

Pocono Mountains, Pennsylvania

Balancing Economy and Education



Delaying school openings until after Labor Day ensures parks employing students stay open for more families vacationing at the end of August.

Photo Credit: CBK Mountain Adventures

When the tradition to open Pennsylvania schools after Labor Day in 2013 and 2014 presented an opportunity for economic gain to the local tourism industry, the Pocono Mountains Visitors Bureau made sure its stakeholders recognized it. The DMO educated its community on issues in education, society, and labor, encouraging them to speak with school districts to avoid cutting the usual summer park season short, as the parks rely on significant staffing from local youth.

Labor Day Tradition

Historically, the school year in the Pocono Mountains region and throughout much of Pennsylvania did not start prior to Labor Day holiday when fell on September 1, 2, or 3. They would do so when it was on September 5, 6, or 7, schools would open prior to the holiday. And when the holiday fell on September 4, each school district could determine whether to begin classes before or after the holiday.

2013 and 2014 presented an opportunity for the Pocono Mountains school districts to stay

with this historic trend to start the school year after Labor Day. The holidays fell and will fall on September 1 and 2 respectively.

Seizing an Opportunity

Starting the school year early in Pennsylvania considerably affects the tourism economy on both the supply and demand side.

The vast majority of workers that businesses including amusement parks and attractions, as well as hotels, restaurants, and event venues employ are school students and teachers during the summer. Tourism demand also suffers in

general as less families willing or able to travel in the last week of August or even over the holiday when school has already begun.

Recognizing the opportunity to take advantage of the traditional post-Labor Day opening in 2013 and 2014, the Pocono Mountains Visitors Bureau began its campaign to educate its stakeholders on the issue as early as 2011, to uphold the traditional academic calendar while supporting the local economy.

“We have the leadership responsibility to advocate for policies that support our visitors, to educate our residents, and to encourage our elected officials to understand the value and significance of our industry to the triple bottom line — economic, social, and environmental,” said Carl Wilgus, President & CEO of the Pocono Mountains Visitors Bureau.

Adding Context to the Numbers

Understanding that convincing local school boards and superintendents to delay opening school doors would be difficult, the DMO armed itself with state statistics on the footprint of the travel and tourism industry and how it relates to the very students and teachers the schools aim to serve.

For example, the DMO-managed webpage on the issue explains that opening schools prior to the Labor

Day holiday:

- Has a \$378 million negative economic impact on [Pennsylvania, in terms of] unrealized spending by residents and non-residents alike.
- Costs 2,348 jobs.
- Equates to a loss of \$17.7 million in state tax revenue.
- Leads to students and teachers losing \$45.6 million due the inability to work a summer job during the last week of August, which includes bonuses often

provided by employers for employees who work the entire summer season.

Leading the Charge

The DMO leads a coalition of interested parties and has thus far, successfully advocated for five school districts in Monroe County, Pennsylvania to adopt a post-Labor Day school opening. Wilgus and his team continues to inform the community and encourage residents to show their support on the issue to their school superintendents and boards. •



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Carl Wilgus, President & CEO
Pocono Mountains Visitors Bureau

Words from a DMO Advocate

Carl Wilgus

President & CEO Pocono Mountains Visitors Bureau

What is the Pocono Mountain Visitors Bureau's stance on advocacy?

The Pocono Mountains Visitors Bureau primary focus is tourism marketing and sales with advocacy being our second level priority.

What was the biggest win so far from leading a coalition in support of the post-Labor Day school opening?

We received recognition by elected officials, school board

administrators, community leaders and even the local paper that the tourism industry is the "most powerful force" within the county.

Now that you have five districts on board for 2013 and 2014, what's next on your advocacy agenda to tackle?

We're connecting the dots between education and labor. We currently aim to get various tourism occupations designated as "High



Priority Occupations" by the state's Department of Labor as it will open up job training funds and provide educational funding to institutions of higher learning in this industry.

Do you have any words of advice to DMOs looking to advocate for travel and tourism in their destinations?

First one needs to establish a plan and then commit to working the plan. Anything can be done but you have to put the time and effort into it in order to see the results. •



Carl Wilgus has held the position of President/CEO at the Pocono Mountain Visitors Bureau, a four-county DMO located in Northeast Pennsylvania since November of 2007. In addition, he actively participates as a members of several committees and boards for the Monroe County United Way, the Pocono Medical Center, and East Stroudsburg Universities School of Hotel Restaurant and Tourism Management Program.

Prior to his relocation to the Pocono Mountains Carl was the Director of Tourism for the State of Idaho, a position he held for twenty years. He moved the state's top tourism position in the spring of 1987 after having spent thirteen years in Sun Valley, Idaho working in various capacities for the Sun Valley Company.

A native of Tacoma, Washington and graduate of the University of Washington Carl currently resides in East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania with wife, daughter and granddaughter. He enjoys alpine skiing, golf, mountain biking, and reading.

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Learn more here: <http://www.ustravel.org/marketing/national-travel-and-tourism-week>

Keep up with stories from the DMAI's series "Travel & Tourism Advocacy in Action" throughout National Travel and Tourism Week. You can find all case studies on our blog at <http://www.destinationmarketing.org/blog>.

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