Workforce Strategy Center, a New York-based think tank. The pathway model identifies core skills needed to advance in the industry, and then links these career advancement paths to areas of greatest need and employer demand. By using this approach, Project Welcome prepares its students for careers, not just jobs.

This effort has also spun off several interesting pilot efforts. Project Welcome's basic curricula are now supplemented by a Society for Accessible Travel and Hospitality certification designed for those supporting travelers with special needs. In an effort to help stimulate entrepreneurship in this sector, Kingsborough also operates and supports several local kitchen incubators. The culinary version of the traditional business incubator, kitchen incubators offer shared workspace, equipment and services for those interested in culinary careers. Mi Kitchen Es Su Kitchen, a company specializing in kitchen incubator projects, provides general incubator support, while a new effort targets Brooklyn's growing kosher food industry. The school also now operates the only professional kosher cooking school in the U.S.

To learn more about Project Welcome, visit <http://cewd.net/pages/initiatives/projectwelcome>

Mi Kitchen Es Su Kitchen: <http://www.mikitchenessukitchen.com/incubator.htm>

Regional Flavors: A New Approach to Rural Tourism Development

June 2-5, 2009

Council for Community and Economic Research (C2ER) 49th Annual Conference, Kansas City, MO [[Website](#)]

August 29-September 01, 2009

NADO's 2009 Annual Training Conference, Chicago, IL [[Website](#)]

October 4-7, 2009

IEDC 2009 Annual Conference, Renewable Communities, Reno, NV [[Website](#)]

October 11-13, 2009

University Economic Development Association Annual Summit, San Antonio, TX [[Website](#)]

In today's busy and harried world, many people are searching for experiences that are authentic, unique and "real." This search for authenticity is also affecting preferences for vacations and tourism. While it's nice to visit Las Vegas or take a cruise, many travelers are looking for a vacation experience with unique heritage, foods and activities.

Many rural regions across the U.S. are capitalizing on these changing attitudes toward tourism by emphasizing their heritage or cultural assets. For example, southwest Virginia's "The Crooked Road Heritage Music Trail" (www.thecrookedroad.org) is built upon the region's history as the birthplace of country music. In New Mexico, a state-sponsored Fiber Arts Trail (www.nmfiberarts.org) introduces visitors to artisans and craftspeople across the state.

A new approach — called Regional Flavor Strategies (RFS) — has been developed to begin to assist communities in identifying and building on these assets. Growing out of the pioneering work of June Holley, former Director of the Appalachian Center for Economic Networks (ACEnet), the RFS concept embraces the notion that rural communities can identify a brand or flavor for their region around which businesses and economies can flourish and competition can thrive. The Association for Enterprise Opportunity, with support from the Kellogg Foundation sponsored a pilot project working with six learning clusters targeted toward microenterprise development. Currently, the Rural Policy Research Institute Center for Rural Entrepreneurship is continuing the development of RFS by building an infrastructure for framing, testing and measuring RFS as a rural economic development strategy that can be replicated across rural America.

The regional flavor effort is a true "home-grown" economic development strategy. It encourages small towns to build upon unique local heritage, foods, arts and crafts and cultures. It works with local residents to capitalize on new opportunities to start and grow businesses in these key sectors. Many of these new businesses, such as restaurants and bed and breakfasts, target visitors. But, these new businesses also help support local residents.

According to Holley, "When local assets are combined — like vegetables in a soup — into unique sets of experiences, activities and stories, the region becomes very appealing: residents become more strongly committed to the region, others are drawn to move to the area and visitors develop long term emotional bonds with the region. This process increases economic activity, as locals purchase more regionally made products and services, new arrivals bring much needed skills and resources, and visitors return again and again, spending dollars with each visit."

Tourism promotion is a critical component because small towns, and their entrepreneurs, must identify tools for attracting new resources and new customers to the community. The experience in Athens County, Ohio, portrays some of the economic development potential for this model. In that community, ACEnet developed a strong local brand around the concept of the "Art of Ohio," which includes a Web site and an online marketplace where local crafts people can sell their wares. Today, more than 200 local artisans and food producers participate in the broader local network. More than 100 producers have utilized the online marketplace, generating significant increases in sales. Moreover, the project has generated more than 50 media stories on the Art of Ohio, producing great brand recognition for the region.

Athens has also been aggressive in its support and promotion of local fairs and festivals as another means to promote tourism and generate business opportunities for local entrepreneurs. Recent local events include the Ohio Brew Week, which showcases the region's micro-breweries, the Ohio Chili Pepper Festival and the annual Paw Paw Festival that celebrates all things related to the paw paw, an indigenous fruit.

To learn more about the Regional Flavor Learning Cluster, visit <http://www.microenterpriseworks.org/index.asp?bid=2191>



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