

Port Towns trying to build so that tourists will come

By Stephanie Samuel

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There's a saying that goes, if you build it, they will come. The folks at the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area, Inc. know that and they're already making plans. A small crowd gathered last week at the ATHA Heritage Tourism Conference to discuss possible tourism opportunities in Prince George's County.

With the development occurring in Hyattsville and the Port Towns Bladensburg Edmonston and Colmar Manor, ATHA officials are looking to it's historic past to draw newcomers and visitors.

"You want to spur new development and revitalization into an older community and the you want to get some one who finds value in the everyday," ATHA Executive Karen Jennings Crooms said.

For the Port Towns and surrounding areas, the everyday is its presence in America's history. The history of the Plummer family is historic gem of the Edmonston and Riverdale. Adam Plummer was a slave worker of the Calvert Family who lived in at the Riverdale Plantation.

In Bladensburg, there's the Bostwick House. Built during colonial times, it is the oldest surviving structure in Bladensburg. Bladensburg has teamed up with the University of Maryland College Park to maintain its claim to fame.

"This semester we are actually teaching a course at Bostwick," said Don Linebaugh, director of the Historic Preservation Program. Graduate students in the Bostwick seminar actually meet at the house and discuss ways to preserve the house and its other structures such as a chicken coop.

"The students' work will actually inform the actual [renovation] work," he said. Linebaugh and other students were present at the conference because they hope to a part of another tourism effort currently in the works, the Bicentennial Celebration of the War of 1812.

"We've already been working with the commission and the Friends of the Battle of Bladensburg," Linebaugh said.

The Bicentennial Celebration of the War of 1812 was definitely at the center of discussion. Kate Marks, outreach and partnership coordinator of the War of 1812, said the celebration is being modeled after Virginia's Jamestown celebration and is meant to be a big draw for state residents and tourists alike. "This is for Maryland," Marks said of the celebration. "This about Maryland for Maryland."

It will be an eye-opener for residents who may not have been aware of Maryland's historical significance. It's also meant to boost local economies.

"The economic impact of Jamestown was \$1.2 billion in sales," Marks said.

The coming celebration means there are a lot of preparations needed to turn county towns into tourist destinations. The Port Towns Community Development Corporation Executive Director Sadara Barrow

said as it stands now, the port towns are not, as she put it, "tourist ready."

"Our physical infrastructure gives a [more] negative perception than what it is," Barrow said.

Economic cutbacks in the state and Prince George's County are largely responsible for the slowdown in development and renovations. Still, Barrow said the town governments are doing what they can to revitalize their towns. She said the Port Town's Co-Op is actively embarking on a series of community murals to tie the towns together and create a collective landmark. Barrow also said is moving forward with planning for the Riverview project, which bring a wellness center, several apartment complexes and businesses such as sit-down restaurants to the Anacostia. Barrow says she hopes "the economy will be different by the time the shovel goes into the grounds."

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