

## Building businesses around tourism a key GCAC goal

*This is fourth in a series by the Greater Crisfield Action Coalition about the importance of an action plan and its goals and objectives.*

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Tourism is one of the largest industries in the world, at \$15.4 billion in Maryland alone. With the decline of manufacturing and seafood enter-

prises in Crisfield, tourism remains the single greatest opportunity for our economic recovery based on our location on the waterfront and the assets we have, such as Tangier and Smith islands, Janes Island State Park, Somers Cove Marina, the Ward Brothers Home Place, our sunsets, crabbing, boating, fishing, etc.

Building upon our assets, the Greater Crisfield Action Coalition's Plan is to make Crisfield the number one "unique" tourist destination on the Eastern Shore — #Uniquely Crisfield™. It is a destination tourists coming from the Baltimore-Washington and mid-Atlantic region will enjoy as well as some of the 8 million tourists who are already vacationing in Ocean City, just an hour away.

In last week's article on "Branding & Marketing," we talked about ways to attract these tourists to Crisfield. At the same time, we must ask ourselves what people will find to do when they get here. To attract a steady flow of tourists will require that we also help existing businesses as well as attract and assist new

See Commentary — Page 7

County Times - 11/2/16

## Commentary

Continued From Previous Page

ones. Tourists want to be entertained. They want to eat, shop, and have fun. The more Crisfield can offer in its general appearance and entertainment as well as in the variety and quality of its restaurants and shops, the better. That is the focus of the "Business Building" component of the Five-Year Action Plan developed by the Greater Crisfield Action Coalition.

In the Action Plan, our goals for "Business Building" include aiding in storefront improvements for 25 businesses in five years, seeking loan funds for 25 existing businesses, and establishing a program to help start and aid 25 new businesses related to the tourism industry. The Action Plan is a "living" document which will be reviewed and modified as our city changes and grows. Other items which the plan outlines for consideration in business building include the possibility of a seafood market, music on the City Dock, and fireworks over the water.

In addition to the downtown area, our efforts will also focus on revitalization in the uptown area where we envision creating a beautiful, pedestrian-friendly space for residents and visitors to shop, eat, gather and enjoy.

By simultaneously working on business building and marketing our brand, Uniquely Crisfield™ (along with workforce development, which will be discussed in next week's article), we will increase the number of visitors to the greater Crisfield area and increase spending, which will drive business growth and job opportunities. More jobs will lead to more opportunities for our youth and an increase in home ownership. As businesses grow, opportunities for non-tourist businesses will present themselves too. Our goal is to increase the number of new tourists to over 70,000 per year within five years. We will use data to manage tourism through a Customer Relationship Management System and measure impact using traffic, sales tax and other data streams.

By the end of five years or before, through coordinated community leadership focused on the Action Plan, we

believe we can lay the foundation that will lead to a new Hotel and Convention Center in operation in Crisfield based on the demand and vitality the action steps will bring. Because the action steps are simultaneous, interrelated, and progressive, by 2020, Crisfield should be well on its way to becoming the most "unique" tourist destination on the Eastern Shore!