



sctimes.com

Coalition's goal is a greater Crisfield

Not a tourism-only economy but one that's 'tourism-first'

By **Richard Crumbacker**
Crisfield-Somerset County Times

CRISFIELD — More than 60 people from a cross-section of the community came out on a Friday night to the Woodrow Wilson Community Center give their input on how to make Crisfield better. This first public meeting of the Greater Crisfield Action Coalition was heartening for coalition organizers who are raising their own funds to not let a five-year action plan languish on a shelf.

The GCAC is a community development corporation that has 501(c)(3) non-profit status — something recommended 13 years ago in an economic development study by Michael Lofton. But Crisfield has plans going back to the 1970s, with the biggest and most expensive the \$185,000 Strategic Revitalization Plan by Peter Johnston & Associates that was accepted by city leaders in September 2008.

Last year a subcommittee of the Somerset County Long Term Recovery Committee put together a document for the Mayor and City Council that highlighted common themes from all of the prior studies, but it received no follow-up as well.

Charlotte Scott, president of the GCAC, said this time it's different because the coalition is raising its own money to start, nearly \$30,000 so far out of a goal of \$100,000. It has a diverse board of directors, and will have the people to carry it out. And its goals will be, "in the end...what our community wants."

There are five facets to the plan, with "like it or not" tourism as the economic engine that will drive all of the other components, said Jay Tawes, GCAC treasurer. He said the public may think tourism has been a mainstay in the past but no one has been trained or schooled in driving it. The traffic craft vendors, a seafood wharf or weekend music followed by fireworks could bring will be the platform for workforce development.

See **Greater Crisfield** — Page 9

Greater Crisfield

Continued From Page 1

"This is not a tourism-only economy, but a tourism-first economy," said Keith Campbell, a GCAC board member, adding that it has "tremendous strengths." He is formulating the workforce development piece of the five-year action plan that will partner with the Department of Labor to build up employees with training that will grow their skills so they become more valued workers for new careers.

With that training workers will be able to provide "white-glove service" but in Crisfield it will be called "white-boot" to localize it with the

image of rubber work boots. GCAC Vice President Paul Register, who will work on marketing and branding, said if a restaurant or motel has its staff complete a training course in customer service that business could display the "White Boot Hospitality" seal so visitors will know they can expect to be treated well.

"It's easy to sell something once," he said. "The hard thing is to sell them again," and if there is bad service, "they'll tell everybody." Also being rolled out is the trademarked moniker "Uniquely Crisfield."

As the economy grows storefronts will be improved, jobs created and with that more income where starter homes become possible. The formation of a neighborhood housing cor-

poration is envisioned with new and elevated existing housing. For youth, employment and recreational opportunities will be outlined, with a Crisfield Youth Council organized.

Suggestions from the public included comments to be mindful of the arts as an attraction to advice to use the new library as a place for outreach and education. For youth, working with Junior Achievement was endorsed, while for hospitality, health department inspections of some local eateries should be a priority before even considering service.

Allen T. Smith, president of ATS Consulting & Training LLC in Coatesville, Pa., helped drive public input, stating that the GCAC is committed to actionable goals. He said

the five bullet points — economic development, workforce development, marketing and branding, youth and recreation, and housing — are all "probably in the SRP" but it's "sitting on a shelf."

"This group is different," said Ms. Scott, who is also vice president of the City Council. She said the board comes from different points of view and is learning "to listen to each other." The Nov. 20 meeting was one where "We came to talk to you from the heart," with "no script." And as Secretary Darlene Taylor said, things now "appear to be lining up."

The next public meeting, this one focused on business, is 5 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 5 at the Tawes Museum. Visit GreaterCrisfield.org for more details.