

Photo by Leslie Kipp



NONPROFIT SPOTLIGHT: **Greater Wilmington Convention & Visitors Bureau** BY JEN BOES

»» The impact of COVID-19 on Delaware's tourism industry has been devastating. As leisure and business travel came to a dead stop in March, hotels, restaurants, attractions, and other visitor-reliant businesses lost all or most of their income. Thousands of people lost their jobs or were furloughed.

The road to recovery will be a long one. As we ease our way into the new normal, destination marketing organizations like the Greater Wilmington Convention & Visitors Bureau are more important than ever. The bureau is a 501 c(6) nonprofit that markets New Castle County and the Brandywine Valley to leisure and business travelers.

It promotes all area businesses and attractions offering services and amenities to visitors through many different channels, including traditional and digital marketing, social media, cable television, and inviting travel writers to experience and write about the area. It also brings in meetings, conventions, and group tours.

The bureau relies on the state accommodations tax for the majority of its funding. As a result, its budget took a significant hit due to the pandemic. Like all other businesses and organizations, it has had to pivot to navigate the challenges presented by COVID-19.

Facing reduced staff and a reduced

budget until tourism in our state is robust again, the bureau has not missed a beat. It switched gears, relying almost entirely on digital communication to stay top-of-mind with potential visitors and provide support to its members.

One of the bureau's most effective tools has always been its website. VisitWilmingtonDE.com is used by approximately 600,000 unique visitors per year. When tourism halted, consumers still had a window into the region through the website. While they were not able to travel at that time, they could still think about travel and plan for the future.

Social media remains to be another important tool for reaching potential visitors. As tourism continues to pick up steam, the bureau is able to communicate re-openings and new offerings real-time to a base audience of more than 28,000 people and an

exponential reach of well over 4 million.

The bureau's initiatives to attract meetings and conventions also remain very active. A positive is that a good percentage of the meetings already on the books when the pandemic hit chose to reschedule rather than cancel. In late April, the bureau began securing opportunities for future business again.

As the travel media begins to visit again, the bureau will be inviting journalists from surrounding metro markets in to visit and write about the area. During the travel restrictions, the bureau provided content to journalists, making it easy for them to develop stories even if they could not visit.

Now that people are planning travel again, the bureau is gathering more momentum.

In May, the bureau and its partner organizations in Kent and Sussex Counties signed on to participate in an advertising campaign led by the Delaware Tourism Office to welcome visitors back into the state. It has also partnered with southeastern Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey on a tri-state recovery-focused tourism marketing effort.

The tourism industry is just beginning to bounce back, and it is still hard to predict what the future of travel will look like. As a drive-to destination in a time where many are reluctant to fly or travel far, Greater Wilmington and the Brandywine Valley are well positioned for recovery and growth.

This is why the work of the Greater Wilmington Convention and Visitors Bureau is so critical now. To find out more about what the bureau is doing to support the COVID-19 recovery movement, contact executive director Sarah Willoughby, swilloughby@visitwilmingtonde.com.

AT&T and AT&T Foundation Support Communities Impacted by COVID-19

Community organizations in Delaware are helping their friends and neighbors in need, and AT&T and the AT&T Foundation are supporting their work.

The Ministry of Caring in Wilmington is providing meals to the underserved in Wilmington. The AT&T Foundation provided an \$18,000 grant to the Ministry to help them purchase food, takeout containers and personal protective gear for staff and volunteers managing the Emmanuel Dining Room hunger relief program.

AT&T also made a \$10,000 contribution to The Boys and Girls Clubs of Delaware, headquartered in Wilmington, which is providing childcare services for essential personnel during the COVID-19 crisis at clubs in these locations: Clarence Fraim in Wilmington, Greater Newark, Greater Dover, Greater Milford, Western Sussex at Seaford, and Oak Orchard.

Wilmington Mayor Mike Purzycki thanked AT&T for assisting two of Wilmington's long-time community service providers.

"Technology industry leader AT&T has identified immediate needs such as daily nourishment and childcare, which are even more critical today as the COVID-19 crisis changes the way we react to the present and plan for the future," said Mayor Purzycki. "It's clear that AT&T cares



a great deal about Wilmington, and its generosity is most appreciated."

John Wellons, President & CEO of the Boys & Girls Club added: "We very much appreciate the support of AT&T during this unprecedented pandemic.

These are difficult times for all, and together we will get through this."

"One of AT&T's core values is to Be There when people need us. Now more than ever, Delaware's most vulnerable

residents and front line, essential workers – and the organizations that support them – need help. We're glad that we've been able to provide some support," said Denis Dunn, president, AT&T-Maryland, Delaware and Washington, DC.

The contributions are part of a nationwide commitment by AT&T to provide much needed support for first responders, medical personnel and others impacted by COVID-19. The effort kicked off with a \$1.5 million contribution to World Central Kitchen. We're also supporting Feeding America, the Salvation Army and Team Rubicon. AT&T will also be collaborating with a host of additional local organizations in communities most impacted by the pandemic.

AT&T's support is part of AT&T BelievesSM, a company-wide effort to make a meaningful impact in local communities. To learn more, visit <https://about.att.com/pages/COVID-19.html>.