

Georgia Tourism Product Development Team to Return for Town Hall Meeting

By Elizabeth Jordan

Staff Reporter

The Georgia Department of Economic Development's Tourism division's Tourism Product Development Resource team will return to Washington County for a town hall meeting on Jan. 28.

In September of 2015, the Resource Team spent three days in Washington County, gathering information and research in order to create a plan for tourism enhancement to help open new doors to economic development in the community.

“Washington County was indeed fortunate in having the Georgia Tourism Product Development Resource Team visit our community recently in order to evaluate our strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities in the realm of tourism development. The Team, comprised of a diverse group of state-level professionals from several tourism-related disciplines, spent the better part of three days touring our community, visiting with our people, and in general developing a sense of what Washington County is really all about,” said Charles Lee, Executive Director of the Development Authority of Washington County. “Their assessment of Washington County, which will be accompanied by recommendations for maximizing our tourism potential, will be presented to the community on January 28th.”

The 11 member team consisted of: Cindy Eidson, Director Tourism Product Development Office, GDEcD; Chris Cannon, Assistant Director Tourism Product Development Office, GDEcD; Barry Brown, Heritage Specialist Tourism Product Development Office, GDEcD; Mandy Barnhart, Classic South Regional Tourism Project Manager, GDEcD; Tina Lilly, Grants Program Director, GA Council for the Arts; Keri Ogletree, Visitor Information Center, GDEcD; Jo Childers, Regional Manager for Region 8, DCA; Anne Floyd, Regional Manager for Region 8, DCA; and Caroline Figiel & Danny Jones, Partners in Creative Digital, Inc.

While in Washington County, the team visited Sandersville, Deepstep, Warthen, Davisboro, Oconee, Riddleville, Tennille, and Harrison. During their three day visit, the team learned about the City of Sandersville's downtown park, took a walking tour of downtown Sandersville to see the Coca-Cola Plant, the Ice House, the Courthouse square, the Genealogy Research Center and Old Jail Museum, the Old City Cemetery, the Wilson Building, the Pastime Theater, Motel Clinton, and the former T.J. Elder Middle School.

The team also met with members of the community about the Splash Pad that was constructed in 2015, the disc golf course that will be constructed in 2016, and the former Sandersville Elementary School building.

The area schools, hotels, dining venues, the airport and recreational facilities were also seen during the team's tour of the area. The team also learned about Kaolin during a Mine Tour at Imerys.

“The Chamber of Commerce was delighted to host the wonderful group of tourism professionals last September. We had three days packed with meeting people and visiting sights from all over

Washington County,” said Washington County Chamber of Commerce President Christy Hinton. “Promoting our county and increasing tourism continue to be primary goals of the Chamber, and we look forward to hearing from this group in late January.”

According to a news release from the Georgia Department of Economic Development’s Tourism division, during the research mission, team members worked with local leadership to assess the portfolio of tourism-related assets within the county related to heritage and cultural tourism, nature-based tourism, agritourism and retail development. The resource team’s objectives included inventorying and discussing assets that are probable candidates for further developing an expanded tourism-based economy in Washington County. In their final report, the team will not only highlight the assets found in Washington County, but they will also define solutions to overcome obstacles that may challenge such efforts.

The Tourism Product Development Resource Team will return to Washington County to present their findings at a town hall meeting scheduled for Thursday, January 28 at 6 p.m. at Oconee Fall Line Technical College. The public is invited to attend.

The Georgia Department of Economic Development (GDEcD) is the state’s sales and marketing arm, the lead agency for attracting new business investment, encouraging the expansion of existing industry and small businesses, locating new markets for Georgia products, attracting tourists to Georgia, and promoting the state as a destination for arts events and location for film, music and digital entertainment projects, as well as planning and mobilizing state resources for economic development.

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