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# **OWENSBORO DESTINATION ASSESSMENT REPORT**

**DAVIESS COUNTY, KY**  
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# EXPERIENTIAL ASSESSMENT

## TABLE OF CONTENTS:

<b>PROJECT OVERVIEW AND SITUATIONAL APPRAISAL .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>ASSESSMENT ORGANIZATION RECAP .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>KEY FINDINGS – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>ASSESSMENT NOTES AND PARTNER MEETINGS .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>NEXT STEPS .....</b>	<b>18</b>

# **OWENSBORO DESTINATION ASSESSMENT REPORT**

## **PROJECT OVERVIEW AND SITUATIONAL APPRAISAL**

The Daviess County Fiscal Court and Visit Owensboro recognize that attractions and experiences are key components to attracting visitors, creating economic development, and developing a sustainable tourism landscape for the city.

As a result, Daviess County Fiscal Court and Visit Owensboro have undertaken a strategic initiative to assess destination attractions that drive visitation and economic development.

Veneto Collaboratory was asked to conduct a comprehensive Destination Assessment of the city and review a select group of local attractions. These include:

- Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame & Museum
- Owensboro Museum of Fine Art
- Owensboro Museum of Science and History
- O.Z. Tyler Kentucky Bourbon Distillery
- RiverPark Center
- Western Kentucky Botanical Garden

Secret shopping site visits followed up by onsite meetings were conducted during a series of trips from February to March 2019. The goal was to experience the destination and sites as a visitor would.

In addition to evaluating Owensboro sites and attractions, special attention was paid to identifying how attractions appeal to travelers.

The Assessment findings are designed to lay a foundation for destination development whereby Daviess County Fiscal Court, Visit Owensboro, and the Tourism Attraction Partners, working together, will create a more vibrant tourism landscape.

To grow the tourism economy on a year-round basis, stay competitive, and drive repeat visitation, the destination and attractions partners must create more-engaging and immersive experiences that will appeal to today's savvy travelers.

## **ASSESSMENT ORGANIZATION RECAP**

The following is a list of organizations that were visited during the Assessment. As a first step, most of the sites were visited unannounced to assess their experience as an actual visitor. Then, follow-up meetings were held with organization principals to discuss the current activities, visitation, and opportunities to partner with the Owensboro Convention and Visitors Bureau to drive tourism to the city.

### Owensboro site visits:

- Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame & Museum
- Moonlite Bar-B-Q
- Owensboro Museum of Fine Art
- Owensboro Museum of Science and History
- O.Z. Tyler Kentucky Bourbon Distillery
- RiverPark Center
- Western Kentucky Botanical Garden

## KEY FINDINGS – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Owensboro has created a beautiful riverfront landscape. It includes hotels, the Convention Center, local attractions (Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame & Museum and RiverPark Center) and visitor amenities (park, playground, walking paths). The infrastructure development needs to be supported by quality destination attractions that will drive visitation to the city.
- The city needs to focus on the ongoing creation of quality attractions, restaurants, and retail outlets. This will engage visitors and get them to stay longer and spend more money in Owensboro.
- The Owensboro attractions landscape needs to be enhanced to drive visitation and economic development. There are several local community-based attractions that do not currently have enough appeal to be tourism drivers.
- Owensboro Attractions Recap:
  - The Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame & Museum is a major tourism driver that will appeal to music lovers year-round. The mix of museum and performance venues creates many opportunities. The musical roots of Bluegrass music provide an opportunity to attract broad segments of music lovers in multiple genres.
  - The Owensboro Museum of Fine Art has an interesting collection of art. However, its marketing and promotional efforts, especially online, limit its exposure to potential visitors. This local attraction could become more attractive to visitors but needs to transform its sales, marketing, and promotional strategies and activities.
  - The Owensboro Museum of Science and History is a local community-based attraction in need of much support. The condition of the exhibits is fair to poor, with many elements in disrepair. The coal mine exhibit could have visitor appeal but needs to be refreshed and enhanced.
  - O.Z. Tyler Kentucky Bourbon Distillery is part of the Kentucky Bourbon Trail. This is a huge opportunity for the distillery and also the city. On average there are 25,000 bourbon passports that are redeemed from customers annually. The opportunity is to get visitors coming to the distillery to spend the night and money in Owensboro.
  - RiverPark Center is a beautiful performance venue. Currently, in winter/spring of 2019, there are lots of open dates between performances. RiverPark should look at developing a strategy to enhance its business mix to keep the venues more fully booked.
- Owensboro needs to add more visitor-based attractions that will have broader appeal to attract a wider audience of regional visitors. Tourism-driver attractions will motivate visitors to spend more time and money in the city.
- Owensboro's current major tourism drivers include Bourbon, BBQ, and Bluegrass. These should be used to market and promote the city.
- There are several sites in the city with entertainment venues: Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame & Museum, RiverPark Center, and the Convention Center. While they all have concerts and events, the city should look at leveraging the venues to create citywide festivals and events year-round.
- The Wayfinding signage needs to be enhanced. Currently, there are no Wayfinding signs for Owensboro's major attractions at the highway exit ramps. In addition, once off the exits, there should be Wayfinding signs to take people to Owensboro's attractions and the downtown core. There is some signage downtown, which in several cases are too small, misplaced (street locations), or too close to the sites. Effective Wayfinding signs act as guideposts for visitors and also encourage people to stop and explore.

- Conduct familiarization tours of the local attractions for the frontline tourism associates at hotels, attractions, and restaurants, so they can refer and recommend other activities and attractions to visitors based on firsthand knowledge.
- Create a series of brochure racks with Owensboro attractions materials at each of the major attraction sites. This information will assist people in visiting added sites, extending their stay, and creating more economic impact for the city and tourism attractions.
- Add local touches of destination flavor to the Convention Center, e.g., Bluegrass instruments, bourbon barrels, BBQ, historic artifacts, etc., which will help tell the local Owensboro story. (The Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame & Museum gift shop has done a great job incorporating other destination attractions in the store.)
- Move the “Hometown Hero” Hall of Fame exhibit currently in the Visitor Center to the Convention Center where people will see it.
- Develop ways to connect and leverage Owensboro’s proximity to Nashville, connecting Country music and Bluegrass music.
- Look at building out Bluegrass music performance venues (beyond the Hall of Fame) in bars and clubs. This will add a nightlife component for visitors and locals.

## ASSESSMENT NOTES AND PARTNER MEETINGS

### BLUEGRASS MUSIC HALL OF FAME & MUSEUM

- ❖ The museum is a beautiful venue providing a tribute to the founders and legends of Bluegrass music.
- ❖ Upon entering, I was warmly greeted by a male associate who took my admission fee and gave a brief overview of the museum. I requested a map outlining the exhibits, but was told none existed.
- ❖ The first exhibit you enter is the Pickin' Parlor where people can pick, strum, and interact with the instruments. This is a great immersion experience. However, none of the instruments are labeled; it presupposes people know what they are, which is not the case.
- ❖ The instruments need to be labeled, especially for people who are not familiar with the different varieties of stringed instruments.
- ❖ Also, suggest weekly hours where there would be people in the Pickin' Parlor to engage with visitors seeing the museum.
- ❖ To the left of the Pickin' Parlor is the intro to the museum. There is no welcome copy, just a quarter-size screen video that does a series of interviews. Again, there is a presumption of Bluegrass knowledge. The screen needs to be bigger and a flavor or intro should be added to give context.
- ❖ Bluegrass roots originate from the musical styles of Blues, Jazz, Gospel, Country, and Ballads. This allows the museum to position itself with these genres and expand the offerings and exhibits to incorporate these musical styles and artists.
- ❖ As you walk into the exhibits, the copy is very dense for a 21st century museum. There are also very few hands-on interactive elements.
- ❖ There are multiple videos, interviews, etc., throughout the museum, which are engaging, but they compete with each other based on the volume levels of the sound.
- ❖ Elvis Presley recorded Bill Monroe's song "Blue Moon Kentucky," and it became a hit. Then, Bill Monroe re-recorded it; I wanted to hear both versions at the exhibit to compare them.
- ❖ What else did Elvis record, borrow, or steal from Bluegrass to create his style? Could an exhibit be developed?
- ❖ Rock 'n' Roll and Bluegrass mentioned Grateful Dead connections. Who else could be connected?
- ❖ Steve Martin is a contemporary celebrity who is a great banjo player. I wanted to see a video of his performance. (He would be a great performer with wide appeal to book for the theater.)
- ❖ Bill Monroe and Doc Watson. Who are other contemporary musicians in different music genres that they influenced?
- ❖ In 1989, Bluegrass became an award category at the Grammys: Where is the list of Bluegrass Grammy Award Winners? I want to be able to listen to the songs from each year that won the award.
- ❖ The power of Bluegrass to tell the story of a bygone era – great.
- ❖ Bluegrass music and the festival circuit is a great exhibit and insightful. Why not have a computer terminal listing the current year's festivals and events around the country? Can event stages be streamed in the theater?
- ❖ The oral history project area is interesting, but the computers and the area need an introduction. Then, next to the people/recordings – list who they are, why they are famous or influential. You need to give people a baseline and/or context to get and keep them engaged. Bluegrass disciples will know who people are; the goal should be to educate the rest of the visitors.
- ❖ I would also add some more women to the oral history project, even a few contemporary Bluegrass female musicians.

- ❖ The Hall of Fame room needs a video of the most recent inductees accepting their awards. The space is static and needs some energy. Past-year videos would also be interesting to see.
- ❖ In addition, create video clips of past inductees talking about the honor of being in the Hall of Fame and perhaps now doing a video about the Hall of Fame.
- ❖ Since the ceremony is held in Raleigh each year, is there a way to get inductees to Owensboro each year after the awards ceremony?
- ❖ The Bill Monroe memorabilia on the second floor is interesting. I wanted audio and/or video of him and performances.
- ❖ The theater is beautiful (400 seats), and there are upcoming spring concerts. If Bluegrass fans travel to shows, wouldn't they travel to the Hall of Fame? This means having concerts booked through the fall would be important. (I also realize the Hall of Fame just opened at the end of 2018, and this is the first full season.)
- ❖ At the end of my visit, I re-engaged with the same associate at the desk. He told me there were open jam sessions every month.
- ❖ I was also told that on concert nights, people bring their own instruments and jam before the shows – awesome!
- ❖ Interaction with a musician while in the Hall of Fame creates another dimension of the experience than just seeing the exhibits.
- ❖ The gift shop is well designed, with a great assortment of merchandise, music, and bourbon. The cross-promotion of bourbon – O.Z. Tyler brands is great. Very well done.
- ❖ There needs to be a brochure rack in the lobby that includes the other key area attractions in Owensboro. In addition, the associates at the Hall of Fame and at other attractions should be versed in what there is to see around town.
- ❖ On my visit, I stayed at the Hampton Inn & Suites. Upon check-in, I asked the two front desk clerks about the Hall of Fame (which is across the street). One associate said she hadn't been inside and the other said she attended a concert but hadn't been back to see the exhibits!!!
- ❖ The Hall of Fame needs to do a familiarization event for all sales and frontline staff at hotels, the convention center, and downtown restaurants. This will convert locals into brand ambassadors who can recommend the Hall of Fame to locals and visitors.
- ❖ Facebook
  - ❖ The Hall of Fame opened last fall and has 16,000 fans on Facebook.
  - ❖ There is a listing of upcoming events – great.
  - ❖ There are recommendations and reviews by 120 people.
  - ❖ Spring postings on Facebook are regular with lots of likes, which means engaged followers.
- ❖ Trip Advisor
  - ❖ The Hall of Fame does not show up under top attractions on Trip Advisor. It does, however, show up when searching for museums. (The listing should be indexed in top attractions.)
  - ❖ There were 91 reviews since last fall; 82 are very good to excellent.
  - ❖ The museum needs to ramp up its social media strategy. Since there are visitors, concerts, lessons, and other activities going on, there should be a more concerted effort to build social engagement. This will drive visitation to both the Hall of Fame events and Owensboro.
- ❖ **Meeting**
  - ❖ Met with Chris Joslin, Executive Director, and two of his associates to discuss the museum, current activities, and opportunities to collaborate with the CVB to drive tourism to Owensboro.
  - ❖ The museum provides the following activities:
    - ❖ Spring and summer concert series scheduled; still working on the fall of 2019.

- ❖ Three hundred people take lessons weekly at the museum.
- ❖ The museum brings Bluegrass music into schools.
- ❖ There is an open jam session once a month (first Thursdays).
- ❖ Projected first-year attendance is between 18,000-22,000 people.
- ❖ The foundation also runs the annual Romp Festival, 16<sup>th</sup> year, 27,000 people over three days in June. (People do not realize there is a connection between the Hall of Fame and Romp.)
- ❖ Chris wants to create and present unique music experiences with Bluegrass artists that are different than just playing another concert date at the Hall of Fame. (This is exactly on-trend, and if you do it in the shoulder or off-season, it will help the community. Real disciples and fans will travel.)
- ❖ Prior to opening, Chris spent time in Nashville at the Country Music Hall of Fame.
- ❖ There should be some best practices, strategies, and insights in networking with other music museums around the country. (Nashville Country Music Hall of Fame, Cleveland Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and others.)
- ❖ The museum is open to working with the CVB and Convention/Meetings groups to do receptions, dinners, performances, etc.
- ❖ At present, there has not been a lot of outreach to tour operators, motorcoach companies, and group leaders. This is an opportunity. Look at Louisville, Nashville, and other regional destinations as feeder cities.
- ❖ The Hall of Fame is open to doing familiarization tours for local front-line staff at hotels and attractions.
- ❖ The team is open to creating a brochure rack at the museum to cross-promote other activities in Owensboro. Likewise, they are interested in getting their materials at other sites in the city.
- ❖ A great signature attraction with great potential to drive national visitation to Owensboro for visitors and Bluegrass fans!

### **MOONLITE BAR-B-Q**

- ❖ A family-owned business restaurant, 350 seats, no Wi-Fi, and great food!
- ❖ Food/culinary is also one of Tourism's hottest trends.
- ❖ Fifty percent of the business at Moonlite comes from outside the county – visitors!
- ❖ The restaurant has been written up online, and received great media coverage and accolades.
- ❖ There is a brochure rack in the waiting area with rack cards on local attractions.
- ❖ The brochure rack and area will be reworked in conjunction with the CVB to enhance the visibility and materials available to visitors. There are brochures of local attractions!!!
- ❖ Met with one of the owners who is amenable to assisting Owensboro CVB and the local attractions to grow their businesses by referring and promoting other visitor sites.
- ❖ BBQ is one of Owensboro's key attributes and enhancing the visibility will drive visitation.

### **OWENSBORO MUSEUM OF FINE ART**

- ❖ Most travelers will visit the website of attractions before going to a site. If this were a precursor to my visit, I never would have gone to visit the museum.
- ❖ The Museum of Fine Art's website provides a terrible first impression for any potential visitor. I was on the site ten days after a recent exhibit closed, which was still highlighted on the home page, and

not been taken down! Building an appealing, easy-to-navigate WordPress website is a must for any serious attraction, whether community- or visitor-based.

- ❖ Upon arrival, I was greeted by two people at the front desk. I was given a quick overview of the buildings, but the associates didn't have a floor plan of the buildings and exhibits.
- ❖ I inquired what not to miss and was told to see everything.
- ❖ First stop was at the Smith House to see four galleries of paintings, furnishings, china, and art objects.
- ❖ The pieces are the collection that belong to the museum. There are cards that note the period of the piece and donors.
- ❖ There is no connection between the house and the art collection.
- ❖ Classical music was playing in the background – a nice touch.
- ❖ Kaleidoscope Kave, a closet converted into an interactive exhibit, was fun, but the space was too narrow. The exhibit was also out of place given the nature of the Smith House.
- ❖ Art Land, a kids' space for art projects, looks like fun to immerse kids – also out of place in the Smith House.
- ❖ The Kentucky Art Collection of 19<sup>th</sup> century works was downstairs. Walking into the room was reminiscent of being in a funeral home. (I was looking for a body – none there, happily.)
- ❖ There was an associate at the desk who I engaged with; however, he seemed to have very limited knowledge of why the art hanging in the gallery was meaningful.
- ❖ Religious art occupies a good deal of the museum space. This is composed of the stained-glass window collection plus religious objects.
- ❖ The stained-glass windows have an interesting story. I wanted pictures of the original church they came from and the people who helped to make the collection possible.
- ❖ Gregorian Chant was a nice sensory element to set the mood.
- ❖ The other religious objects were interesting to me because of my faith tradition. Not sure if the size of the religious collection will have wide visitor appeal.
- ❖ Native American artifacts and paintings were notable and interesting. They were interspersed with other paintings, probably due to space constraints.
- ❖ The Joe Downing paintings gifted to the museum are beautiful and interesting. I asked about the connection to the art and Owensboro due to the number of paintings, but nobody knew the story.
- ❖ There were a few other galleries that were closed due to the installation of an exhibit.
- ❖ Some interesting pieces, and the associates need to be able to engage with visitors.
- ❖ The galleries were well maintained and even with the space constraints, the artifacts well displayed.
- ❖ I was the only person, other than staff, in the museum.
- ❖ After engaging with the associate in the Kentucky Collection, I was followed for the rest of my visit – a bit creepy.
- ❖ Facebook
  - ❖ The museum seems to be posting between two to four times per month about news, exhibits, etc., to engage with their fans. However, for the number of people purported to visit the museum, the number of likes is very low on posts.
  - ❖ In the photos section, Christmas pictures come up first, which gives the impression of a static site. Photos of 2019 exhibits need to be added.
  - ❖ The museum shows 3,200 followers. If there are 70,000 people annually, the museum should be creating a social media engagement strategy to build social proof and credibility with locals and visitors.
- ❖ Trip Advisor
  - ❖ The museum is listed as #12 of 24 things to do in Owensboro.

- ❖ There are only seven reviews, which is very light; however, all are very good or excellent. This means once people get in the door, they are very pleased.
- ❖ The museum needs to build its social media presence and engagement on Facebook and Trip Advisor to drive engagement and visitation.

#### ❖ **Meeting**

- ❖ Met with Mary Bryan Hood, the Museum Director, who took me on a tour to familiarize me with the museum and its collections.
- ❖ The museum has four fulltime staff.
- ❖ While we were in the museum, there were no other visitors.
- ❖ The museum has a collection of between 4,000 and 4,500 paintings and artifacts. The mission of the museum is to document the cultural history of Western Kentucky.
- ❖ The collection changes every three months and various artwork is moved, displayed, or put in storage.
- ❖ Artist Joe Downing, with multiple commissioned pieces in the museum, was originally from Kentucky, lived in Paris, and was mentored by Picasso.
- ❖ The religious art is a significant part of the collection and has been donated by local residents and patrons.
- ❖ The museum hosts children's art classes and camps.
- ❖ The museum hosts an annual juried art exhibition.
- ❖ According to the Director, the museum has an annual visitation of 70,000 people. This also includes outreach to schools and children's programming. However, this seems very high given multiple visits without anyone else in the museum.
- ❖ The museum also has an outside sculpture garden with some interesting pieces. (I missed this the first time.)
- ❖ Currently, the staff is not proactively promoting to groups (tours, motorcoach, etc.).
- ❖ Annually, when riverboats stop in Owensboro, their passengers visit the museum.
- ❖ The museum is open to working with the Convention and Visitors Bureau to promote the site as a venue for meetings and conventions, receptions, events, etc.
- ❖ Currently not promoting the museum to the convention center or local hotels that host meetings. These are also potential feeder opportunities.
- ❖ The museum is open to hosting familiarization trips for local lodging and attractions front-line staff.
- ❖ The art is interesting, especially the Western Kentucky art, which is regional.
- ❖ Currently, the museum is a local Owensboro community attraction. It has the potential to draw more regional visitors but will need to proactively promote and market, especially online, to engage potential visitors.

#### **OWENSBORO MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND HISTORY**

- ❖ Greeted by a clerk (man) at the front desk who was not very engaging. I asked about admission and was told it was \$5.00.
- ❖ I asked about what not to miss – no response. Then, the associate told me what I would see. I asked for a map with exhibits, and he gave me a brochure that listed the major exhibits of the museum.
- ❖ The first exhibit as you walk in is World War I artifacts. There is no heading or introduction to the exhibit; it just starts.

- ❖ Some of the artifacts are well marked, but others are not. There doesn't seem to be any cohesion, progression, or flow to the exhibit.
- ❖ There are a number of glass cases on the right as you walk in that have pottery and pots. (This is not part of World War I exhibit. The artifacts have very small notes; hard to read.)
- ❖ Twenty minutes into my visit, the fire alarm went off, and I moved to the lobby. It took the fire department fifteen minutes to arrive! After checking the museum, no fire or emergency was found – back to the galleries. The staff did not clear the museum!
- ❖ The artifacts on World War I were interesting but with no real context to tell a story.
- ❖ The model of a trench was not marked, almost missed, and nothing inside (soldiers gear, artifacts, etc.).
- ❖ There was an area that showcased World War I songs, with a great opportunity to add audio to the exhibit, but none available.
- ❖ There was a theater with six to eight seats, which shows a video on World War I; it was not working.
- ❖ I saw a sign about the Coal Mine Tour and inquired at the front desk. The associate told me there would not be a tour today because the person who covers at the front desk had gone home so there was nobody to cover. (It was a big out-of-town visitor disappointment.)
- ❖ The back of the first floor had a series of 19<sup>th</sup> century artifacts, some women's clothing/styles along with machinery and inventions. Again, no real introduction or storyline to the section.
- ❖ The model of the Columbian Mammoth was interesting. The information panel was a bit hard to read and was set back in the exhibit.
- ❖ There should have been more information on Mammoth fossils in Kentucky (context).
- ❖ Along the windows at the back of the museum were several carriages and other machinery. Almost nothing was marked.
- ❖ Speed Zone is at the very back of the first floor. It is dedicated to racing champions from the area. It also houses the Kentucky Motor Sports Hall of Fame.
- ❖ There were no sensory or interactive elements, which would be perfect for a racing exhibit. There were two TV touch screens, but neither was working.
- ❖ The cars and artifacts were interesting if you were into racing or from the area.
- ❖ At the very back of the exhibit, there was a room from the outside into the Hall of Fame.
- ❖ There were plaques and descriptions of the inductees (writing too small to appreciate or read accomplishments).
- ❖ This exhibit also needs added context to provide accomplishments for people from around the state, as well as accomplishments nationally (beyond Kentucky) in racing.
- ❖ Upon returning to the front, there were a series of local Christmas scenes. There was no heading or information about the artist.
- ❖ There was also an exhibit with stuffed animals in a darkened room. This led to what looked like an incomplete exhibit on the river habitat.
- ❖ There was a cave-like structure that you could walk through, with no labels. There were a number of stones that were laid out in cutout areas but again, no labels.
- ❖ The river habitat area was unfinished and not cohesive.
- ❖ Walking back into the animal area, there was an exhibit on passenger pigeons. The video (the only one working in the museum) was interesting and explained the history and attempt to revive the species.
- ❖ There were displays on passenger pigeons as well as a display with audio of other birds.
- ❖ The second floor has a variety of different areas:
  - ❖ The kids' play area is very popular with local families.
  - ❖ The area is clean and well maintained.

- ❖ Many of the museum's members are local families with children who come for multiple visits throughout the year.
- ❖ There is also an exhibit area about coal on the second floor. It provides background on coal and mining in Western Kentucky. The exhibit area is used to set up the coal mine tour. The exhibit copy is too dense.
- ❖ There is also a large area under construction on the second floor. It looks like possibly new exhibit space, but there are no signs indicating future exhibits – a missed opportunity to inform visitors.
- ❖ The third floor houses the Wendell H. Ford Government Education Center. The Center is dedicated to engaging citizens in the governmental process.
  - ❖ The exhibit follows the career and accomplishments of Wendell H. Ford.
  - ❖ The quality of the exhibits, layout, and visual appeal are far superior to anything on the first two floors of the museum.
  - ❖ This area is used to educate students on the workings of government.
  - ❖ There were some interactive elements and audio. I wanted to see videos of the Senator working on the Senate floor or giving a speech.
- ❖ The rest of the museum should take note of the exhibits, layout, and content in the Ford Government Education Center when designing new exhibits.
- ❖ The outside of the building has a sign, which is constantly changing.
- ❖ The scaffolding at the top of the first level needs to be cleaned to make the building more visually appealing.
- ❖ The museum location on 2<sup>nd</sup> Street is in the heart of the city and close to the RiverPark Center, with lots of activity and traffic.
- ❖ The overall condition of the museum is fair to poor. Many exhibits need refurbishment, especially exhibits that are not working.
- ❖ There is a lack of context and cohesion with many of the exhibits and displays. (This may be because the museum is trying to be too many things to too many people.)
- ❖ The contents of the collection have local appeal as a community museum/attraction with the exception of the coal mine, which would have broad appeal.
- ❖ The coal mine exhibit tells a bigger story that has broad appeal for out-of-town visitors as it is the story of not only Western Kentucky but also the state. However, not all elements of the exhibit are working, and there are enhancements that need to be made. Finally, the tour must run daily as scheduled if that is the expectation being set for visitors.
- ❖ On Trip Advisor, the museum is #13 out of 24 things to do in Owensboro.
- ❖ The reviews online were spread out over long periods of time; however, those focusing on kids at the museum were very positive.
- ❖ The museum should be encouraging its visitors to post or write a review to enhance social proof.
- ❖ **Meeting**
  - ❖ Met with Kathy and Debbie to discuss the museum, current exhibits, and potential for tourism.
  - ❖ The museum has 45,000 feet of useable exhibit space. It tells the history of Daviess County.
  - ❖ The museum is associated with the ASTC Association of Museums.
  - ❖ There are about 1,000 local families that have memberships.
  - ❖ In the basement is a model of a coal mine, which is based on the Pony Mine, the first in Western Kentucky.
  - ❖ The museum does get an occasional tour group, but this has not been the focus of visitation and it is not being actively promoted.

- ❖ The museum is in the process of building out the new history gallery, which will tell the story of Daviess County.
- ❖ The first part of the exhibit to be built out is a flat boat, currently under construction.
- ❖ The new gallery will also work to tie the Daviess County regional story to national stories of interest and relevance.
- ❖ One of the most successful fundraising events done each year is a program called the Voices of Elmwood (Cemetery). The program has been done for the past twelve years.
- ❖ Each year, local volunteers recreate characters of ten local people from the past. It is wildly successful, done over three weekends in September and October.
- ❖ Walked through the museum with Kathy to get a brief overview of the exhibits.
- ❖ Saw the Mammoth Cave exhibit, which in the middle had exhibits that were not working. In addition, if a guide was not accompanying you, you would not have a good sense of what you were viewing – most of the area is not labeled.
- ❖ We saw the new history gallery and the construction of the flat boat. This gallery needs renderings and signage telling visitors what the future galleries will contain and look like.
- ❖ The children’s area will be going through an update. It was build out in 2005 and sponsored by the local Rotary.
- ❖ The Coal Mine exhibit
  - ❖ The exhibit is in the cellar of the museum and only accessible via stairs.
  - ❖ Normally, the tour begins on the second floor with a brief overview of the Coal Industry in Western Kentucky.
  - ❖ Then, the group goes to the basement to the equipment area to put on hard hats.
  - ❖ The exhibit highlights a day in the life of a coal miner along with safety issues.
  - ❖ Kathy mentioned there is a tour script; however, my visit was an overview of the exhibits.
  - ❖ The exhibit showcases the equipment and tools used by the miners working coal.
  - ❖ The constraints created in the exhibit with physical space to model the confines of a mine – great.
  - ❖ Not all the exhibits on the tour were working, which does not create a great impression.
  - ❖ I would also label more of the artifacts on the tour to support the narrative and story of the guides.
  - ❖ There also needs to be an ending story about how and why the coal mines declined and how it has affected the region.
  - ❖ An interesting exhibit that needs enhancement. This has good potential for out-of-county visitors because it tells the story of not only the community but also Kentucky.

## **OWENSBORO RIVER FRONT**

- ❖ The walk along the river from the RiverPark Center to the Hampton Inn & Suites is beautiful. The development provides a comfortable gathering space for locals and visitors.
- ❖ There are walkways with seating and tables.
- ❖ The playground for kids is well constructed, well maintained.
- ❖ Restrooms are available.
- ❖ A great gathering place for families, individuals, and visitors to enjoy Owensboro. Great foresight and vision went into the development of the riverfront. The key is to keep it sticky with great programming.
- ❖ Riverfront programming will also drive visitation and fill hotels, creating economic development.

## **O.Z. TYLER KENTUCKY BOURBON DISTILLERY**

- ❖ Upon arrival, I met Karen who was the tour guide. She was pleasant, and checked me in.
- ❖ Karen asked if I wanted a drink or glass of water. On weekends, most people like to have a cocktail with them while on the tour.
- ❖ Bourbon – distinctly U.S. spirit, 51% corn in the recipe.
- ❖ The bourbon history of the site is impressive. Green River started distilling in 1895; in 2016, O.Z. Tyler’s parent invested \$20 million; 82,000 barrels of bourbon produced annually; tenth largest bourbon distillery in the U.S.
- ❖ Outside, grain trucks were unloading grain. Karen explained process of mashing, cooking, fermenting, and distilling the spirits.
- ❖ We went into the first building to see the distilling of liquid. We were also able to get a taste of the two versions of liquor being produced. This was a great sensory experience.
- ❖ Seeing some of the original machinery was very interesting.
- ❖ I’d recommend adding some more visuals in the first building to outline the bourbon-making process for people.
- ❖ The special barrels were great: First barrels, signed by workers, construction workers, eclipse barrel – fun, interesting, and engaging!
- ❖ The fermentation tank area, very interesting especially seeing the mash before being filtered. Who knew?
- ❖ Karen told a few great stories about the collegiality of Bourbon Distillers. One story was about O.Z. production issues and how another distiller helped out. It was great to hear that the Industry partners see a big picture for bourbon.
- ❖ We went back to the event building and gift shop where Karen talked about the various products.
- ❖ A very good tour.
- ❖ Facebook
  - ❖ O.Z. Tyler has about 4,500 Facebook followers, a great number for being open a short time.
  - ❖ Postings on the Facebook page seem to be fairly regular.
  - ❖ Since the distillery hosts monthly events with the Owensboro Bourbon Society, there should be postings about their events.
  - ❖ Every tour could have a posting with participants and where they come from. This would promote the tour and the visitors, and drive social proof.
- ❖ Trip Advisor
  - ❖ O.Z. Tyler is #3 most popular attraction in Owensboro of 24 things to do.
  - ❖ There are 54 reviews, and the vast majority are very good to excellent.
  - ❖ There are a good number of 2019 reviews; prior to that, spotty, which means that O.Z. could ramp up its social media strategy to garner more online reviews.
  - ❖ Also, suggest responding to reviews to engage with people, which will build brand ambassadors.

## RIVERPARK CENTER

- ❖ The center is set on the river and is a beautiful complex.
- ❖ The Cannon Hall Theater is a beautiful venue. The seating is comfortable; the view to the stage, even at the back of the room, is unobstructed.
- ❖ There is a Broadway series along with other programs booked into the theater. However, there seem to be large gaps between program dates from February through April 2019.
- ❖ The Cabaret Theater was not open when I was there.
- ❖ The BB&T Plaza is a beautiful spot on the river for receptions and events, and I assume at intermission when the theaters are in use.
- ❖ The venues at RiverPark Center are stages to program activities to generate attraction to downtown. Events and programs beyond traditional arts and cultural events should be considered.
- ❖ In addition to the RiverPark Center, the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame & Museum, which is relatively close by, also has a magnificent venue.
- ❖ City-wide programming and events that combine the RiverPark Center and the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame & Museum and the Convention Center should be explored. This would build attraction to Owensboro's downtown core.
  
- ❖ **Meeting**
  - ❖ Met with Executive Director Roxy Witt to tour the facility and discuss the performances hosted in the various venues.
  - ❖ The complex was built in 1992; the main theater has 1,479 seats. It hosts Broadway productions, meetings, community events, etc.
  - ❖ The Broadway series brings in six shows annually. The Symphony hosts five concerts a year.
  - ❖ The venue has served as a staging and launch site for Broadway productions, most recently Motown's pre-Broadway production started here.
    - ❖ Pre-production Broadway launches are good business to fill need periods. The cast and crew contribute to the community with hotel stays, meals, employing local tradespeople for building sets, etc.
    - ❖ The previous Executive Director used his contacts to facilitate pre-Broadway productions.
    - ❖ This business should be developed and promoted to producers. According to Roxy, it is not currently being actively promoted.
  - ❖ The RiverPark Center competes with other venues in town for booking shows, specifically the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame & Museum, the Convention Center, and the Sports Center. There should be some parameters developed around event venues and bookings to not cannibalize venues and events.
  - ❖ There is sensitivity around past bookings at the Convention Center, which could have been accommodated in the RiverPark Center.
  - ❖ There is also regional competition of venues in Evansville, Ind., and Bowling Green, Ky.
  - ❖ Since the RiverPark is independent, it does not get the benefit of being able to book multiple dates and site locations like national management companies.
  - ❖ Customer demographics are people in their 60s. This means the Center should focus on programming that will attract younger audiences.
  - ❖ In the foyer of the Center, there were no brochures or visitor guides to other sites or attractions in Owensboro. Roxy is open to exploring a brochure rack or materials. Likewise, cross-promoting the events at RiverPark around Owensboro would also be helpful.

- ❖ Roxy and her team need to be networking and connected to similar size independent theater venues both regionally and around the country to access shows, best practices, and innovative ideas to grow business.
- ❖ Keeping the Center booked with performances and events that will attract people to Owensboro will have powerful economic benefits for the entire community.

#### **WESTERN KENTUCKY BOTANICAL GARDEN**

- ❖ Visited the Western Kentucky Botanical Garden in early March, which was off-season.
- ❖ There was no activity in the gardens, greenhouses, or welcome center.
- ❖ It was easy to park, pay admission (on your honor); maps and information are readily available and easy to follow.
- ❖ The grounds are well maintained, and once spring arrives, it will be beautiful.
- ❖ The greenhouses looked interesting and could be great for special visitor programs.
- ❖ There is classroom space, also good for creating programs, make-and-take activities, etc.
- ❖ The large basket sculpture is great.
- ❖ The smart flower solar panel, which powers the garden's energy needs through solar panels, is an excellent exhibit and teaching tool.
- ❖ I would recommend scheduling volunteers and horticulturists/master gardeners during the season to engage with visitors and educate them on the gardens.
- ❖ I did not notice restrooms. In the cottage? Water available?
- ❖ An easy self-guided stop, it would be even better with horticultural experts and master gardeners.
- ❖ Well worth a stop and if possible a great attraction to expand as an asset in Owensboro's tourism landscape.

## NEXT STEPS

- The Owensboro Community has made major investments in its tourism infrastructure with a Convention Center, downtown hotels, etc. This has been supported by the opening of major visitor attractions such as O.Z. Tyler Kentucky Bourbon Distillery and the Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame & Museum.
- The city of Owensboro, the Daviess County Court, Visit Owensboro, and local foundations should work together to create and develop more visitor-based attractions in the city.
- Continue to build on Owensboro drivers of Bourbon, BBQ and Bluegrass to drive year-round visitation.
- Leverage the city's performance venues to drive visitation: RiverPark Center, Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame & Museum, and the Convention Center with events.
- Refresh and innovate the attractions landscape:
  - Owensboro Museum of Fine Art – build out an outreach, exhibits, and programming strategy to drive local and regional visitation.
  - Owensboro Museum of Science and History – determine how to help the museum. What is their mission and story? How do their exhibits and artifacts support it? Fix the exhibits and enhance the displays immediately. Assess their audience and how to best serve them.
  - Bluegrass Music Hall of Fame & Museum – create a strategic plan to build out entertainment and events that will drive year-round visitation, especially in the shoulder and off-season.
  - Create events with the Hall of Fame and Hall of Fame inductees to drive visitation.
  - O.Z. Tyler Kentucky Bourbon Distillery – build out new experiences and offerings beyond tours that will appeal to today's experience junkie travelers.
  - Look at opportunities with other regional bourbon distilleries and distilleries on the Kentucky Bourbon Trail.
  - RiverPark Center – create events and performances that will appeal to local as well as regional visitors. Look at events that will also build younger – millennial – customers.
  - Develop Broadway relationships to do pre-Broadway launches of plays.
- Visit Owensboro should determine the current as well as best customer market segments for the city. Then, develop a strategy to add attractions, restaurants, and retail venues that will attract these market segments.

The Owensboro Area has started to create the foundation to build a sustainable tourism infrastructure, which also offers quality-of-life amenities and experiences to local residents.

The ongoing development of quality visitor attractions, cultural/arts venues, restaurants, and retail stores will be important to the future success and the economic development of the Area.

Joe Veneto  
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