

## NEWS RELEASE



*Where the Sun Rises  
on the Smokies*

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### **HAYWOOD COUNTY TOURISM ENJOYS BEST YEAR ON RECORD**

*Marketing Program Helps Boast Occupancy Tax Revenue 7 Percent in 2006-2007 Fiscal Year*

**HAYWOOD COUNTY, N.C. (August 10, 2007)**—Haywood County experienced its best tourism year ever during the 2006-2007 fiscal year, according to occupancy tax figures released by the Haywood County Tourism Development Authority this week.

From July 2006 through June 2007, Haywood County accommodations collected more than \$700,000 in occupancy tax—a 3-percent fee charged to guests who stay at a lodging facility within the county. That's a 7-percent jump in occupancy tax revenue from the previous fiscal year and the most in Haywood County history.

Tourism finished the year strong in June, as occupancy tax collection climbed 11 percent that month when compared to June 2006. Three other months—August, September and March—also experienced double-digit increases between 2005-2006 and 2006-2007.

“Our main goal is to attract overnight visitors to Haywood County,” said Scotty Medford Ellis, executive director of the Haywood County Tourism Development Authority. “Occupancy tax figures are essential in gauging our progress from year to year. And in the fiscal year that just ended, we’ve seen nothing but positive growth for tourism here.”

Despite bouts with unfavorable—and unseasonable—weather at times (including that late freeze in April) and fears stemming from high prices at the gas pump, visitors still found their way to Haywood County in record numbers.

“The numbers don’t lie,” said Alice Aumen, chairman of the Haywood County TDA board of directors. “We overcame those typical tourism-related challenges and experienced the best year on record. That is, in large part, a result of our marketing efforts of the last several years.”

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The TDA's marketing initiative, which began during the 2004-2005 fiscal year when board members voted to hire Knoxville-based advertising agency The Tombras Group, has certainly proven effective. Since that year, occupancy tax dollars have risen a total of 14 percent.

"The marketing plan we've now had in place for two full fiscal years has really served us well," said Ken Stahl, chairman of the TDA board's finance committee. "Through our branding efforts and targeted-audience marketing, people throughout the Southeast and the country now know what Haywood County has to offer as a travel destination.

"Inquiries from potential visitors for our vacation guide have skyrocketed in the last year," Stahl added. "More importantly, more visitors than ever are staying at the many accommodations offered here."

And once here, they are spending money. In the 2006 calendar year, visitors to the county spent \$111.06 million, a 7.3 percent increase from 2005, according to figures recently released by the North Carolina Division of Tourism. The report also stated that the travel and tourism industry directly employs more than 1.4 thousand people in Haywood County and generated \$23.38 million in total payroll.

"We're extremely pleased with the state of tourism here," Ellis said. "It's an important economic stimulator for Haywood County. It provides jobs for people living in the county and brings in money to local businesses.

"The various attractions—natural and manmade—make this a great place to vacation, and we have a great supply of accommodations for overnight visitors to choose from," she said.

But the key, Ellis said, is to make people aware of Haywood County and all that it offers vacationers.

The TDA recently finished shooting its first television commercial, which is now in the final stages of production. A revamped, state-of-the-art Web site is also in the works. The airing of the commercial and launch of the site, coupled with the fall, leaf-looking season, should foster continued success for tourism in Haywood County as a new fiscal year gets underway.

"We'll continue our aggressive marketing and promotion campaign into 2007-2008," Ellis said. "We expect the results to be more of the same—positive growth for Haywood County tourism."

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