Greetings!

As we speak, area sporting fields are being prepared for soccer and lacrosse tournaments, the crack of the bat is heard from both Ripken Stadium and Little League Baseball fields around the County, music fills the local concert stages, restaurateurs are arranging outdoor cafe seating and the gardens of Ladew and Rockfield beckon with their spring blossoms.

More than 1.6 million people visited Harford County last year and spent an estimated $320 million at local businesses. Whether they came for sporting events, cultural events, weddings or family visits, they experienced our County's wealth of activities. In this month's EDAB e-News, you'll learn more about the opportunities to promote your business to these visitors, and about the steps the tourism industry is taking to help you. In Business Spotlight, read about the Ripken Baseball Experience in Aberdeen. Fast Facts is chock full of statistics about tourism destinations and activities in the County.

For more information or to get involved in the efforts of the Economic Development Advisory Board to advocate for positive growth in the County, visit www.harfordbusiness.org.

Sincerely,

Eric McLauchlin
Chairman, EDAB

Tourism Means Business

Meetings, destinations, conventions, sporting events and weddings are among the occasions that bring thousands of visitors to Harford County each year. Those visitors stay at local hotels, eat in area restaurants and search for entertaining activities during their stays. Ideally, area businesses should experience measurable increases from tourism trade in the County. They should also see themselves as part of the reason tourists come to the County. Tourism isn't a vacation. It's a business that generates business.

In Harford County, the infrastructure for a successful tourism program has expanded over the last five years. Leading hotel chains, fine dining and casual restaurants, spacious event venues and indoor and outdoor recreational facilities are now part of the landscape. Communications vehicles designed to raise awareness of the tourism infrastructure, like the Harford County Visitors' Guide and tourism website, give visitors an overview of the available attractions. After a long pursuit of a lodging tax for Harford County hotels, we also now have a possible revenue stream for tourism marketing efforts. The enabling of the tax brings new possibilities for tourism promotion and growth.

According to Patti Parker, chairman of the Harford County Tourism Advisory Board, "Tourism is a sound investment. It returns money back to the County. If distributed correctly, the lodging tax revenue will do its job," she said. She noted the revenue can be used to further promote the County's assets to both visitors and residents.

Communicating about the infrastructure to these audiences is essential. Many Harford County residents don't even realize what they have right in their own backyards. Strategically, Parker says the Tourism Advisory Board is taking steps to apply for 501C6 status, which would significantly expand the ability to promote...
tourism in the County. The proposed organization, called Visit Harford!, would be led by tourism industry experts, which Parker says will allow greater flexibility. Marketing possibilities abound with ways for local businesses to reach visitors with their products and services - from information packets with coupons provided by the hotels to event invitations redeemable during the visitors' stays. The mission of Visit Harford! is to help the County's businesses reach tourists more effectively through sports, recreation, dining and historic sites.

The sports infrastructure - including Ripken Stadium and Cedar Lane Regional Park - is responsible for significant visitor numbers, and in turn, business traffic. Ripken Stadium hosts over 200 events per year, including 38 minor league baseball games. While many of its event attendees are Harford County residents and their guests, Ripken Stadium also works to attract people from neighboring counties for on-site events, which open the door for consumers to dine and shop in the Aberdeen area.

The popularity of youth and championship sporting events has also made Cedar Lane Regional Park a leading venue for soccer and lacrosse tournaments. Since its opening in late 2008, Cedar Lane Executive Director John McHugh says the complex has brought 1.7 million attendees and 15,120 teams to the County. It has made a name for itself, with sold-out tournaments year after year and college scouts counting it among their necessary stops for recruitment. McHugh instituted Cedar Lane's signature Inception Lacrosse Tournament in 2011, with a group of 100 teams. Today, attendance has nearly tripled, with 280 teams participating. In addition, McHugh notes that since the excitement of the March 2009 Women's World Club Soccer Championships, Cedar Lane has been successful in persuading this tournament to return to the County in both 2014 and 2015.

A sought-after venue of 13 fields at Cedar Lane and 12 satellite fields at Carsin's Run, the sports destination is ideally positioned to draw crowds who have the ability to invest in dining, shopping and exploring the surrounding area. McHugh attributes the ability to secure larger tournaments to the Carsin's Run "overflow" fields. For example, McHugh notes that the LAX Inception Tournament, which was Cedar Lane's second largest tournament last year with 21,000 attendees, has counted on the combination of fields to meet its needs. "Our fields have allowed this tournament to continue to grow. It was sold out within 90 minutes last September, and we're seeing the same enthusiasm from other groups because of the field availability," he said.

A captive audience for weekends at a time, these visitors can be turned into business customers with the right partnerships and promotions. This is an audience that seems to experience continued growth; regardless of economic conditions. "When times are tough, people may cut down on their spending, but they don't skimp on their children's sports," said Parker. "We need to make sure these people who come to Harford County for tournaments are out seeing what the County has to offer."

Promoting additional accolades like Havre de Grace's selection to the Smithsonian Magazine's list of "America's 20 Best Small Towns," and business partnerships like the University of Maryland Upper Chesapeake Health Center's donation of an electronic scoreboard, to be unveiled this season at Cedar Lane, will help to increase tourism traffic and business potential.

Elsewhere in the County, entertainment venues such as the new APGFCU Arena and the Harford Community College stages are bringing recognizable theater, music and cultural arts performances to our backyards. They are affording residents the opportunity to stay local for cost-effective and professional performances. Historical sites, botanical gardens and outdoor recreation are all part of the draw for tourists. They seem to call, "Visit Harford!" and they do mean business.

Business Spotlight: Ripken Baseball

Perseverance. Integrity. Community. Passion. These are just some of the characteristics used to define Ripken Baseball. A mainstay in Aberdeen and a household word nationwide, the organization draws thousands to Harford County each year with its youth baseball programs - from clinics and camps to tournaments and the Cal Ripken World Series. According to its website, the Ripken Way "shapes every experience with our brand - we celebrate the customer, we make it fun and we align every experience with our purpose to forge the future of baseball."

Ripken Baseball was founded by Bill Ripken and his brother, Cal Jr., after retirement from professional baseball. The Aberdeen location is one of two Ripken Experiences in the United States. The second is in Myrtle Beach, SC. The Ripken Experiences boast major-league quality fields with covered dugouts and lights, designed to provide young ball players with a big-league experience. Aberdeen’s facility has seven fields, including a full-sized replica of Yankee Stadium, as well as youth-sized versions of Oriole Park at Camden Yards, Wrigley Field, Fenway Park and Memorial Stadium. In addition, 15 professional-grade batting cages and an infield training island round out the resources for the young baseball player.

The Ripken Experience in Aberdeen hosts a variety of activities. The organization offers the well-known Ripken baseball camps that provide young athletes a week-long opportunity to develop their skills. Get Out and Play clinics, sponsored by Giant Foods, encourage activity for young children and offer education on healthy eating. The clinics are free and available to the first 150 to register on-line. Tournaments and the World Series are the final part of the excitement at Ripken Baseball. Their annual events bring thousands
of tourists to Harford County, frequenting the area’s shops, restaurants and entertainment venues. Ripken Baseball supports numerous community organizations, including the Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation, which brings baseball and softball-themed programs about critical life lessons to disadvantaged young people.

**Fast Facts**

- Harford County Tourism generated more than $10 million in visitor-related state and local tax revenue in 2013.
- The Tourism industry supports over 6,000 jobs in Harford County.
- Of the locations visited in 2013, Cedar Lane Regional Park drew the most visitors at 510,400, followed closely by Ripken Stadium at 350,000.
- Events throughout Harford County drew over 282,000 people last year. The best-attended events were the Darlington Apple Festival and the Seafood Festival.
- Cedar Lane Regional Park has 19 major tournaments scheduled for 2014, projected to bring 3,780 teams to the park with nearly 300,000 attendees.
- Since 2008, Cedar Lane Regional Park events have had an estimated economic impact of more than $156 million on the local economy. The tournaments provide well over 200 jobs to the local economy each year, as well as hundreds of thousands of visitors who stay in local hotels, eat in area restaurants and visit Harford County events and facilities.

*Sources: 2013 Harford County Tourism Annual Report; Cedar Lane Regional Park statistics*

David R. Craig, Harford County Executive

The Harford County Economic Development Advisory Board consists of a number of subcommittees - including technology, workforce development, finance, tourism, and land use - dedicated to the positive growth and Economic Development of Harford County.