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Capstone Project

“Tourism Makes a Splash in Rural East Tennessee”

September 2016

Tourism Makes a Splash in Rural East Tennessee!

Major industrial expansion is typically the method to increase tax revenue in most communities...

However, in rural communities with *limited* available industrial space for expansion, this is not the case. Rural Communities need to put on their thinking caps and pull out all their creativity and develop projects and programs that will increase tourism traffic. Ultimately this will increase sales tax and lodging tax revenue.

This Capstone Project will explore the myriad of ways a small town--Spring City, in Rhea County, TN has used its natural resources and assets to encourage tourism as a means of economic development and growth. Examples of past and current projects will be cited, along with future projects that are in the planning and funding phases.

Spring City Demographics

Spring City, Tennessee lies in the Tennessee River Valley at the intersection of Highway 27 and Highway 68, one half hour west of Interstate 75. Heading south on 27, one will travel through Dayton, and Chattanooga (55 miles South) crossing Interstate 24, on their way through Georgia to Florida. Northward about 30 minutes, one will encounter Interstate 40, leading to Knoxville (60 miles north) and Nashville (140 miles west). These major thoroughfares are mentioned to show that, even though Spring City is in a rural community, it has convenient access as a tourist destination.

While Spring City is only 2.44 square miles in size, and had a 2014 census of 2,009, it services over 10,000 people in the surrounding area. This area includes, The Grandview Community, west on Highway 68; homes and businesses in the Spring City zip code around Watts Bar Lake as well as those in the county. It also services permanent and temporary employees at Watts Bar Nuclear Power Plant.

According to City-data.com, Spring City compares to the State Averages in the following ways. The median ages were: Spring City-43.2, Tennessee-38.5. The median household income for residents in 2013 was: Spring City- \$33,471, Tennessee - \$44,297. Average household size: Spring City – 2.3, Tennessee – 2.5. In addition, in 2013, 24.9% of Spring City residents were living in poverty.

Educational facilities in Spring City include the Spring City Elementary School and the Spring City Middle School. These schools, along with the Rhea County High School, located 10 miles

south in Evensville, provide school sports, in addition to community sports programs. These school children and their parents, along with the faculty and staff are included in many of the tourist activities being discussed, especially in regard to *sports tourism*.

Retail establishments range from 2 pharmacies, 1 grocery store, Hair salons/Barber shops, a florist, 3 gas station/convenience stores, several thrift stores, a shoe store, a video/DVD store, a hardware store, 2 antique stores, a car dealership, 8 restaurants, and 2 chain retail stores. Two marinas with cabins and camping available, 1 hotel, a Museum, and a Community Theater are also found within the city limits and thus, contribute to the available places for tourism dollars to be spent.

Nine churches are within the city limits, several of which currently host *sporting events*. Their facilities may be utilized as Sports Tourism expands.

Spring City has more than FIFTY volunteer organizations! For a community of this size, that is an amazing number! A large number of those volunteers live outside of the city limits. Because they live outside the city limits, they do not pay *city* property taxes. This is important to note as these volunteers *do* still make a significant contribution to the community through their countless volunteer hours. These groups of people are the ones who coordinate the majority of the tourist activities. They are for example, members of “the Parks and Recreation” and “Friends of the Park” that coordinate the park activities and work to enhance the parks. They are the coaches for basketball, baseball, softball, soccer and football teams that are, and will be, a part of Sports Tourism activities.

The city’s annual budget is so limited that the majority of the projects, programs and activities within the city would not exist without the efforts and donated hours of the volunteers.

As one can see, this small town in rural east Tennessee has quite a few assets for its citizens. The demographics, however, also show that there is limited potential for increasing current property tax revenue without creating a burden for the homeowners, many of whom are on a fixed income and within the 24.9% poverty statistics.

Local elected government officials and concerned citizens have struggled with this issue for many terms.

Through the 5 year strategic plan process, the Mayor, the Board of Commissioners, the City Manager and the department heads, have mapped out their ideas and goals of how to promote and prosper within the parameters and restrictions of the annual city budget.

Industry in Spring City

Manufacturing includes SSM Industries, Inc., employing 70 people in 3 shifts. SSM manufactures the yarn/thread that is woven into flame resistant, cut resistant and thermal fabrics in their plant. SSM’s products are used worldwide in applications ranging from the military,

racing, fire and rescue, industrial, children's sleepwear, and mattress flame barrier. Their products are typically shipped via major trucking companies or major delivery companies.

Spring City has an industrial park of 20 plus acres. It is currently the home of General Shale Brick Plant which employs 45 people. General Shale harvests the local soil that is used to make bricks that are then shipped all over the country via rail or truck.

As part of a 2008 TDOT Grant agreement, General Shale will be leveling the ground *when* they have completed their excavation of the dirt. The engineers and surveyors reviewed the plans and have presented their findings and recommendations. When these plans have been finalized, the necessary inspections and studies will be conducted according to the Tennessee State Certification Process.

Long range plans with the city and county are to collaborate with General Shale to create a "site ready" plot that can *then* receive the designation as a "Tennessee Certified Pad Ready Site". This area, when completed, is the *only* area within the city limits that is available for *future* industrial expansion.

Tourism

Tourism in a rural community takes on a different picture than in a larger metropolitan area. A rural community typically does not have ONE big asset to promote for all of its tourism dollars. This type of region finds it necessary to utilize all of its available resources *combined* to enhance its community coffers.

Watts Bar Lake/Parks

One of Spring City's major assets is beautiful Watts Bar Lake with over 780 miles of shoreline. Watts Bar Lake includes a number of small islands for boaters' enjoyment. Watts Bar Lake is part of the TVA Tennessee River and Corps of Engineers project of the 1930's. Public access is available within the city limits through the docks, boat ramps, two marinas and several parks along the shoreline. The lake is an ideal environment for boating, swimming, canoeing, skiing, fishing and enjoying serene sunsets!

Two City parks are included in the assets of this rural community. The first is the Nature Park which has a paved walking/biking/running trail, children's playground equipment, a pavilion, that is available to be rented, and the Spring City Softball Leagues' *new* field. The Piney River runs along the northern border of the Nature Park.

The Veteran's Park the largest of the parks, is surrounded on 3 sides by Watts Bar Lake. It includes a paved walking/running trail, 2 pavilions, which may be rented out, the Splash Pad, tennis courts, the newly renovated basketball court, temporary soccer fields, children's playground equipment, picnic tables, a sand volleyball court, and fishing areas.

In addition to the City Parks, Spring City has Holloway Park, the Piney River and the Spring City Dixie Youth Little League Baseball Fields. Holloway Park was donated to the city to be used for Boy Scout Activities and as a soccer complex. This too is bordered by the Piney River. Piney River “has been determined by American Whitewater to be a class III-IV+” river for whitewater kayak and canoes. The Dixie Youth Baseball fields are used for practices, games and tournaments.

Tennessee Valley Theater

The Tennessee Valley Theater (TVT) is “Rhea County’s only community theater” providing opportunities for community actors and musicians to participate in a variety of venues from major theater productions and musicals to events written by local artists. In addition, TVT has performances from music groups of many different genres. This allows Spring City citizens to be exposed to big city culture without the big city prices! Every summer, TVT sponsors a children’s acting experience to encourage and develop the creative talents of the youngsters.

Spring City Museum and Depot

The Spring City Museum and Spring City Chamber of Commerce are located in the restored 1900’s Train Depot. The Museum houses several permanent exhibits as well as changing and traveling exhibits. This is a FREE attraction for the community and visitors alike.

Several of the permanent exhibits are *unique* to the Spring City community and are of great historical significance. One of them occurred August 22, 1955. That was the day that a “Spring City School Bus was struck by a Southbound train killing eleven children and injuring many more. Several older boys opened the emergency doors and helped unload many children or there would have been more injuries. As a result of this tragedy 35 caring Spring City women lobbied and achieved the FIRST law requiring all school buses to “stop, look and listen” at all Tennessee Railroad crossings. Thanks to these women, within one year, every state had passed the same law!”

Other permanent exhibits include a model of Spring City from the 1940s and ‘50s made by one of the local residents. It gives a glimpse of life in bygone days.

The permanent exhibit space also includes the history and progression of The Tennessee Valley Authority’s presence in the Spring City/Rhea county area from their acquiring of farm land and the community of Rhea Springs to the building of Watts Bar Dam. Watts Bar Dam created the area now called Watts Bar Lake and one of the major assets of this East Tennessee Community.

In front of the Depot/Museum is a historical marker recognizing the Rhea County Lady Spartans from the Civil War Era. During the summer of 1862, “30 young, socially prominent Rhea County women organized a nonmilitary unit called *the Spartans* as the Civil War was beginning. A mounted soldiers’ aid group, they carried food and clothing to fathers, brothers, and

sweethearts in the Confederate cavalry patrolling Walden's Ridge to keep the Union out of the Tennessee Valley. The Spartans were the only all-female unit active during the Civil War." The museum contains additional information about this unique group of women.

The Historical Society is an all-volunteer organization that works in conjunction with the museum to provide volunteers to staff the museum, to develop and design new exhibits as well as educate the public about the historically significant events in Spring City. The Historical Society has an annex where they host special events such as quilts shows, and The Festival of Trees, complete with Santa and a train set up at Christmas time.

Sports Tourism

The Spring City Community sports program is comprised of Nationally Sanctioned Organizations, such as AYSO soccer, school Sanctioned sports, and Church/community organizations. These include softball, soccer, baseball, basketball, and football.

Fishing

As has been previously mentioned, Spring City lies along the banks of Watts Bar Lake and the Piney River. Currently, local fishermen/women utilize the area via the parks, docks, boat ramps and marinas on a recreational basis.

Starting in 2013, research was done to bring fishing tournaments to Spring City and again in 2015. The City's elected officials were on board with the program, but were told that more launch/dock area was needed in order for Spring City to be included in the tournament schedules.

During this time, Dayton began having fishing tournaments on Lake Chickamauga. Being in close proximity to Dayton, Spring City's amenities such as lodging and restaurants have been an asset for Dayton's tournaments. With an increase in dock/launch and parking space, Spring City will be able to partner with Dayton on tournaments that would encompass both locations.

TCED Courses Utilized

During the remainder of this project several TBEDC courses will be cited including the following: Gary Alexander's "Case Study: Music City Hits Softball" from the May 2015 TBEDC course will be used as an example of the benefits of sports tourism.

Lessons learned from the August 2016 Marketing and Attraction course will be utilized in the discussion on the Fishing Tournaments.

Trends

The Rhea County area is an area which is growing as a fishing destination. Approximately, 4 years ago, the Rhea County Economic and Tourism Council had their first fishing tournament on Chickamauga Lake. The tournament numbers and sizes have continued to grow over the last 4

years. The area has become nationally known as a “fishing destination”. The RETC has statistics that show the increase in sales tax for Dayton during the months in which there are fishing tournaments. In 2015, the impact of major professional fishing tournaments on sales tax income was greater than the impact of Christmas Sales!

Tourism as an Economic Driver in Rural East Tennessee

Tourism in a rural community takes on a different view than if one were in an established major tourist community like, for example, Orlando, Florida, or, Nashville or Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. To begin with, those communities have a considerably larger tax base, and, therefore a larger budget within in which to work. In addition, they have a greater geographic area to utilize for expansion.

Project Partners

Partners are very important for projects of any scope. In a rural community with limited financial resources, they are even more necessary.

Spring City, TN’s elected officials include the Mayor and four City Commissioners. These are the people who vote to pursue researching a proposed project. After the project has been researched, a vote is then cast to explore funding.

The funding part may require additional partners. This may include obtaining grants from the following: The State of Tennessee, the United State Department of Agriculture Rural Development (USDA Rural Development), Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT), Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency (TWRA), as well as from local financial institutions. In some cases, the funding may come from several different sources.

The scope of some projects allows for the Town of Spring City to obtain a grant by themselves. Others, however, require the City to partner on a grant with other entities within the region. These may include Rhea County, the City of Dayton, or the Rhea Economic and Tourism Council (RETC).

While funding is quite often a major part of any project the people involved are vital to complete any project. In addition to the previously mentioned agencies and organizations who contribute financially and with man-power, a rural community relies heavily on its volunteer force! Spring City, TN has over 50 volunteer organizations who contribute ideas, labor and moral support for new ventures as well as to supplement existing programs/events.

Tourism as a goal...

Tourism is an ongoing goal for any community, but even more so in this rural town of Spring City, TN. Spring City’s Mayor, City Commissioners, and City Manager, along with her

volunteers, lead the way in introducing and promoting tourism. Many projects have met with resistance upon initial introduction, but gain enthusiasm as the benefits and excitement grow.

Spring City has only one available industrial park that is available for future industrial expansion. Because this project is still in its planning stages, the potential economic impact will not be felt for quite some time.

As a result, this town of 2,009 people has to rely on current programs and projects that are in their infancy to provide an economic impact. 24.9% of the residents within the city limit are living in poverty, and, many of the citizens are on a fixed income. With basic living expenses continuing to rise, the governing body strives to keep the property taxes, the City's main revenue source, at a minimum. This requires exploring other avenues for increasing funds, mainly through increasing sales taxes revenue.

The Economic Impact of Travel in Tennessee Counties in 2014 indicates that Rhea County is ranked 47 out of 95 counties in the state for "Tax Revenues in Tennessee for Domestic Travel" (tourism). From 2013 to 2014, Rhea County's sales tax receipts have increased by 5.83%.

This rural community has many activities and programs that it provides for its citizens and visitors throughout the year. The majority of them are typically smaller events that, when combined, provide a continual source of sales tax revenue for the city. In fact, according to Spring City's sales tax comparison for 2014 and 2015, during the months of July through November, sales tax receipts rose 9.8%.

As has been previously noted, Dayton, just south of Spring City, has been pursuing fishing tournaments as a means for tourism growth and sales tax revenue. In fact, according to a 2015 article by David Cobb, published in TimesFreePress.com "These (fishing) tournaments have brought thousands of people from across the country to Dayton over the last three years ..." "Officials say \$10 million in current local development follows directly in the wake of the fishing boom". These include a new hotel and several restaurants in the Dayton area.

Spring City is preparing to jump on the band wagon and join Dayton as a Fishing Venue. While there may be some "growing pains" with new tourist activities, like Dayton, Spring City anticipates being able to add new amenities as the revenues increase from fishing activities, sporting events and other new tourist activities.

Tourism Activities-Past, Present and Future

That being said, this rural community has as one of its amenities Watt Bar Lake which is, as has been previously mentioned, a fantastic resource for fishing, boating, skiing, canoeing and relaxing! Watts Bar Lake is only just beginning to see the effects of tourism. Plans are in the works to improve the available fishing areas to include a new park complete with docks, ramps and additional parking facilities for at least 100 boats/trailers. These new facilities will allow

Spring City to be a partner with Dayton and the RETC on their professional, semi-professional and other fishing tournaments, which, in the past, have only been on Lake Chickamauga.

Past Projects:

The Splash Pad

The Splash Pad at the Veteran's Park was initiated by a former Mayor and her Board as an avenue of play for the children in the community. The project began as a dream. Research was done on the options available. The site at the veteran's park was chosen due to its proximity to the main park, to Watts Bar Lake, Highways 27 and 68, and easy access for all citizens. The budget and builder were decided upon. Grants to help fund the project were explored. The city applied for and received a grant. This was an 80/20 grant with the 20% coming from the general fund. The grant money was obtained and the project was completed.

The dedication and ribbon cutting ceremony on May 11, 2013 signaled the Grand Opening of the Splash Pad! As soon as the ribbons were cut, the children scurried into the enclosed area to explore their new play area!

Was this a beneficial project? You bet!

While this is a FREE amenity in the community, it has many benefits. These include providing a safe and cool place for children to play, and, bringing visitors from south Rhea County, Roane & Cumberland Counties as well as those from other states that are in town to visit local folks. These visitors spend their money on food, fuel and souvenirs for their children.

It has brought people to Spring City that may not have otherwise come to town. Spring City has the *only* Splash Pad in Rhea County and also for several surrounding counties! During the recent Shake the Lake Festival, many children enjoyed the Splash Pad while their parents roamed the vendor sites. Once they have visited the Splash Pad, the children request a return visit even when they are in town for another event!

It has been such a great success that other cities in our county have been asking details about possibly putting a Splash Pad in their city!

Fishing Tournaments

Professional fishing tournaments in Rhea County began several years ago in Dayton on Lake Chickamauga. "Lake Chickamauga was named by Bassmasters Magazine as the 7th best bass fishing lake in the U.S. in its 2014 listing." These events were held in the Dayton area because they had sufficient access to boat launches and parking on Lake Chickamauga. While the main event was held in Dayton, Spring City has also experienced a benefit during these tournaments, mainly through increased patrons in the hotel, cabins, and restaurants.

Current Projects:

Spring City Chamber Events

Spring City's Chamber of Commerce is a separate entity in relation to City Government. The Chamber, however, does make an economic impact on the town.

Throughout the year, the chamber holds events in Spring City to draw people to the community. For example:

Every year, the Chamber sponsors *Spring and Fall Craft shows* that bring Vendors from the local area as well as, from other counties, charging \$20 per vendor spot. The Fall craft show has grown from 7 vendors in 2014 to 31 vendors in 2015. 2015 was the first year for the Spring show. The 2014 and 2015 Fall vendors came from Birchwood, Graysville, Rockwood, Dunlap, Hixson, Dayton, Athens, Cleveland, Chattanooga, and Antioch, TN.

The second Saturday of December finds Front Street closed to automobile traffic for the Annual *Christmas Parade!* Vendors are set up; floats, bands, vehicles, fire trucks and police cars, and other groups arrive, all paying an entry fee. The streets are lined with people from all over to celebrate the season. The 2014 and 2015 vendors came from Knoxville, Fairview, Kodak, Evensville, Dayton, Crossville, Chattanooga, and Cleveland, TN.

These events bring in revenue that is then used to Sponsor the *Miss Spring City and Junior Miss Spring City Pageants* that are held every spring. A total of \$1300 is given out in Scholarships to assist these young ladies in pursuing their future higher education goals.

Every year, the Chamber sponsors "*The Layman Memorial Ride*". This is a motorcycle ride in which each motorcycle pays a \$20 entry fee. 2014 had 17 bikes and 2015 had 19. The money raised is then donated to the Christmas "Toys For Children" program in Spring City.

The last two events bring friends and family members to town for the events. While in town they are able to contribute to the city's revenue through purchasing gas, food, and other amenities, along with lodging.

Shake the Lake Celebration

One of the biggest events in Spring City occurs every year at the beginning of July. It is the 4th of July "*Shake the Lake*" Celebration sponsored by the *Friends of the Park* and the *Park Board*. Both of these are volunteer organizations.

This has an economic impact in several ways. The event brings vendors from the local community as well as from miles away. In 2016, the vendors came from Dayton, Chattanooga, Knoxville, and Grandview. This has an immediate impact through the registration for the pageant fees of \$10 per child and the vendor fees that range from \$45 to \$65. These fees, along

with the funds they receive from the City's Budget, enables the Park Board to pursue additional events and improvements at the City's parks.

The Friends of the Park also contact local individuals and businesses to become a "Sponsor" for the Fireworks. Sponsors contribute from \$100 to \$1,500 and receive recognition based on their level of sponsorship. These donations go directly to helping defray the cost of the fireworks.

The *Shake the Lake Celebration* brings thousands of people into Spring City for the Children's Pageants; contests, such as pickle and watermelon eating contests; craft and food vendors; musical performances; and....the highlight of the day....the annual Fireworks Display!

This Spring City Celebration is the largest in the county, bringing people from Dayton, Graysville, Chattanooga, Grandview, Rockwood, and Sweetwater to visit for the day and the evening fireworks. While in town, they support the vendors, the gas/convenience stores, grocery store, and restaurants. These are the measurable benefits of the Shake the Lake Celebration.

The intangible benefits of the Shake the Lake Celebration are bringing people to Spring City where they are able to visit town and see the beautiful setting on Watts Bar Lake, and, to meet the citizens of the town. This encourages them to return at a later date to partake of other amenities, and, maybe even move to the area! By moving to the area, they would, in turn, be contributing to the property tax revenue.

Cruise-ins

On the 4th Friday of every month from April to October, the Town of Spring City holds a *Cruise-in* on Front Street. This is a free event sponsored by The City. Since its inception in 2013, the number of vehicles averages 75 on a monthly basis. The event has continued to grow with some months even surpassing the 100 vehicle mark!

It began as a way for people to gather and celebrate their love of transportation. Vehicles run the gamut from cars, trucks and motorcycles to go karts, racing boats, and drag racing cars. Participants come from as far away as Texas, Georgia and Florida.

The restaurant owners on Front Street, and bordering it, indicate that they have a 20-30% increase in sales on the day of the cruise-ins. This, of course, varies if the weather is inclement such as rain or temperatures in the high 90s.

Even though this is a free event, a number of non-profit organizations are included. The volunteer Fire Department gives out educational material and water, and accepts donations. The Rescue Squad has a 50/50 drawing and a raffle for a quilt to help fund their activities. Several non-profit groups provide food as fund-raisers.

Singing at the Depot

The first Friday of the month from April to October, finds people bringing their lawn chairs and gathering by the Train Depot for the *Singing at the Depot*. This is another free event sponsored by the Town of Spring City. Musicians come to share their love of music to a willing audience. Music varies from Gospel and Country to Blue Grass and Rock and Roll. The Singing At The Depot averages 50 people a month, with the top month having 91 pairs of listening ears!

Sporting Events

Spring City has the 2013 and 2014 Clinch Valley AA League Middle School Championship Football team called the Bulldogs! It also has the Spring City Girls' Softball League, Spring City Dixie Youth Little League Baseball and AYSO Soccer. "Upward" Basketball teams/games are held at the local churches.

All of these teams encourage the youth to participate in the activity of their choice while also giving them an opportunity to try different sports. The teams compete against local teams as well as teams that travel from neighboring areas.

Recently, the SC Girls' Softball league petitioned the Town's elected officials to allow them to develop their own fields at the Nature Park. Up until this time, they had been sharing fields with the Dixie Youth Baseball teams. With the town's blessings, the SC Girls' Softball League, along with their volunteer leaders and donated materials, built their first field, with plans to add another full size and a smaller practice field in the future. The Softball League currently hosts small tournaments, with the plans to host larger ones as their other fields are completed, and, as Sports Tourism expands in Rhea County. An example of the economic impact of a softball tournament will be reviewed under the Sports Tourism discussion to follow.

These current projects, combined, provide opportunities for tourists to visit Spring City throughout the year, leaving much needed revenue in their wake.

Future Projects

Sports Tourism

Dayton's Professional Fishing tournaments have expanded in notoriety, numbers of tournaments, participants and accompanying visitors, and a major increase in sales tax revenue. The RETC has analyzed the last several years' numbers and concluded that there are gaps in the calendar which can be filled to increase revenue, not just in Dayton, but also in all of Rhea County.

As a result, in the summer of 2016, the Rhea Economic and Tourism Council (RETC) created a subset of their Tourism Committee to explore special events...namely Sports Tourism. This new "*Special Events Committee*" is comprised of persons from all ends of the county. They will be "looking at travel sports for tourism income". One of the ideas being explored is to bring

tournaments to Rhea County that utilize ALL of the available venues. For example, a basketball tournament would use the gyms at the High School, the elementary and middle schools, the church gyms, and RC3 (Rhea County Community Center), the facility that now runs what was the “Y” .

Gary K Alexander, during the May 2015 TBEDC 4-day course, presented “Sports Tourism Facts & Figures” that support this new committee’s goal.

#1 Dr. Lisa Delphy Neirotti from The George Washington University’s 2014 study showed that Sports Tourism is an \$8.7 BILLION industry in the United States.

#2 Sports Tourism accounts for 14% of overall travel and tourism in the U.S.

#3 Sports Tourism is *resistant* to economic downturn

#4 Sports Tourism is currently experiencing unprecedented growth.

Mr. Alexander’s “Case Study: Music City Softball” also demonstrated the economic impact of Sports Tourism. This tournament was comprised of 24 teams, 16 were from out-of-town and 8 were local teams. The competition dates were Friday night through Sunday morning. Each team had 12 players and 2 coaches. The out-of-town teams averaged 1.75 guests per athlete, while the local teams averaged 2.5 guests per athlete.

These numbers translate to an average of \$200 per day per person for the out-of-town teams/fans, and an average of \$50 per day per person for local teams/fans. The total economic impact from just this *one tournament* resulted in \$343,200 spent in one weekend! Depending on the local/state taxes for a specific community.....that is a tremendous boost to a local economy!!

Spring City’s sports teams already have tournaments, but on a smaller scale. Working together with the new Sports Tourism Committee and the amenities available in all of Rhea County, it is conceivable that the local teams, using additional fields and courts, will be able to participate in more and larger tournaments, thus creating a significant economic impact. This economic impact will also provide the potential opportunity for additional lodging and restaurant facilities to be added to the community.

New Fishing Venue

Four years ago, this author inquired to several of the semi-professional fishing promoters about holding their events in Spring City and was told, in order to hold an event in Spring City, there had to be enough boat launch space and parking for at least 100 tow vehicles and trailers. Even with 2 Marinas and boat launches, the City could not achieve that number.

Dayton’s Professional Fishing tournaments have created an opportunity for Dayton to market itself as “the new bass fishing capitol of the south”. “Officials” in Dayton “say \$10 million in current local development follows directly in the wake of the fishing boom”. In fact, the

competitive fishing industry has “fueled massive sales tax increases and economic development, including the highest sales tax revenue ever recorded in June 2015” “generating nearly \$550,000 of sales taxes.” and the construction of a new Sleep Inn Hotel.” The new hotel was necessary as many people were having to stay in surrounding counties to attend these events.

As the August 2016 TCED Marketing and Attraction Course demonstrated, when a small rural community is in close proximity to a larger city, this creates an opportunity to piggy back on programs or events in the larger area as well as to use the proximity in Marketing Strategies.

This is what the town of Spring City, in partnership with Rhea County, and RETC, are seeking to do. In 2015, the partners began to research the possibilities of creating a new park along Watts Bar Lake. The wooded area required surveys into the feasibility of the project, including checking on environmental concerns both with the land and the water. Having received approval, a master plan was developed with architectural drawings and cost involved. The Mayor and Commissioners voted to move forward with the project with the plans for it to be a long range project taking about 10 years to complete.

Funding options were explored. The Town of Spring City with the City of Dayton pursued an ARC grant of \$500,000. The Spring City portion is estimated to be \$226,912 with a \$60,000 match coming from the Town of Spring City in conjunction with TWRA and TVA. Spring City, in collaboration with Rhea County, has applied for a TVA Watershed Grant. The ARC grant is expected to be awarded in October of 2016, and, the Watershed Grant is anticipated to be approved and awarded in the near future.

Surveys and clearing of the land began in July of 2016. The Town of Spring City is also working on a TVA 26A permit application.

The first phase of the project will include a 300 foot boat dock, a 300 foot boat ramp, and a gravel parking area. The goal is to have this initial phase completed by Spring of 2017 which will enable Spring City to host Fishing Tournaments in conjunction with Dayton’s events, hopefully, as soon as the 2017 Fishing Tournament Season.

Future plans include adding pavilions, a walking/hiking trail and a paved parking area. A launch area for Canoes, Kayaks, and Paddleboards is also being considered. The long range goal will vary depending on available funding.

Lessons Learned

Tourism increases tax revenue by bringing people, and their wallets, to spend money on a myriad of activities from a monthly cruise-in to a major fishing tournament. These visitors spend money on lodging, fuel, food, and souvenirs. All of these items create sales tax revenue. This revenue is then added to the local coffers without causing financial hardship for the residents.

This project has demonstrated that a rural community does not have to be a stagnant one. It has also demonstrated that a rural community has many opportunities to grow when it realizes that it is not an “island” and does not have to rely only on itself. By partnering with neighboring communities and agencies it too can thrive and grow!

In addition, it does not have to “re-invent the wheel”. The TEDC courses encourage Economic Development Professionals to have conversations with Elected Officials, Government Agencies and other communities to share ideas and work together on programs and grants in order to benefit all the communities involved.

What at first may seem to be an area with little amenities, quite often there are many “hidden” gems. These gems need to be identified and promoted!

One of the goals of this project, going forward, is to share this project with the local elected officials and others with a vested interest in economic development and growth to encourage them to continue pursuing projects and activities that will enhance the quality of life, and, thereby, creating *a positive economic impact*.

Conclusion

Rural communities with a minimal property tax base and limited available space for industrial expansion can thrive and grow when they explore and promote Tourism. Tourism is a facet of economic development that can produce significant tax revenue increases by encouraging visitors to spend their money in your town!

Tourism Makes a Splash in Rural East Tennessee

Resources

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