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14 June, 2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Experts explain changing dynamics of tourism

‘Backyard tourism’ encouraged to sustain local economies

SHAMOKIN DAM, Pa. – Two directors of central Pennsylvania visitor’s bureaus addressed members of the Greater Susquehanna Valley Chamber of Commerce on June 10 to explain how the recessing economy has affected tourism in the Valley and throughout Pennsylvania.

Tourism is the number two industry in Pennsylvania, after agriculture, according to David “Otto” Kurecian, executive director of the Columbia-Montour Visitor’s Bureau. More than 130 million visitors are drawn to Pennsylvania each year for the beauty it offers, many of them admiring the Susquehanna Valley. If not for these visitors spending money in local towns, each household would pay \$575 more in taxes per year.

Kurecian and Andrew Miller, executive director of the Susquehanna River Valley Visitor’s Bureau, explained to business and community leaders at the Chamber’s June Monthly Meeting that tourists, tired of tightening their belts and staying put, are slowly starting to loosen their purse strings and travel once again.

However, as tourists do so, Miller said, they are becoming much savvier and want to know all they can about an area or business before adding it to their itineraries. They want to research products, businesses and vacation spots before they go anywhere, and like to track where every one of their pennies will go. Their greater need to research each destination is driving tourism businesses to rely on technology and emerging networks as a way of attracting visitors.

According to Miller, businesses looking to attract tourists as customers need to adapt to the changing market and get on board with social networking tools such as Facebook and Twitter, to appeal to the word-of-mouth marketing that those networks thrive on. He encourages business owners to add a humorous or entertaining video to their Web sites –

the kind that could easily get a lot of internet traffic through Facebook if it has the right dynamics.

Those businesses must also be aware that application-based cell phones will soon drive the way business is done, Miller said, making note of travel games like foursquare and SVNGR, which encourage people to enter a location or business and earn badges and points. Businesses that jump on board early with these tools are likely to drive more foot traffic to their establishments.

Tourists are not traveling as far as they used to, the experts said, so locals must become ambassadors for an area that relies on visitors. Miller constantly encourages locals to discover the hidden gems of the Valley and then invite friends and family from out of town to come enjoy those same locations. He encourages them to visit the local museums and learn the area's history, because by doing so they are supporting their local economy.

The proud mission of the Greater Susquehanna Valley Chamber of Commerce is to connect business with community as a way of strengthening the local economy and preserving the way of life for the people of the Valley. The Chamber holds a meeting every month to keep its members up to date on the trends of local industries and the policies that affect them.