

## **QUARTERLY ASCERTAINMENTS / COMMUNITY ISSUES**

**STATION: WVAQ—October, 2023**

**SUBJECT: Tourism Numbers approach Pre-Pandemic Levels in North/Central WV.**

### **DISCUSSION:**

Visit Mountaineer Country CVB has announced that tourism around the Morgantown area has almost returned to pre-CVOID-19 pandemic levels.

CEO Susan Riddle released the mid-2023 report for the tourism firm to Morgantown City Council, where she stated the number of visitors to the area has been the highest it's been since 2019. Through a culmination of efforts on a local, state, and national level, Morgantown Area tourism appears to be improving despite local businesses still feeling pandemic-related aftereffects.

"We're above 2019 figures, which I really didn't think was going to happen in a really long time," said Riddle on the current occupation numbers for 2023. "We're not at occupancy levels where we would like to see them; however, the rates are well above where they were before (COVID-19 shutdowns), even with all of our partners still struggling to find staff," she said.

The mid-2023 report showed an increase in lodging bookings. Interest in hosting events in the Morgantown area has also seen a dramatic increase in 2023. According to Riddle, applications for their 2023 Request for Proposals (RFP) to event partnerships were close to capacity with a combination of local and national interest. This includes organizations based as far west as Texas.

"We had interest at a local level, a state level, and a regional level, and I think as far as Texas and Illinois," said Riddle on RPF applications for tourism opportunities. "So we've had interest in many different directions," he said.

For their efforts, Riddle reported that Visit Mountaineer Country CVB was recognized by state officials as part of the 2023 Governor's Conference on Tourism at Cannan Valley Resort. For their use of social media and work with community partners, they were awarded the "Future of Tourism" award at the conference, one of the highest honors. Riddle stated that their efforts to work with West Virginia University were a highlight for conference voters.

"We were the winners of the industry 'Future of Tourism' award for the amount of work that we do with our partners," said Riddle. "It was based on our work with all of the university programs, the interns that we work with, and various organizations throughout the region," she said.

As 2023 begins to wrap up, Riddle and Visit Mountaineer Country CVB will continue to make the push for both regional and national partners to promote Morgantown Area tourism. This includes discussions with nine separate groups for potential working partnerships and the promotion of events such as the Grand National Cross Country motorcross competition that will wrap up in

**Morgantown this year. With goals such as the hosting of Olympic diving trials at Mylan Park still in sight, Riddle hopes the 2023 momentum can carry into 2024.**

**"Working with the state, as well as what we do (regionally and nationally), we are getting national recognition, and we're having people who are seeking us out for things," said Riddle. "Not just us being on the search and destroy missions, so to speak, they are actually coming to us," she said.**

**DATE: October 8, 2023**

**TIME / DURATION: 2:32**

**GUESTS: Mountaineer Country CVB CEO Susan Riddle**

**MEDIA INTEREST: Talk of the Town – WAJR, Dominion Post, WVAQ, WKKW, WBOY, WDTV, facebook, twitter**

**YEAR: 2023**

**QUARTER: 4<sup>th</sup>**





