

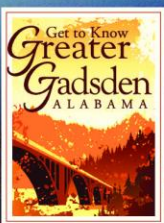


Tourism

An important component
of economic health for
Gadsden & Etowah County

fishing • shopping • food • golf • festivals • hiking • music • parks • climbing

STRATEGIC PLAN FY2019-2020



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@GreaterGadsden #GreaterGadsden

OVERVIEW

The Etowah County Tourism Board is charged with marketing Etowah County as a travel destination.

OUR MISSION Statement – “The mission of the Etowah County Tourism Board is to develop the economic prosperity of Etowah County through the promotion of tourism and by attracting and assisting visitors to our communities.”

OUR PRODUCT is the wide-range of leisure, cultural, historic, and recreational activities that Etowah County has to offer. The Coosa River and Noccalula Falls combine to give the county abundant natural resource attractions which drive our brand: our natural beauty, the outdoors, and outdoor activity.

OUR VISION points to the ECTB continuing to promote Gadsden and Etowah County in our target markets- Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia and Mississippi. Actively promoting the Greater Gadsden Area should create an upswing in visitors, hotel room nights, and ancillary sales.

OUR GOAL is to give visitors to Etowah County all they need to enjoy our offerings and to be a strong partner with county stakeholders, while being a leader in regional tourism efforts

TOURISM UPDATE

Tourism in Gadsden and Etowah County continues to grow. This trend is expected to continue in FY 2019-2020. Continued riverfront development in Gadsden is driving additional visitors to our river. Gadrock has proven to be a successful business getting people on the water on paddleboards. High School Fishing organizations continue to grow, and Neely Henry Lake is a popular North Alabama Lake for these groups. Southside is in the process of adding boat ramps and dock assets. Improvements in 2018 to the Black Creek Trails brings out total trails to over 13 miles, and we have landed our first High School Mountain Bike Race. The opening of The Venue in October 2018 has given Gadsden a new venue for the special events and meetings.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths—Noccalula Falls, the Coosa River, DGI and First Fridays/Summer Concert Series remain strong tourism assets; The continued growth of events like The Barbarian Challenge and new events like Art on the Rocks and Noccalula: The Experience are showing off Noccalula Falls; The Venue, the new special event and meeting facility at Coosa Landing has opened and has been very successful; Buffalo Wild Wings is opening a new restaurant adjacent to Coosa Landing and The Venue in September; Obtaining an entertainment district for the Coosa Landing Area will be crucial.

Weaknesses—The recent 2019 legislative session saw several bills that would have impacted tourism in Etowah County. While neither bill passed, we need to be proactive in 2019/2020 in working with our legislative delegation to make sure we can express Tourism's need for representation in bill creation should they desire to take up these matters in 2020. The Sports Authority Cap is still in place and will stifle the Tourism Board's ability to grow our tourism product.

Opportunities—Technology, such as iPhone and Android apps and mobile websites becoming more affordable; Black Creek Trail multi-use trails system events; Sports Complex discussions; New ramp/docks in Southside when completed may attract additional tournaments to Neely Henry; Canoe Creek boat ramp is complete and may bring new opportunities to the lower lake. Gadrock Micro Gym (Climbing, yoga, paddle boards, etc.) has opened and is a unique facility.

Threats— U.S. politics regarding international travel may dissuade travel in 2020 and may continue to affect travel in both leisure and business markets; state tourism funding continues to be in flux due to fiscal problems of state government and 2020 AL government races. 2020 Presidential campaigns could affect the economy and therefore tourism.

TOURISM ACTION PLAN

1. Tourism has agreed to a 3-year deal in partnership with Buck's Island Marina to host The Bass University at the Venue. Over 175 anglers from 5 states are expected to attend this event at The Venue on Jan 18 and 19, 2020 and the third weekend in January in 2021 and 2022.
2. Continue promoting website for fishing; fishneelyhenrylake.com. Website designed to raise awareness of Gadsden and Neely Henry Lake regionally.
3. Continue Alabama Bass Trail Tournament (ABT) Series Presenting Sponsor. Goal is to leverage and maximize fishneelyhenrylake.com awareness at 11 ABT tournaments and 11 TV broadcasts on Fox Sports South and on ABT website.
4. Black Creek Trails--Continue to raise awareness through social media and internet sites based on mountain-biking, and working with City officials on planning for maximizing use of new trails. National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA) will host a high-school race in Gadsden in February 2020.
5. Etowah County Composite Mountain Bike Team--Continue to grow high school mountain- biking in our county.
6. Continue to work with City of Gadsden staff from The Venue to determine how best we can help them to attract out of town events, meetings and expos. On-going.
7. Increase sponsorship of Etowah County High School fishing teams by adding new schools. Sponsoring these teams improves awareness of Gadsden and Neely Henry Lake.
8. Continue sponsorship of Bassmaster Elite professional angler Matt Herren.
9. Continue recruitment of a BASS Elite or Open event in Gadsden on Neely Henry. Bid for 2020 Elite tourney has not been accepted or rejected yet.
10. Barbarian Challenge--Continue partnership with the City of Gadsden to grow event through our involvement in helping in marketing, promotion, and website. Over 1,750 adults from 13 states and 400 children participated in 2019.
11. Continue to evaluate the Mega Sports Complex status and keep up with developments.
12. Continue "Get To Know Greater Gadsden" campaign, including "Greater Gadsden Area Tourism" as a "dba" for the ECTB.
13. Continue online presence through iPhone/Android app, and digital advertising, including Facebook and Twitter paid advertising; increase awareness of app.
14. Increase blogs, videos, Facebook Live, and newsletter communication with partnership with Tami Brooks and Brooks Consulting, LLC.
15. Continue pursuit of fishing tournament opportunities, including possible sponsorship of individual anglers beyond Matt Herren.
16. Continue county-wide community event support through sponsorship using sponsorship criteria, event advertisement and event planning assistance.

17. Research and/or create new events wither alone or in partnership with others, such as the Xterra Alabama Park Series races.

TOURISM OPERATIONS

Marketing

GOALS

Continue on-going efforts to position the Greater Gadsden Area (GGA) as a destination for visitors; increase awareness of the GGA as a preferred outdoor activity environment; provide visitor service information; create advertising to increa.se hotel room bookings, event attendance, and ancillary sales opportunities in the GGA

MARKET

1. Drive-in leisure visits, predominately from the states of AL, MS, TN, GA. Leisure travel for our purpose includes cultural, literary, musical, and heritage visitors. For the WLYS, our market will include FL panhandle, south Alabama, Atlanta metro, and central/southern MS
2. Sporting event attendees, including youth sports
3. Family reunions
4. Special Event attendees
5. Recreationalists, such as fishing, bouldering, golf, cycling, hiking, etc.
6. Small market/unique conferences

STRATEGIES

1. Advertising
2. Inquiry Fulfillment
3. Website
4. Billboard (occasional timely use to promote events)
5. Destination Travel app
6. Special Events
7. Collateral Materials (brochures and Visitors Guide)
8. Social Media and digital ads
9. Travel and Consumer Shows
10. Email Marketing
11. Sponsorships
12. Familiarization Tours (FAM tours) and Site Visits
13. Public Relations
14. Membership in Industry Organizations
15. State-wide and Regional Tourism Industry Relations
16. Community Partnerships

ADVERTISING

Advertising will be aimed at a 150 mile radius, in magazines focusing on women, southern travel, country living, outdoors and recreation lovers. State guides and/or regional magazines will be utilized to build our image and advertise our events. We will advertise as Greater Gadsden Area Tourism, using the “Get To Know Greater Gadsden” campaign

Magazines/Guides

- Official Alabama Vacation Guide
- Official Alabama Golf Guide
- Alabama Mountain Lakes Vacation Planner
- North Alabama Golf Guide
- Alabama Magazine
- Birmingham Magazine
- Chattanooga Magazine
- Atlanta Magazine
- American Road Magazine
- Birmingham Christian Magazine
- Southern Travel and Lifestyles digital
- Escape to the Southeast Travel Guide
- Gadsden Style
- Alabama Outdoors
- Anniston/Gadsden Christian Magazine
- Business Alabama
- Northeast Alabama Living
- Alabama Heritage Magazine
- Internet
- Alabama Bass Trail website
- North Alabama (AMLA)website
- Fishneelyhenry.com

COLLATERAL MATERIALS

Continue updating and adding content to Visitors Guide. We will partner with other organizations to help them produce their materials if warranted

We manage brochure distribution through various channels that include:

- The North Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association brochure distribution program
- The Alabama Welcome Centers (DeKalb and Cleburne) -quarterly visits to inform staff and replenish brochures as needed
- The Alabama Travel Council in all Alabama regions
- State Department of Tourism-all Welcome Centers

The Visitors Guide and tear-off city maps will also be distributed as needed to local hotels, attractions, and other businesses that visitors frequent, such as hospitals, city halls, etc.

TRAVEL/CONSUMER SHOWS

The ECTB will participate in trade shows as an exhibitor to expose target-market attendees to the “Etowah County Experience.” Often we will partner with the North Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association at various shows. Shows to attend include:

- Nashville Southern Women’s Show
- Indianapolis Boat, Sport and Travel Show
- Birmingham Southern Women’s Show
- TN Valley Hunting and Fishing Expo

WEB SITE

The Greater Gadsden Area Tourism web site will be a major marketing tool for us. A large majority of travelers use the internet to research and plan their travel activities. We will keep our site current, engaging, and full of information. A responsive updated web site was undertaken in 2019 and will continue into 2020.

INTERNET

We will continue to expand our use of the internet for marketing and promoting Greater Gadsden. Actions to include:

1. Use our Facebook account to update our Facebook Friends on upcoming events and important news and uploading videos and photos as needed to reinforce our image and drive visits to our website and email sign-up. Paid advertising on Facebook will continue.
2. Use our Twitter account to send out notices of events and important news.
3. Use our YouTube channel to upload videos of Greater Gadsden events and happenings.
4. Increase usage of Pinterest and Instagram.
5. We have hired Tami Brooks with Brooks Consulting, LLC to create timely Newsletter, video blogs, regular blogs, and timely sponsored FB posts.

EMAIL MARKETING

Using Constant Contact, an email marketing software program, we will routinely create email marketing messages for our database. We will harvest permission-driven email addresses from all of our touch-points with potential visitors, as well as from our partner organizations. These email messages will include information on:

- Special Events
- Important area news

INQUIRY FULFILLMENT

Inquiries to Greater Gadsden Area Tourism are fulfilled as quickly as possible. Relevant brochures are mailed as requested. Inquiries are tabulated and recorded, giving us feedback on advertising efforts and potential new or overlooked markets. Inquires may come from:

- Walk-ins
- Phone calls for information
- Website information requests
- Leads from reader-service cards in magazines we advertise in
- Leads from Alabama Mountain Lake Tourist Association advertising
- Leads from Alabama Department of Tourism advertising
- Leads from Southern Travel and Lifestyles

SPECIAL EVENTS

Special events such as The Barbarian Challenge and the World's Longest Yard Sale provide tourism visits and/or media attention. We will continue to work with local groups and communities to help plan events that have the goals of increasing tourism, hotel room bookings, and/or media attention potential. We will research possible new events, either on our own or in partnerships with other organizations or groups. Highlights include:

- World's Longest Yard Sale
- Glencoe "Celebration in the Park"
- Art on the Rocks
- Attalla "Heritage Day"
- Sardis "Sardis City Celebration"
- City of Gadsden "Smoke on the Falls" BBQ Festival
- City of Hokes Bluff "City Fest"
- First Fridays
- Attalla "Cruise-In"
- Carver Community "First Saturdays"
- Habitat for Humanity "Dragon Boat Race"
- Outdoors activities focusing on the Coosa River and Noccalula Fall Park
- The Barbarian Challenge

SPONSORSHIPS

Sponsorships are used to promote Greater Gadsden through advertising and to support events that create hotel room bookings; events that need start-up help and have good potential for growth, events that have community impact, or media recognition. Sponsorships are evaluated using the Sponsorship Criteria document. Specific events, programs, or projects may include:

Potential Hotel Room Bookings

- City of Southside "Cityfest"
- City of Glencoe "Memorial Day Celebration"
- Habitat for Humanity Dragon Boat Festival
- City of Gadsden "Summer Concert Series"
- City of Attalla "Heritage Day"
- Weiss Lake Antique Power Association "G-Round-Up"
- Etowah County Fair

Community Impact/Arts Organizations

- Gadsden-Etowah Patriots Association
- Northeast Alabama Genealogical Society
- Etowah County Youth Orchestra
- Center for Cultural Arts
- Gadsden Museum of Art
- Downtown Gadsden, Inc.
- Gadsden Symphony Orchestra
- Theater of Gadsden
- Etowah Historical Society
- Walnut Gallery
- CharActers Entertainment

FAM TOURS AND SITE VISITS

We will invite and host tour planners, travel writers, out-of-town media, and others with the ability to promote the Greater Gadsden Area or bring visitors or meeting attendees to Etowah County to show them the unique reasons why we should be on their itinerary or conference agenda. We will offer tours, hotel rooms and/or meals and local knowledge in accordance with the potential for business. Travel writer leads are developed through:

- Alabama Department of Tourism
- Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association
- Southeastern Outdoor Press Association

PUBLIC RELATIONS

The ECTB spreads its message through many channels and public relations is a highly-visible means of communicating our brand. We do this by:

- Issuing press releases about upcoming events and noteworthy happenings
- Attending public forums and meetings involving our community partners
- Appearing on television, radio, and webcasts
- Speaking to civic groups on tourism importance and impact
- Attending local and regional festivals, events, and happenings as the Greater Gadsden tourism official
- Working with state and regional tourism organizations in leadership capacities

MEMBERSHIP IN INDUSTRY ORGANIZATIONS

Not only does membership in industry organizations give ECTB employees ample opportunities to network, get more education, and create business leads, many organizations make their membership database available for marketing purposes. Some of the organizations include:

- Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association-Board President
- Alabama Bass Trail-Board President
- Lookout Mountain Parkway Association-past president, board member
- Alabama Department of Tourism-board member
- International Festivals and Events Association-member
- Southeast Festivals and Events Association-board member
- Southeastern Tourism Society-member
- Alabama Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus-treasurer
- Southeastern Outdoor Press Association-member

STATE-WIDE AND REGIONAL TOURISM INDUSTRY RELATIONS

Keeping our message in front of our state and regional tourism industry partners is done through meetings, conferences, attendance at their tourism events, and by attending continuing-educational opportunities. Tourism-related meetings and educational opportunities include:

- Annual Alabama Governors Conference on Tourism
- Alabama Tourism Bash
- Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association Quarterly Board Meeting and Annual Meeting
- AL/MS/TN Rural Tourism Conference
- Lookout Mountain Parkway Monthly Meetings and Annual Luncheon
- Southeast Festivals and Events Association
- Southeast Tourism Society Spring and Fall Meetings
- Southeast Tourism Society Marketing College
- Alabama Association of Destination Marketing Organizations Meetings
- Alabama River Trail Quarterly Meetings
- Continue Tourism Organization leadership roles, currently:
 - Board Chairman, Alabama Mountain Lakes Tourist Association
 - President, Alabama Bass Trail
 - Treasurer, Alabama Association of Destination Marketing Organizations
 - Treasurer, AL/MS/TN Rural Tourism Conference

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

A strong partnership with organizations that create community spirit and build a healthy business and social community atmosphere helps us spread our message to stakeholders and strengthens the Greater Gadsden brand. Community partnerships include:

- The United Way
- YMCA of the Coosa Valley
- Center for Cultural Arts
- Gadsden Museum of Art
- Downtown Gadsden, Inc.
- The Chamber, Gadsden and Etowah County
- American Red Cross of Etowah County
- County Mayors Association

Administration

GOALS

Maintain and grow a professional, highly productive, informed, and efficient staff, Board, and organization to best serve and promote Etowah County as a tourist destination

OBJECTIVES

- Run an effective, efficient, and ethical business
- Adhere to Board By-laws
- Maintain excellent relationships and communication between internal departments, Board of Directors, and external stakeholders
- Employ effective and motivated staff members
- Maximize productivity and cost effectiveness while minimizing turnover and economic waste

STRATEGIES

Human Resources

- Regularly re-evaluate compensation and benefits against competitive organizations
- Develop an office culture that fosters camaraderie (open-door communications policy and team-building activities)
- Create and maintain up-to-date new hire packets
- Regularly update Policy and Procedure Manual
- Provide training, educational, and recognition opportunities for staff

Financial Management

- Create, update, adhere, and amend an annual operating budget
- Forecast future revenues and expenditures to adjust programs and services
- Maintain Board banking accounts
- Maintain internal controls system for checks and balances, financial health, organizational transparency and cash flow management
- Conduct an annual audit
- Work with Board Treasurer to maintain accurate financial records
- Manage accounts payable and accounts receivable

Office Management

- Provide Board and staff with adequate administrative support, necessary equipment and resources, a pleasant office environment, and clearly defined policies and procedures
- Maintain supplies inventory
- Maintain and update office equipment and systems for greater staff efficiencies
- Manage and maintain Visitor Center display racks with current Board collateral and other tourism-related materials
- Conduct regular staff meetings to update Board employees on current and upcoming events, projects and initiatives

Board of Directors

- Maintain excellent relationships and communication with all Board members
- Prepare and provide accurate information pertaining to Board's services, activities, and operations at scheduled Board Meetings
- Work with Board to adhere to and periodically update Board's By-laws
- Maintain and regularly update a Board of Directors new member packet
- Between Board meetings, provide regular updates to Board of Directors on Board accomplishments, news, and information pertinent to the Boards' mission

Outreach and Education

- Maintain excellent relationships with key stakeholders including City and County Partners, hoteliers and local, regional, and state partners
- Maintain excellent industry relationships for networking and new business opportunities
- Participate in industry educational programs
- Regularly educate and update key stakeholders on Board accomplishments via presentations, press releases, and email