

**Testimony in support to fully fund Howard County Executive's fy16 proposed budget for the Howard County Tourism Council at \$1,075,800 as presented to the Howard County Council on Wednesday, April 29, 2015.**

Good evening Councilchair Sigaty and members of the County Council. The Tourism Team is delivering to you a handy note pad, made out of recycled paper with an attached dicut pen, so that you can TAKE NOTE that the vibrant and diverse tourism industry in Howard County is benefiting from our sales and marketing initiatives.

I am Rachelina Bonacci, the CEO of the Howard Council Tourism Council and I reside in the Village of Dorsey's Search. I THANK YOU for not only the time to testify this evening but for the many, many years of investment in Tourism.

Tonight, I respectfully request that you fully fund the Howard County Executive's fy16 budget for the Tourism Council at \$1,075,800 as derived from the outstanding performance over the years of the dedicated and legislated hotel tax. For all of us on the award-winning Tourism Team and our Board of Directors, it is an honor to work with and for the citizens and businesses of Howard County to sway travelers from nearby and faraway for a daytrip, week night or weekend stay.

So we all know that Howard County is home to Merriweather Post Pavilion, a top regional tourist attraction for nearly 50 years that still tops *Billboard's* and *Rolling Stone's* list of best places for live music. So tonight, I thought I'd give you a fy15 Tourism Team Top 10 list of TA-DAHs that is helping ROCK the Comptroller's designated tourism taxes!

#10

Co-hosted Ellicott City Plein Air with our BFFs the Arts Council as part of the summer Arts Al Fresco campaign encouraging everyone to enjoy cultural happenings outdoors.

# 9

With our new COO we are authoring and activating a 3-year strategic plan while applying for industry accreditation all in preparation for Columbia's 50<sup>th</sup> in 2017.

#8

Introduced new look, new logo, new colateral and a bigger and better *Visitor + Resident* guide.

#7

Hosted the hottest Summer & coolest Winter Restaurant Weeks EVER luring urban foodies to suburban fabulous fixe price feasts. And our lucky locals loved that we collaborated with the Chamber to celebrate our culinary scene.

#6

Greeted thousands of guests from all-over-the-world in our Welcome Centers in Ellicott City and Savage Mill (...still no one from Wyoming!), double dared Ghost Tours and braved 3<sup>rd</sup> grader field trips

#5

Launched new Great Golf Giveaway multi-media campaign in the Spring and Fall with incentives to play all of the County's courses from Putt-Putt to the Pros.

#4

Promoted Family Haycations, March Gladness and FeBREWary BROmance all with prizes awarded via Twitter and Facebook and with the opening of Haven on the Lake created a new Wellness area on our homepage.

#3

Participated in regional tradeshow and sales missions with the Maryland Office of Tourism, Visit Baltimore and Destination DC. Hosted meeting planners and tour operators on site-visits plus generated leads via Cvent, all to benefit our hotels and meeting venues.

#2

Provided media sponsorship, on-site info tent services, hotel packages, traditional and digital PR activities for the County's signature events like the Columbia Festival of the Arts and Symphony of Lights, plus soccer and lacrosse tournaments

...and #1

Rocked out *The Washington Post* full-circulation of the Sunday travel section AND local living touting Ellicott City as THE destination for shopping and history sprees reaching millions via newspapers on their doorsteps and in-hands on their iEverything's.

So looking forward what's now and what's next for fy16? We've issued an RFP for a new responsive design fully-optimized visually stunning website. We'll be investing in destination videos since YouTube is top search engine especially when people plan travel. We're developing a geocache trail for the Patapsco Valley and releasing a super cool something in July, that for now, is Top Secret, so that our frenemy destinations don't find out. We'll continue to promote farm-to-table, dock- to-dish and add garden-to-glass, all good for culinary and agritourism. With Pope Francis' visit to DC and Philly in September, we'll promote Faith & Food local itineraries as our hotels will be sold-out as more people are expected in each city then for President Obama's 1<sup>st</sup> inaugural. In October, we are co-hosting the prestigious three-day Maryland Tourism & Travel Summit . Following the success of Restaurant Weeks, we'll do "Hotel Weeks" during the holidays. All of our expanded multi-media media buys from TripAdvisor to *Better Homes & Gardens* will continue to have a unique url and trackable call to action. And packaging, packaging, packaging every Howard County experience with overnight stays while introducing a "show your badge" for hotel guests to get deals while in town during their business meetings, weddings or sports events.

**So on behalf of the 10,000 folks that make their living in our tourism and hospitality industry often working nights, holidays and weekends, I want to again say thank you for your on-going investment in the Tourism Council. Your investment in our organization has a direct impact on the many locally owned small businesses and non-profits that are our marketing partners. Please know your talented and dedicated Tourism Team works 7 days a week, 363 days a year, creating award-winning promotions that has raised the visibility of our destination. As we always say, having fun is serious business, and now say, tourism is EVERYBODY'S business, as travelers who visit Howard County leave behind \$16M in tax dollars that are reinvested to maintain our resident's Nationally recognized high quality of life.**

Thank you,



Rachelina Bonacci, CEO, Howard County Tourism & Promotion