



## **Message from PACVB President Betsey Howell**

*Delivered to legislators and attendees at the 30th Annual Travel & Tourism Legislative Dinner - Tuesday, March 15, 2005*

My message to you tonight is short and simple – the Commonwealth needs to invest more dollars in tourism, because it is an industry that has continuously proven to provide an almost immediate return on that investment.

Pennsylvania's tourist promotion agencies represent over 14,000 businesses in the Commonwealth, and these businesses contributed over three million seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars in membership investments to our bureau's. These 14,000 plus businesses employ hundreds of thousands of people which demonstrates one thing - Tourism is extremely important to Pennsylvania and the livelihood of so many of your constituents! Why are the efforts of CVB's important? I think a recent article in our local paper that quoted two of my hoteliers sums it up - "working with the visitors bureau has made a difference. They're our voice to the outside world. The bureau works to generate interest in Centre County in people that aren't coming here for another reason." "They go more places to sell Centre County than we could possibly get to".

I'm sure you would hear the same response from every other business that relies on tourism with regard to the work of the CVB's.

Through our promotional efforts, your local CVB representatives play a significant role in building better communities and adding revenues to the local economy. Our job is to promote and market the cities, towns and villages of Pennsylvania with the sole purpose of getting people to visit whether for leisure purposes or meetings and conventions. Our success in bringing in these visitors generates spending at local businesses and tax revenues for our local governments and the Commonwealth, which are used for a variety of other initiatives.

In fact, in 2003 *Spending by travelers in Pennsylvania totaled over 23 billion dollars!*  
But we need the financial resources to continue the successful marketing and promotion of Pennsylvania that will attract even more visitors and ultimately generate more revenues.

Through the continued support from the administration and you, our Legislators, and the commitment and dedication of the Convention and Visitors Bureaus, we will succeed in fostering the continued growth of tourism in Pennsylvania.

In accordance with the Matching Funds Law guidelines, our CVB's are eligible to receive over \$32 million from the matching funds program. But, as of this very moment there is only \$10.4 million allocated in the budget for the matching funds program – a decrease of 5%! While 5% may not sound like a lot to you, to the visitors bureaus it will create quite a challenge because our costs to market and promote Pennsylvania continue to increase every year. In addition, many CVB's are being challenged at home by County Commissioners who want to take control of the hotel tax revenues. These Commissioners are not interested in using the hotel tax for tourism marketing and promotion but for infrastructure and other purposes that in most cases have nothing to do with tourism. Yes, there have been instances when hotel tax dollars were used to build museums, but without money to promote it, who will know about it? They are singling out the lodging industry as a means to fund initiatives that do not benefit the traveler but only the local community. It's tax abuse at it's finest.

We are here tonight to ask for your commitment to four items -

1. increasing the matching funds by 5 million dollars
2. increasing the regional marketing initiatives by 5 million dollars
3. increasing DCED's tourism marketing budget by 5 million dollars.

These are all amounts we believe are very doable, justifiable, as well as necessary for us to move forward in making Pennsylvania a top destination for visitors.

And last, but not least,

4. We need you to help us stop the abuse of hotel tax dollars. These dollars should be used by the cvb's for promotion and marketing – not highways, museums, prisons, or fire training sites. Bottom line – if an area isn't promoted, nobody will know about it which means nobody will be staying at the lodging properties, so, no hotel tax is generated – EVERYBODY LOOSES, and that includes you and the people you represent!

In closing, let me say this - The CVB's in Pennsylvania are ready to go – we want to help, and we can help. But your investment in the matching funds program, the RMI program and DCED's tourism marketing budget along with your commitment to making sure the hotel tax is used by the CVB's for tourism promotion and marketing is critical to the continued success of tourism in Pennsylvania.