

Planning for Heritage Tourism

by Bert Winterbottom

Tourism provides an opportunity to enhance a community's image. A community that is attractive to visitors is also attractive to business and investors looking for a place to locate. Tourism infrastructure — transportation, communications, hotels — also serves business and facilitates the area's broader development efforts. Tourism development is economic development.

The travel and tourism industry in the United States is big business and represents a major segment of the national economy. The United States Travel Data Center reports that in 1991:

- U.S. tourists took 1.3 billion person/trips in the United States.
- The tourism industry generated 5.9 million jobs with a payroll of \$83.7 billion.
- Total travel expenditures amounted to \$328 billion.
- Almost 39 million foreign visitors spent \$40 billion, creating a \$10 billion balance of payment surplus.

Communities planning for heritage tourism to enhance economic development need to focus on several important elements: (1) the local resident; (2) the visitor; (3) the place; and (4) principles of tourism development. Effective tourism development plans and strategies require much more than just another advertising campaign. They require a thorough understanding of the visitor, and a clear recognition that "locals" are very important.

The Local Resident. The local resident is perhaps the most often ignored element of tourism. While residing in the community, the local also visits those areas that are of interest to the visitor. In this sense, the local is a visitor. Most importantly, the local contributes to the authenticity and ambience of the place which is what most visitors seek. Successful planning and man-

[Editor's Note: Heritage tourism, ecotourism, green tourism — these are phrases being used to describe what perhaps amounts to a new philosophy of tourism, one that respects and draws on the unique historical, cultural and natural resources of a community or region. Bert Winterbottom's short article, along with John Stilgoe's commentary on page 18 and the "Heritage Tourism Portfolio" on pages 13-15, should give you a better feel for this rapidly growing approach to tourism. But also take a look at Ron Powers' cautionary observations on page 12].



Baltimore's Inner Harbor

agement of tourism provides first for the local resident, and then for the visitor. A perfect example is Baltimore's Inner Harbor. It was planned for the people of Baltimore and now draws more than nine million visitors annually. A great environment for residents will be a great environment for visitors!

Balancing tourism with resident needs and maintenance of a quality environment is a major concern. Sound planning should produce a plan designed to manage the number and quality of visitors while giving them a quality experience and value for their dollar. The worst possible thing that can happen to a city or a part of a city is to become totally dominated by visitors.

Most travelers on vacation or visitors at leisure do not want to go to places occupied only by people like themselves. They

want to go where the locals go, eat where the locals eat, and be entertained by the attractions that are a part of the character and culture of the city. Likewise, local residents are unlikely to patronize places aimed solely at outsiders.

The Visitor. The term "tourist" is passe'. The visitor, or to use the Disney term "guest," is an essential ingredient for successful tourism-based economic development. Understanding visitor impact not only in economic terms, but also in social and environmental terms, is very important. The truly successful visitor destination is one that is more concerned with visitor quality than quantity. The quality visitor is someone who is most likely to repeat the visit and to respect the visitor environment — both natural and man-made.

The Place. The destination is many things to the visitor. It includes the physical location and the physical place, be it countryside, city, district, street, or building. It also includes the local history, architecture, culture, folklore, crafts, cuisine, natural features, ethnicity, and customs.

Authenticity and uniqueness are particularly important for successful heritage tourism. In many parts of America, cities and towns are losing their regional differences and special characteristics to an ever more homogeneous, look-alike, dress-alike, eat-alike, shop-alike, world. It is a joy to encounter places that preserve, enhance and celebrate those things that set them apart and give them a meaning and personality all their own.

Visitor attractions and supporting facilities can be important to a community's quality of life, very often directly supporting the community's basic economic development efforts. In Corning, New York, the Corning Glass Museum, Glass Center and Steuben Glass Factory exhibit bring


almost 500,000 visitors annually. These visitors spend enough while in Corning to make the city's historic Market Street one of the most successful small town retail streets in America, to the benefit of local residents. In this small town of about 12,000, one out of every four new jobs is travel related, and within the three county region, travel related receipts amounted to almost \$350 million in 1990.

Information and interpretation are essential ingredients for successful heritage tourism. If the unique, special places are hard to find, then many people will miss them. Information must be provided in advance of the visit in marketing and promotional literature, as well as on-site in the form of brochures, maps, and a legible signage and graphic identification scheme. Equally important is the interpretation of what is being seen and experienced by the visitor. Seeing without understanding is a negative experience.

Principles of Tourism Development. Planning for successful heritage tourism development should be based on several important principles:

- *Community Involvement* — Tourism planning, like most other planning efforts, must engage and involve the local community if it is to be successful. A "bottom up" process is essential, keeping in mind that perhaps the most important component of tourism is the local resident.
- *Vision* — Push current problems aside and focus on what you want your tourism base to be in the future — be proactive and long-range.
- *Planning* — Planning is what translates vision into reality. The essential element of a tourism plan is the implementation strategy that focuses on "who does what, where, and when" to make things happen.
- *Focus* — Concentrate on what is important! Don't be distracted.
- *Quality* — The quality of the place, the

environment and the experience are what make tourism work in the first place.

- *Authenticity and Uniqueness* — Plans for heritage tourism must build on the special character of the community. The environment should be authentic and the attractions unique and different.
- *Price Value* — Visitors must clearly sense that they are getting true value for the money they spend. This relates in large part to the quality of the place and the experience, but matched with the quality of service received. 
- *Concentration & Critical Mass* — Concentration and critical mass go hand-in-hand and are often difficult to achieve. Concentrating attractions, facilities and services in a convenient, accessible location can create a critical mass or synergistic effect, where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Too many communities try to scatter their attractions in order to satisfy parochial interests.

A PROGRAM FOR TOURISM PLANNING

The objective of planning for heritage tourism should be to create a great place for visitors, minimize adverse environmental impacts and maximize economic benefits to the community. The work program should not focus on planning for a specific attraction, event or place, but rather seek to develop an overall community strategy for tourism.

Assessment: Analysis of Current Conditions. The purpose of an assessment is to collect as much information as possible in order to understand the data base and the essential development opportunities, constraints, and issues. A complete inventory of heritage resources should be a key element of the assessment.

Public Forums. Community participation and involvement should be an integral part of the tourism planning process. Tourism development has traditionally

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Planning Commissions & Tourism

Planning commissioners have an important role to play in supporting and encouraging planning for tourism development. By recognizing that tourism development is economic development, planning commissioners can support sound planning while at the same time expanding the community's economic base.

Talking Tourism: A Glossary

Tourist — A word that has been replaced by visitor or guest to more accurately reflect the importance of the visitor to a given place. A visitor is someone who travels more than 100 miles and stays overnight.

Visitor Domain — The place within the community where resources are invested to enhance the visitor experience.

Market Positioning — The process of establishing and maintaining a distinctive place for a destination in the minds of potential visitors within target markets.

Price Value — A subjective assessment of the value of a holiday experience compared to what the individual pays for that experience.



Downtown Corning, New York

Artifice & Illusion

by Ron Powers

[The following comments on heritage attractions are from journalist Ron Powers' excellent book, "Far From Home: Life and Loss in Two American Towns" (Doubleday 1991), and are excerpted here with his permission].

Heritage attractions had become so numbingly commonplace on the American landscape by the 1980s that they seemed at times almost to form a parallel universe, a shadow-nation of artifice and illusion. ...

As America urbanized and plowed its authentic past under a widening crust of asphalt and concrete, its strange, deadpan society of crossbred heritage attractions grew. "Preserved" or "historically redeveloped" towns and sites and centers and theme parks and outdoor museums proliferated across the land: Silver Dollar City in Missouri, New Harmony in Indiana, Old Tucson in Arizona, Deerfield and Sturbridge in Massachusetts, Mystic Seaport in Connecticut, Dollywood in Tennessee, Roadside America in Pennsylvania, Old Town in Kissimmee, Florida; Henry Ford's Greenfield Village in Michigan. There was even, for one brief shining moment, a fundamentalist-Christian entry in the field: Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker's Heritage USA in Charleston, South Carolina.

As more and more heritage attractions entered the lists, a certain inevitable rationale began to attach to them — an economic rationale. With growing frequency these enterprises began to turn up in towns or regions or urban sectors that had lost their grip on an indigenous economy: a manufacturing plant had left, or the trains had stopped coming through, or the surrounding farms had fallen on hard times. When one or another of these calamities struck, there always seemed to appear, sooner or later, some professional with a business card that read, HISTORIC REDEVELOPMENT, or COMMEMORATION SPECIALIST, or CONSULTANTS IN RE-

SOURCE MANAGEMENT. As "Rust Belt" and "Forgottonia" began to define large sectors of the country, "heritage" became a kind of entrepreneurial anti-venom, a commercial quick-fix. Those who did not understand history, to paraphrase Santayana, were doomed to pay admission for it. ...

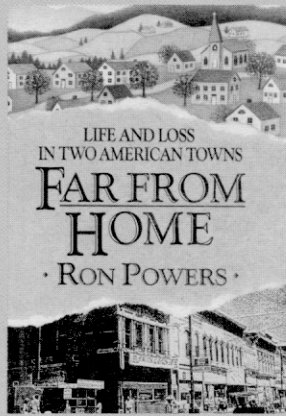
The trend took on a manic kind of momentum. Entire towns began transforming themselves into theme parks. Large sections of America were beginning to resemble giant dioramic cartoons. Frankenmuth, on the lower peninsula of Michigan, "went Bavarian." Its populace started to wear lederhosen and eat sauerkraut, to the presumed enchantment of tourists passing through on their way north to the upper peninsula.

But at least Frankenmuth had some ancestral connection to Bavaria. By the end of the 1980s it didn't seem to matter whether the theme related to the town's history or not, just so long as it was a theme. Tourism had grown to the third-largest retail service industry in the United States; travelers within the country were spending more than \$300 billion a year on goods and services.

The implications for American towns, particularly depressed towns, were transitional and unambiguous. Towns, in the late twentieth century, had simply ceased being what they had always been, and had begun to be something else.

No more talk, now, of summer evenings in Knoxville. No more white towns drowsing in the sunshine of a summer morning. No more of the Emersonian idea that all historic nobility rests on possession of the land.

No longer did the Town function as a generator of products and values and human beings into the great stream of American life. The stream had been exactly reversed: now products came from somewhere else to transform the face of the Town; now values were imported from distant marketing and merchandising centers; all so that human beings from the metropolises might now feel inclined to drift through the revised Town, and look, and spend, and move on.




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been undertaken with little or no public involvement until after problems resulting from major visitor impacts have occurred. Several public forums should be held during the planning process, along with individual public and private leadership interviews, stakeholder small group meetings, and invited written input.

Tourism Development Potentials. Understanding the economic impact of tourism on the community is fundamental to the planning process. Collecting and analyzing information on visitation, hotel and motel occupancy, and travel-related employment and expenditures is important — as is identifying and understanding the competitive framework locally and beyond. Equally important is understanding why people visit the area's attractions.

Tourism Development Plan. The heritage tourism development plan is the product of this planning process. It should set out an overall strategy or mission, and include: a map of the visitor domain  *Talking Tourism*, p.11 (and ideas for its enhancement); alternative concepts; access and parking recommendations; and marketing and management strategies. An effective tourism development plan should also include an action plan designed to succinctly get at "who does what, where, and when." The idea is to launch implementation at the conclusion of the planning process — the end becomes the beginning. ♦

Bert Winterbottom is a principal with LDR International, Inc., a planning and design firm based in Columbia, Maryland. The focus of his work is on vision-building, organizing public-private partnerships, implementation strategies and



tourism development. His tourism planning work has included projects in Niagara Falls and Corning, New York; Mobile, Alabama; Bermuda; and Scotland. Prior to joining LDR, Winterbottom was a principal with The Rouse Company's American City Corporation. Earlier in his career, he served as planning director of the Greenville County, South Carolina, Planning Commission and as a planner for the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County, North Carolina, Planning Board.

A Heritage Tourism Portfolio

From the Editor

Commercial Revitalization

GALVESTON, TEXAS

Think of Galveston, Texas, and most of us conjure up images of broad sandy beaches stretching out along the Gulf of Mexico. But there's another side to Galveston Island, a side that includes the Strand/Mechanic historic district.

By the early 1960s, most businesses had left the Strand, Galveston's main commercial street. But strong local efforts — including locating the Galveston County Cultural Arts Council on the Strand — helped turn things around. The Galveston Historic Foundation's establishment of a revolving loan fund (initially capitalized with \$200,000 contributed by two funds) was also critically important, as it gave potential buyers of buildings along the Strand access to funds for their purchase and rehab. The Foundation also began to purchase facade easements of properties not on the market.

The revitalization effort did not just rely on preserving the Strand's physical re-



Entertainment along the Strand in Galveston

sources; a key component involved drawing more people to the area. As a result, walking tours and special events — such as the annual Dickens on The Strand festival — were developed.

According to Betty Massey, Director of the Galveston Historic Foundation, revitalization of the Strand has had a tremendous economic impact on the city, and has led to development in the nearby downtown, waterfront and residential districts. [A recent study by the Government Finance Research Center, "The Economic Benefits of Preserving Community Character," has documented the impact of historic preservation efforts in Galveston and several other cities; the study can be ordered from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 673-4255 — the cost is \$25].

A Sense of Place

CAPE COD, MASSACHUSETTS

The communities of Cape Cod have undertaken an ambitious program to attract visitors by stressing the Cape's heritage. With staff assistance from the Cape Cod Commission, a "Sense of Place Study Group" was formed in 1992 with the goal of developing a strategy for tourism that complemented, rather than detracted from, the Cape's quality of life. The study group found that the Cape's historic and natural resources represented an underutilized and undervalued resource.

A number of specific projects have al-

ready resulted. One has been the publication of a detailed "Cape Cod Heritage Attractions" map/brochure that identifies more than 100 sites where a visitor can experience the history, culture and natural resources of the Cape. Many sites identified on the map are not noted on other tourist maps or guides.

Another major project has been organizing this June's "Cape Heritage Week," a coordinated program of over 45 exhibits and numerous special events throughout the Cape. The aim of Heritage Week is to promote what makes the Cape special, and to make visitors aware that the Cape is more than a crowded summer resort area. The Heritage Week program is centered on themes such as "Changing Landscapes," which relates to maritime history, cranberry farming, windmills, saltworks, and the Cape's ecology.

For more information, contact James O'Connell, Economic Development Officer, Cape Cod Commission, 3225 Main St., Barnstable, MA 02630; (508) 362-3828.

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The Strand, Galveston, Texas

- nday - June 20
- 2 - Exploring Fresh Brook, a walking tour of one of the early historic settlements c. 1644, Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, off West Street, Wellfleet, 349-2615, admission.
 - 1-3 - Tour Coast Guard Lifeboat CG36500, a floating museum, Cape Cod Historical Society, River Landing end of River Street, Wellfleet, 349-2615, admission.
 - 0-4 - Craft Show at Buzzards Bay Park on Main Street, Buzzards Bay, sponsored by the Cape Cod Canal Region Chamber of Commerce, free admission.
 - 1-5 - "Festival Days," with artist demonstrations, workshop, music and refreshments, Cape Museum, 100 Main Street, Cape Cod Playhouse grounds, Dennis, 387-2222, admission.
 - 12-2 - Kite Festival at Town Neck Beach, Sandwich, lunch and come fly a Kite! More information call 338-2222.
 - 2 - Guided tour of the New Church (c.1870), co-sponsored by the Cape Cod Commission, SPNEA and Historical Society, Yarmouth, Route 6A across from the Village Green, free admission.
 - 2 - A theatrical production, "The Bourne Connection: Historic Figures and Their Homes," a collaboration of actors from Theater on the Bay and Bourne Society, Bourne, 759-6120.

A day from the Cape Heritage Week brochure

A Heritage Tourism Portfolio

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Fox River Tour Boat

Heritage Corridors:

THE FOX-WISCONSIN RIVERS HERITAGE CORRIDOR, WISCONSIN

The Fox-Wisconsin Heritage Corridor is an excellent example of the type of cooperative effort at promoting heritage tourism that is spreading throughout the country. Spearheaded by the East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, the heritage corridor project involves 15 counties and 42 communities along 275 miles of the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers. A seven member steering committee is guiding the project.

The goals of the heritage corridor include historic preservation and tourism development. Some of the activities already being undertaken include: preparing a photographic survey of the complete riverway system focusing on historic, cultural and natural resources to be used in a traveling exhibit; developing a visitors' in-



Lower Wisconsin Riverway

formation kiosk in an historic train depot; filming of a 30-minute video about the corridor; collecting oral histories from residents along the lower Wisconsin River; conducting a study of business opportunities for heritage tourism; and publishing a heritage corridor map.

For information on the Fox-Wisconsin Heritage Corridor, contact Harlan Kiesow, Project Manager, East Central Wisconsin RPC, 132 Main St., Menasha, WI 54953; (414) 751-4770.

THE BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY HERITAGE CORRIDOR, MASSACHUSETTS - RHODE ISLAND

Congress has designated the Blackstone River Corridor as a national heritage corridor (joining the Illinois & Michigan Canal, the first corridor so designated). The Blackstone River Valley was once one of our nation's principal industrial hubs. Its mills and factories represented the first widespread industrial use of water power in America.

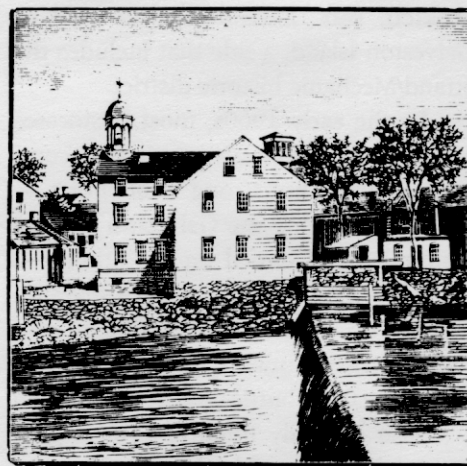
While the Valley's industries have long since declined, a new "industry" has begun to emerge: tourism based on the preservation and interpretation of the Valley's historic sites and resources.

The approach taken in the Blackstone River Valley represents a partnership drawing on the expertise of the National Park Service and state agencies, combined with the interest and enthusiasm of local governments and businesses within the Valley. Technical and financial assistance is provided by the National Park Service to a Heritage Corridor Commission, composed

of local government officials from the Rhode Island and Massachusetts towns within the corridor, representatives from several state agencies (economic development, environmental protection, and historic preservation), several other individuals appointed by the two

states' Governors, and a representative of the National Park Service.

The Commission is charged with developing an overall vision and strategy for preserving and interpreting the Valley's historic resources. But it has no power to own or manage land, regulate activities, or enforce mandates. As stated in the Commission's *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan*, "the National Heritage Corridor can achieve its vision only if the people, businesses, and governments of the

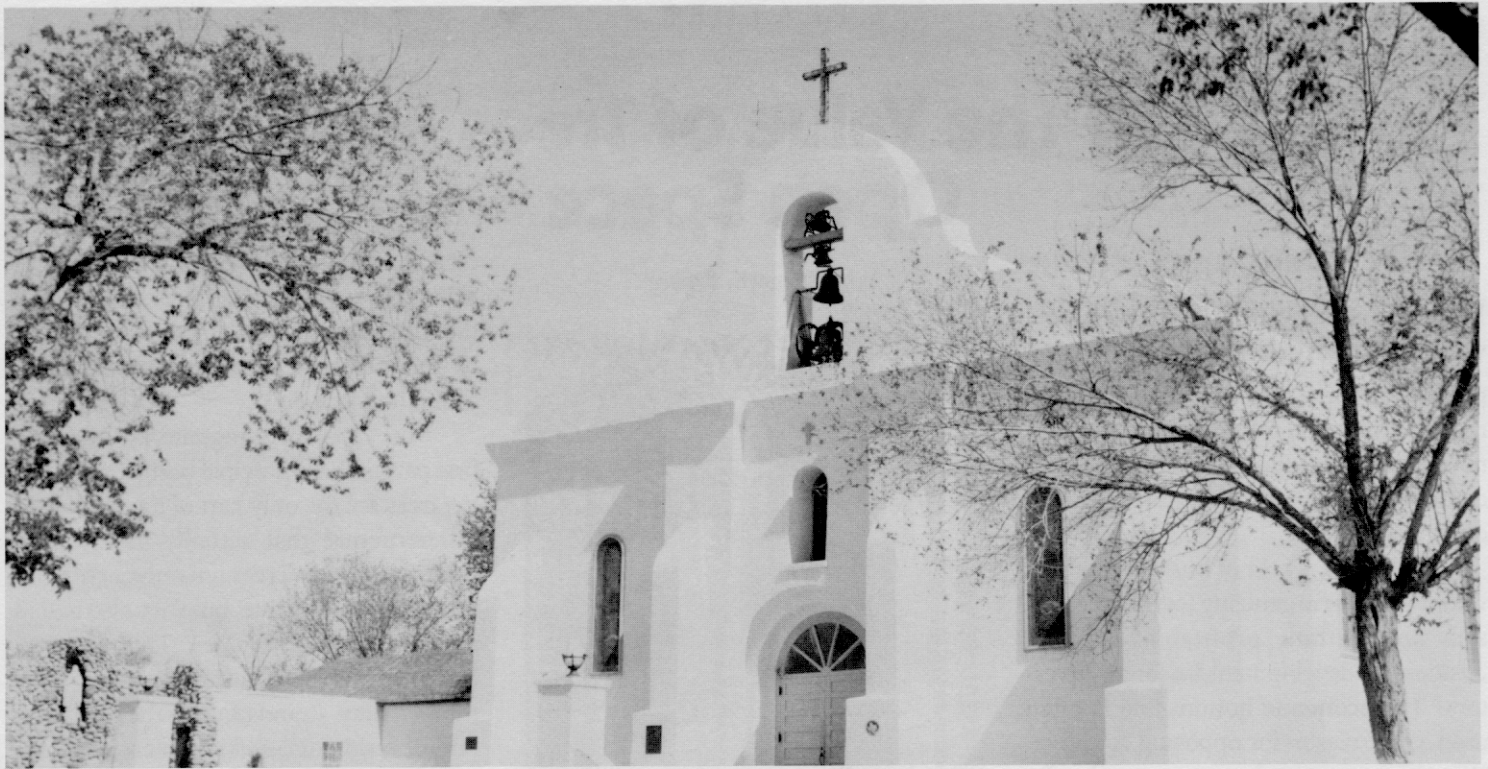


Old Slater Mill on the Blackstone River

Valley become devoted partners on behalf of the Valley."

What has resulted so far is a coordinated program to better preserve, interpret and respect the Valley's historic resources and its special character. Park rangers provide guided tours of historic sites; several small visitor centers are being planned or are under development; a unified signage program is in the works; local bed & breakfasts are flourishing; a new bridge is being built using a wooden truss, instead of a standard concrete, design; and an International Steamboat Muster has been held in the old "port city" of Pawtucket.

Also of note, a regional comprehensive tourism plan for the Rhode Island portion of the Valley has been completed. The plan notes that "it is imperative that the Valley capitalize on its rural aspects, cultural and heritage richness and eco-tourism possibilities," but cautions that "the Valley must continue to remain 'true' to the ideals of good historical interpretation, [and] shouldn't present anything phony."



Mission San Elizario. El Paso, Texas

Bob Billington, President of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council and a member of the Corridor Commission, believes that “people are starting to use the heritage corridor feeling and philosophy to help bring about positive change.” Billington also feels that the initial public investments in the corridor have “created an engine for business,” and that “businesses, not just those that are tourist-related, are beginning to understand that amenities mean something, and that taking our unique history and using it makes sense.”

For more information, contact Bob Billington, c/o Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, P.O. Box 7663, Cumberland, RI 02864; (401) 334-7773.

The Mission Trail

EL PASO, TEXAS

Through the combined efforts of volunteers, business leaders, and the city planning department, progress has been made to restore the Spanish missions of the El Paso area and better protect the old Mission Trail that connects them.

According to Al Pellez, Historic Preservation Coordinator for the El Paso Plan-

ning Department, until recently the missions were “very unpublicized with little organized effort to promote tourism.” Pellez believes that increased tourism will help in preservation efforts, especially of buildings within the historic district that borders the Mission Trail, and create new jobs. The Planning Department is also finishing work on a master plan for the Mission Trail — once part of the Camino Real that stretched from Mexico City to Santa Fe.

The El Paso Mission Trail Association plays a key role in raising public awareness of this important part of El Paso’s heritage. Sheldon Hall, Director of the Association, notes that the volunteer group helps with tours of the missions (including tours for 1,400 school children this May), training volunteer docents, and organizing a reenactment of what Hall calls “the real first Thanksgiving celebration in America.”

For more information, contact Sheldon Hall, Mission Trail Association, One Civic Center Plaza, El Paso, TX 79901; (915) 534-0677 — or Al Pellez, El Paso Planning Dept., (915) 541-4024.

Resources



The National Trust for Historic

Preservation’s “Heritage Tourism Initiative” is working with communities and regions across the country — including the Fox-Wisconsin, Galveston and El Paso areas described in this Portfolio — on developing heritage tourism programs. The National Trust provides experts in the fields of historic preservation, tourism development, and marketing, but stresses the importance of good local planning in dealing with issues closely related to heritage tourism, such as parking, traffic, and signage. You can get more information on the Tourism Initiative by contacting Cheryl Hargrove, c/o National Trust, 511 16th Street, Suite 700, Denver, CO 80202; (303) 623-1504.

For anyone interested in learning more about the role of tourism in American life, take a look at *The Tourist: Travel in Twentieth Century North America*, by John A. Jakle (University of Nebraska Press, 1985), a lively and informative book.