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Subject: February 2016 News & Economic Indicators of Tourism in South Carolina

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Thank you for
attending the
Governor's
Conference!

Duane Parrish

Director

Once again, we had a great Governor's Conference in February, with speakers who inspired us and sessions that motivated us to embrace best marketing practices and grow tourism. It was a conference that challenged us to rediscover our passions and possibilities, and look at things a bit differently.

I'd be remiss if I didn't thank our industry partners for always stepping up and attending the conference, giving our sponsors a base of attentive customers that keeps them coming back.

Special thanks also go to the Charleston Area Convention & Visitors Bureau for hosting the opening night reception, and to the host

Statewide Hotel RevPAR -- Steady room rate increases of 5% or greater for each month in 2015 contributed to a year-end RevPAR growth of 7.2%.

Admissions Tax -- The increase in Admissions Tax collections for this period is due primarily to accounting adjustments such as late payments and tax payer refunds.

property Belmond Charleston Place for their incredible customer service.

I also thank Governor Nikki Haley who took time out of her busy schedule to help us recognize outstanding achievements in tourism for 2015 during the awards luncheon on Wednesday.

And the biggest thanks goes to the SCPRT team who worked hard to pull this conference together, specifically our Industry Relations Manager Jenny Waller, my Executive Assistant for Policy Justin Hancock, and Sales and Marketing Director Beverly Shelley, all of whom have creative ideas and outstanding organizational skills.

I hope you enjoyed the conference and found the information and sessions helpful for your program of work!

Reminders!

STAR GRANT DEADLINE
The deadline for Sports Tourism Advertising & Recruitment (STAR) grant hosting applications is 4:30 p.m. Monday, March 7. All destinations that would like assistance in covering the costs of hosting new sports events should complete the application and submit before the deadline. For eligibility requirements and more information, click [here](#).

TAG GRANT DEADLINE
The deadline for submitting material for Tourism Advertising Grants is 5 p.m. Thursday, March 31. The program provides competitive, matching grant funds to qualified tourism marketing partners for direct tourism advertising expenditures. For details, click [here](#).

State Park Revenue -- Camping was down in state parks in the fall and early winter as several continued to recover from flood damage. Campgrounds are expected to open fully by spring.

Airport Deplanements

Charleston International's double digit growth continues to make it South Carolina's busiest airport. Deplanements year-to-date in South Carolina are up 5.9%.

Occupancy Forecast

STR, Inc. forecasts minor increases in occupancy in South Carolina through the spring months.

Tourism Investments

New Bayshore Hotel planned for Myrtle Beach

Developers are planning a new \$50 million hotel at the south end of Myrtle Beach on property that's been vacant for many years. The new Bayshore Hotel is expected to be a 20-story, 240-room hotel on the corner of Sixth Avenue North and Ocean Boulevard between Sharkey's Beach Bar and the Bay View Resort.

The hotel will have an indoor-outdoor water park, including a water slide and lazy river. It will feature a glass wall on the first floor, providing a view of the waterpark, the hotel's pool and the ocean beyond. The hotel's third floor will host guest registration, a breakfast area, bar, coffee shop and a "grab-and-go" store. Guest rooms will start on the fourth floor.

The new hotel should open in two years after construction begins in September.

"Head to Gorgeous South Carolina" -- The Weather Channel Interviews Parrish

Reynolds Wolf and other meteorologists with The Weather Channel held live interviews with SCPRT Director Duane Parrish after learning that tourism has become a \$19.1 billion industry in South Carolina. The interviews were conducted via Skype on Saturday, Feb. 20, and broadcast on [American Morning Headquarters](#) (AMHQ) Weekend at 7:40 a.m. and [Weekend Recharge](#) at 9:40 a.m.

Wolf and other show hosts said they were impressed with South Carolina's tourism success in spite of a historic flood in October, and were particularly impressed with SCPRT's aggressive marketing efforts that reminded consumers the South Carolina "Coast is Clear."

Parrish promotes South Carolina live via Skype on The Weather Channel

"The Palmetto State is one of those places where you have so many great things to see, so many things to take in," Wolf said.

The Weather Channel took notice of the campaign during the Governor's Conference on Tourism & Travel when Parrish announced another record-breaking year for tourism in 2015.

"Cheers" to Connecting Locally!

As a capstone to the 51st Annual South Carolina Governor's Conference of Tourism & Travel, the PR Department, led by Kim Jamieson, hosted its first ever in-state media mission for statewide tourism partners. The event, held at picturesque Charles Towne Landing in Charleston, SC, was a two-part affair, complete with a traditional media marketplace followed by a dinner reception. For the marketplace, tourism partners, who financially contributed to participate, mixed and mingled with invited media from across the state, including some from bordering states and target drive markets. Writers from *Garden & Gun Magazine*, *The State Newspaper*, *The Local Palate Magazine*, *Charleston Magazine*, *Thrillist*, *Midlands Biz*, *The Charlotte Observer* and more spent time with partners learning about new and noteworthy happenings and events taking place, or on the horizon, in the Palmetto state.

During the reception, guests were

Sonja Burriss of Rock Hill/York County CVB(left) talks to Renata Parker of TALK Greenville.

treated to a delicious dinner prepared by the 2016 South Carolina Chef Ambassadors - Chef Ramone Dickerson, Chef Orchid Paulmeier, Chef Forrest Parker and Chef Teryi Youngblood. Cooking up culinary creations like pimento cheese creamed collards, traditional dirty rice with red pepper gravy, buttermilk panna cotta with fresh strawberries and mini sweet potato pies with bourbon-infused whipped cream, they stole the show with their delights. The chefs, hailing from Columbia, Hilton Head Island, Mt. Pleasant and Greenville respectfully, are the second class of culinary ambassadors for the state, chosen by Governor Nikki Haley in December of 2015. Before their one year term comes to an end, the chefs will participate in a number of other media missions, the Charleston Wine & Food Festival, Euphoria 2016, the South Carolina State Fair and the Atlanta Food & Wine Festival, taking place in June.

The highlight of the evening was the announcement of SCPRT's latest initiative, The Satisfy Your Thirst Tour. Addressing the crowd, Duane Parrish, SCPRT's Executive Director, spoke about the creative South Carolina makers who are included and celebrated on the tour. Focusing on the many liquid locations found throughout the state - including breweries,

Chef Ambassadors stole the show!

distilleries, wineries, farms, etc. - the tour mimics the wildly successful SC BBQ Trail that launched back in 2013. For the tour, visitors and locals alike are encouraged to download the Satisfy Your Thirst app - found on both Apple and Android mobile devices - and visit both adult and family friendly purveyors. The event wouldn't be complete without a signature beverage featuring a Charleston distilled liquor. (Follow along and participate in the Satisfy Your Thirst social conversation by tagging and viewing images with the hashtag, #SatisfyYourThirstSC).

From start to finish this event proved to be beneficial for partners, media and the SCPRT team. The PR department looks forward to hosting more in-state media mission in the future, providing an avenue for statewide tourism partners to tout the many fantastic things found in their regions. The saying is so true... There's always something new to diSCover in South Carolina.

Two Museums Win State Tourism Awards

South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley recognized outstanding achievements in tourism at the annual Governor's Conference on Tourism & Travel at the Belmond Charleston Place in Charleston. The annual awards honor projects and people who have excelled in tourism development, marketing and customer service.

The industry's highest honor - the Governor's Cup - was given to the South Carolina State Museum's "Windows to New Worlds" expansion for extraordinary achievements in growing tourism and promoting South Carolina as a great place to visit.

When it opened in August 2014, the newly expanded State Museum became the only attraction in the country to house a planetarium, 4-D theater, observatory and multi-disciplinary museum under one roof. Media coverage about its grand opening included more than 900 news stories with more than 15 million impressions. In its first year of operation, the new museum grew its revenue by 84 percent, increased attendance by 44 percent and placed an estimated economic impact on South Carolina of \$22 million after driving new business to local hotels and restaurants.

Its success was rooted in creative and strategic marketing as well as innovative business practices. One of its most successful efforts was a

"Brighter Than Ever" public awareness campaign that launched a full year before the renovation was complete and built anticipation for the new attraction. The museum's marketing team also partnered with BI-LO grocery stores around the state to sell season passes.

Tourism's Charles A. Bundy Award, which recognizes tourism success in rural parts of South Carolina, was awarded to the new Colleton Museum and Farmers Market in Walterboro. About five years ago, the community moved its treasured museum into a renovated 1950s grocery store in the downtown area and added a farmer's market in the attached pavilion. What transpired was a unique blend of culture and agriculture that illustrated this small town's authentic appeal and enhanced the visitor experience. The museum continued to promote Colleton's heritage, and the farmer's market provided retail space for up to 50 local farmers who brought fresh fruits, vegetables, flowers and plants for sale.

In its former location, the Colleton Museum welcomed 4,908 visitors, most of whom were local. Visitation has steadily climbed since the museum was moved to its new location, and in 2015, the museum saw 18,350 visitors. The museum continues to draw visitors with special programming and events.

The Hospitality Employee of the Year Award was given to Sharon "P.J." Howell, a restaurant supervisor for Embassy Suites Columbia. She has been an employee of the hotel for more than 20 years, and rose up in the ranks to her current position five years ago. Managers at Embassy Suites Columbia call Howell the most dependable and hardworking employee they know, who often fills in where needed and leads by example. They also describe her as fun-loving and enjoyable, and said that some previous guests who are driving through Columbia stop by the hotel just to say hello to P.J. She is chairman of the hotel's CARE Committee, a group that seeks to improve employee morale and guest relations, and to provide contributions to the local community. Howell was Embassy Suites Columbia's Employee of the Month for October 2015 and November 2015, and was Employee of the Year for 2013.

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