



2016 Economic Impact of Domestic Spending: Tourism is Good for Forsyth

Tiny Forsyth, Georgia (population 4,004), has over a 32 million-dollar plus tourism-based economy. That's no typo! That volume didn't happen by chance. It happened because city leaders identified tourism as their industry, and they have begun to promote it heavily and smartly through the recently formed (2015) Convention & Visitors Bureau. People see that commitment and invest in tourism related businesses. That healthy climate continues to produce expansions, new ventures and more jobs – as evidenced in new hotel construction.

Tourism has been good for the City of Forsyth and Monroe County. Tourism creates jobs, both through direct employment and indirectly in sectors such as retail and transportation. When these people spend their wages on goods and services, it leads to what is known as the "multiplier effect," creating more jobs. The tourism industry also provides opportunities for small businesses, which is especially important in rural communities, and generates extra tax revenues, such as hotel taxes, which are used for schools, housing and hospitals.

The City of Forsyth collected hotel-motel taxes from 14 hotels and the KOA last year. 60% of the hotel-motel tax goes to Forsyth Main Street, and the remaining 40% to the City of Forsyth's Convention & Visitors Bureau formed in 2015.

According to the Georgia Department of Economic Development and U.S. Travel Association, in 2016, the City of Forsyth – Monroe County's domestic tourism industry:

- Supported **298 jobs**
- Generated **\$32.22 million in direct domestic travel spending**
- Created **\$1.47 million in state tax revenues**
- Generated **\$880,000 in local tax revenues**

Each Monroe County household received \$278 in tax relief per household, as a result of the taxes generated by direct travel spending. Tourism continues to grow in the City of Forsyth with direct domestic expenditures rising from \$29.97 million in 2014 to \$31.98 million in 2015 and \$32.22 million in 2016.

Last year, we hosted a tourism product resource team from the Georgia Department of Economic Development. The team of experts in tourism and community development conducted an in-depth analysis of the community resulting in a full report of recommendations for existing enhancements and ideas for future product development. The CVB is actively utilizing it as a guide for tourism product development.

The improvements to infrastructure and the creation of new leisure amenities resulting from tourism, also benefit the local community. One example is the addition of mini-golf and mining, open to the public, at the Forsyth KOA. The City has added a Pumptrack for riding your bike, skateboard or scooter at the Country Club Park.

Tourism encourages the preservation of traditional customs, handicrafts and festivals that might otherwise have been lost, creates civic pride, and greater cultural understanding. One example is the City of Forsyth's Convention & Visitors Bureau and the City's joint public art project, funded in part with a Vibrant Communities Art grant, which resulted in Forsyth's first mural. The welcoming train mural is perfectly located across from the historic train depots and Museum and Tift College on East Johnston Street. It has become the catalyst for additional public art installations.

Tourism -- particularly nature and ecotourism -- helps promote conservation of wildlife and natural resources such as wildlife management areas and state parks. It also helps generate funding for maintaining these through entrance charges and guide fees. In 2017, the City of Forsyth's Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Monroe County Commissioners joint tourism product development project, funded in part by a grant from the Georgia Department of Economic Development, refreshed Juliette Park with park repairs and grading, new benches and signage. Juliette is a vibrant community where guests step onto the movie set and



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can have their very own plate of *fried green tomatoes* at the Whistle Stop Café. The Whistle Stop Café and the shops on McCracken Street, see over 100,000 visitors from around the globe annually.

The City of Forsyth's Convention & Visitors Bureau's marketing and public relations efforts have paid off as more and more media professionals being made aware of the experiences awaiting them in the City of Forsyth/Monroe County. This, coupled with a ramped up production in new photography, creation of the City of Forsyth's Convention & Visitors Bureau website, and a new Visitor Guide, has been the perfect marriage along with growth in the area. The outdoor brochure displays as the Welcome Center and City Hall on the Square, provide our visitors with access to tourist information 24/7. We have plans to expand this program.

Sometimes tourism comes from unlikely sources, just as the City of Forsyth has experienced in 2016 and 2017 with Hurricanes Matthew and Irma. Our hotels and KOA were fully booked for days. The CVB worked with City and myriad of volunteers to assemble over 1,000 welcome bags for the evacuees and stranded motorists – for starters. The media found several families that had returned to Forsyth based upon their prior evacuation experience here. Reportedly, the evacuees found our community to be generous and hospitable. A place where they felt safe and welcomed.

The City of Forsyth/Monroe County have received exceptional coverage in the local media, particularly through WMAZ, WGXA, and the Monroe County Reporter; and through the state's tourism website, ExploreGeorgia.org. Georgia Tourism launched their "New Georgia Film Selfie Spot Tour" and the City of Forsyth/Monroe County holds four of the eight spots in the Historic Heartland region (www.ExploreGeorgia.org/Film). This new tour puts visitors in the scenes from popular film and television shows. The City of Forsyth, Juliette and the Whistle Stop Café enjoy international media coverage like the recent digital article in www.filmtourismus.de. The City of Forsyth/Monroe County has also been featured in such publications as: Philadelphia Sun newspaper, Georgia Travel Guide, Georgia Eats, Roam magazine, Southern Living, Atlanta Magazine, Georgia's Great Places, and RV America magazine. Social media coverage has been limited primarily to Facebook and Instagram.

These projects layered on top of one another paint a vivid picture of the City of Forsyth and surrounding area enticing more visitation and more media coverage. The CVB took on operating the Welcome Center for the City. We are in the midst of putting together exhibits to tell the unique story of our community. We are also working with the hotels on a Welcome Center promotion designed to encourage visitors to come into town and to visit the Welcome Center. We would like to work with the Georgia Public Training Center and Department of Corrections to expand this initiative. We are currently working on a Wayfinding Signage project with the City, having received a Tourism Product Development grant from the Georgia Department of Economic Development. Other current projects include:

- New billboard initiatives with the hotels, local downtown restaurants, and downtown retail.
- Cemetery tour and an Architecture tour with the Monroe County Historical Society
- Digital tour of the Historic Rose Theater with the Backlot Players
- Tradeshows for Domestic travelers in partnership with GDEcD
- Administering a Community Marketing Assistance and Tourism Product Development grant program, and
- Public Art Installations with Burruss CTC, the City and local businesses.

We are excited to see what the coming years hold and are confident that by working together, we can continue to achieve great growth for our community and destination. For more information on tourism, contact Gilda Stanbery, Executive Director of the CVB or visit the City of Forsyth's Convention & Visitors Bureau website: www.forsythcvb.com