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WEDNESDAY

Answer a survey, enter a raffle, and help the region

By WENDY STIVER

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LOCK HAVEN – Visitors are good for business.

If you make recreation available, visitors will come.

But where will they eat, have coffee, see a play, relax and stay the night?

Three Lock Haven University students will be asking visitors – and residents – their opinions of Lock Haven and its surrounding communities and what they have to offer.

The student interns with the LHU Small Business Development Center will distribute surveys to people using local

bike and walking trails, as well as the “water trail” that is our river. You may see them at outdoor concerts and other events.

They are working to discover what needs aren’t being met for people who like outdoor pursuits, and what type of businesses might meet them.

The Susquehanna Greenway Partnership will use this survey and its results, along with the results from similar surveys being done in Jersey Shore and Williamsport, to help existing and attract new tourism-related

Susquehanna
Greenway



PARTNERSHIP

businesses to the region.

Local residents may take the survey, along with visitors.

Those who fill it out will be entered in a raffle. Prizes are a an adult bike donated by The Bike Gallery of Lock Haven; a framed print by Steve Getz from Station Gallery; and a picnic basket, blanket and other bonus items given by Woolrich Inc., a kayak donated by Country Ski and Sports of Montoursville, Wilkes-Barre and Wellsboro.

The student interns are Emily Weight

and Blake Walker, both of the Bellefonte area, and Rebecca Shuman of York County.

They are charged with getting 700 surveys filled out, and they have to complete the task by Labor Day, according to Trish Carothers, executive director of the Partnership.

She and Nick Lentz, business consultant with the Lock Haven University Small Business Development Center (SBDC), talked about the survey and what it might accomplish during the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership Board of Directors

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annual meeting held Tuesday on campus, in the Durrwachter Alumni Conference Center.

The survey asks a few questions about the people filling it out, including their age group and zip code. It asks how much time they spend in Lock Haven, what they do when they are here, and how they find out about activities in the community.

Visitors are asked about where they stay, whether they dined here or shopped here, and what sort of item they bought, if anything.

Both visitors and residents are asked to describe the community by circling words and phrases. Choices include "attractive," "unattractive," "historic," "thriving," "declining," "friendly," "unique" and "average."

They also are asked to read a list of services and check all that would encourage them to spend more time in Lock Haven. These services include: restaurant, bar, brewery, bike shop, other type of outfitter, retail shop, gallery, guided tours, and amenities like ATMs and convenience stores.

The survey form includes space for additional comments.

Those who fill out a survey are encouraged to drop it off by Aug. 30 at the Downtown Lock Haven Inc. office at 205 E. Main St., at the Jersey Shore YMCA, or at the Lycoming County Visitors Bureau. If they do, they will be entered in the raffle.

The Susquehanna Greenway Partnership (www.susquehannagreenway.org) also plans a "walk-around" day in each of the three target communities. Lock Haven's walk-around assessment day is Tuesday, Aug. 11; Jersey Shore's is Wednesday, Aug. 12,



WENDY STIVER/THE EXPRESS
These three Lock Haven University students will be out and about, asking residents and visitors to take a survey about the community and what it has to offer. They are, from left, Rebecca Shuman, Emily Weight and Blake Walker.

and Williamsport's is Thursday, Aug. 13.

Once the surveys and the assessments are done, the Partnership should have a picture of what the community wants and what visitors want, Carothers said.

The results will be discussed in a workshop to be held in October, she said, probably in the Williamsport area.

There may be some surprises, she said. Will the communities and those who love them ask for more guided tours, public art, bike racks? The answers will help point the way for tourism efforts and also for budding business owners.

A second workshop will fol-

low, Carothers said, to refine strategies for the future and to identify opportunities for business entrepreneurs.

A third work workshop will be specifically for those entrepreneurs and will be run by the SBDC. It will help them write business plans and show them how to seek financing to get their ventures off the ground.

The Partnership will then track how many new jobs are created and how many new businesses open their doors to customers drawn by recreation, the arts, local history, and other cultural assets and natural resources.

The SBDC now offers services especially for owners of existing outdoor recreation-related

businesses and those who hope to own such a business someday. These services are funded by a Rural Business Enterprise Grant from USDA, Lentz said.

The center can help identify new business opportunities and also help existing ventures become "River Town Ready."

To be "River Town Ready," owners should ask themselves if their business has convenient hours for their potential customers, if its website can be found easily, and if the website includes contact information, he said. Location and access also are key.

Carothers said the Partnership has been working very closely with Lock Haven University over

the past year and a half.

Dr. Stephen Neun, dean of the College of Business, Information Systems and Human Services, also addressed the gathering. He said groups like the Partnership and the work they do add to the quality of life locally, making it "easier and easier" to recruit faculty and staff members.

Rick Vilello also spoke, in his new role as executive director of the Governor's Center for Local Government Services. He spent 18 years as a city councilman and then as mayor of Lock Haven before being asked to take this new position.

He recalled a phone call he received after winning his first bid at the mayor's seat, a call that told him International Paper would be leaving Lock Haven. Before he was even sworn in, he said, he had to face the loss of a major employer.

"But you have to make a start," he said.

The city did survive, and Vilello went on to serve more than three terms as mayor. In his new job, he works with officially "distressed" communities that need help digging out of a financial hole and starting over.

"I love working with communities to help them get better, and I've enjoyed the opportunity to help Pennsylvania get better," Vilello said. "This is what I've lived."

The River Town designation that Lock Haven recently pursued and attained is one piece of a puzzle, just as its successful downtown program has been, he said.

"It's a jigsaw puzzle that you're always working on. Sometimes the pieces fall out, but you have to start with something," he said. "Once you do, people will see that success."