



**Blackstone Valley Tourism Council
Annual Report To the Community
2011**

**The 26th Annual
Awards Dinner**

Thursday, September 22, 2011

President's Report 2011



The theme of this year's awards dinner is baseball, and why not? 2011 marks the 30th anniversary of the longest professional game, played at Pawtucket's McCoy Stadium, right here in the Blackstone Valley. On April 18 and 19, 1981, the Pawtucket Red Sox and Rochester Red Wings battled for 32 innings

before a break was called. The game resumed on June 23, before a sellout crowd of 5,746 and 140 reporters from around the world. Eighteen minutes into the 33rd inning, the Paw Sox Dave Koza drove in the winning run.

With that in mind, this report should probably begin with a memorable quote from a baseball player. There's just one problem. The most quotable man in the game has always been Yogi Berra, famous for announcing "It's déjà vu all over again."

That line doesn't fit northern Rhode Island. This is a place where déjà vu never happens. Every day brings something new, thanks in part to the efforts of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council. So let's skip Yogi and the baseball theme, and poach a quote from the organization's chairman, David Balfour. "The Blackstone Valley," he says, "has more to offer than any place of comparable size in the country."

That's true even during economic doldrums, or at least Bob Billington and his team make it seem so. Despite the current financial constraints, the BVTC has managed to maintain most of its programs, and even make them grow. Let's take a look at some highlights.



This year the BVTC will be expanding one of its most popular events, *The Polar Express*, a 90-minute, holiday season adventure aboard the Providence & Worcester Railroad.

Five more dates have been added to the calendar, for a total of eleven. The excursion train is drawing so many families that the boarding area has been moved from the Ann & Hope lot in Cumberland to the beautifully restored 19th-century depot in downtown Woonsocket, where more parking is available. The magical trip includes sing-alongs, Christmas coloring books, hot chocolate and cookies (now prepared by culinary students at Johnson & Wales University) and a visit with Santa Claus himself. Part of the experience, of course, is a reading of *The Polar Express*, the children's classic written and illustrated by Rhode Island's own Chris Van Allsburg.

The Fall Foliage Tour on the P&W keeps rolling, too. The train will leave the Woonsocket depot on a Saturday morning in October with

several hundred passengers on board, and meander across the New England countryside to Putnam, CT. There the day trippers will have several hours to explore the many antique shops and the city's fall festival.

The Rhode Island Cherry Blossom Festival, launched three years ago, is another success story. The May event celebrates the blooming of cherry trees along Roosevelt Avenue in Central Falls and Pawtucket, as well as the ongoing revitalization of the commercial thoroughfare. This year 20 more trees were planted, and the giant Cherry Blossom helium balloons used in Washington, DC, festivities were floated through the city. There was Chinese drumming and a lion dance by the Rhode Island Kung Fu Club, a rubber ducky race, a Latino music festival, a garden plant give-away and more. The Gloria Gemma Breast Cancer Foundation took over the Cherry Blossom road race, transforming it into an event that drew ten times more runners than the year before. Rhode Islanders also used the local celebration to collect donations for Japanese communities reeling from the earthquake disaster.



This year saw the expansion of Behind the Scenes Leisurely Bicycle Tours, a way to see the Valley that's both green and good for you. There are now 13 guided rides from Pawtucket to Lincoln, and two new trips from Lincoln to Woonsocket. The three-hour tours are scheduled from mid-May to mid-October, and they're advertised as "appropriate for all fitness levels." Sights include Slater Mill, the Cumberland hydro-generators, the Colonial Bakery (where riders might enjoy coffee and Portuguese pastry) and the Central Fall Provisions Company.

There was more good news for bicycling enthusiasts in 2011. An on-road route has been established linking the Blackstone River Bikeway with the East Bay Bike Path, allowing folks to pedal from Woonsocket to Bristol, a total of 33 miles. The 8.5-mile connector is marked by street



signs and symbols painted on the pavement to alert drivers to watch for bikes. The BVTC worked with a number of municipal governments, the National Park Service, the Governor's Energy Office and Rhode Island Housing to establish the route, which was inaugurated in July.

This year's Dragon Boat Festival in Pawtucket was bigger and better than ever. As 2011 marks the 100th anniversary of the Republic of China, which now exists primarily on Taiwan, that government sent the all-female folk troupe Musou to perform during the pre-race celebration. The Sept. 10 event -- part of the three-week Pawtucket Arts Festival -- also included a lion dance, Chinese drumming, and a Peking



dumpling eating contest. For those who've never attended, dragon boats are paddled long boats traditionally associated with China's Pearl River delta region. Racing competitions, long popular in Asia, have caught on in the USA and Canada in recent years.

This year the tourism council also coordinated efforts to bring Taiwanese performing artists who were touring the USA to International Charter School in Central Falls, where they spent a day and a half working with students.

More than 6,000 Rhode Islanders now claim Colombian descent, and each July the BVTC helps them celebrate that country's independence with a parade down Central Falls' Dexter Street and through downtown Pawtucket. This year the bash included something new: marchers carried massive flower blossom mosaics -- known as "silletteros" -- that were flown up from Colombia that morning. After the Rhode Island parade they were trucked to East Boston for another celebration.

Food tours are currently in vogue in hip cities around the globe, but the Blackstone Valley Culinary; Secret Ingredient Tour gives the idea a new twist. In most locales, tour participants spend an afternoon nibbling appetizers at one eatery and then another; here, the tour is an ongoing event. Every Wednesday evening diners gather at a different locally-owned restaurant, usually someplace that features ethnic cuisine or food unique to our region. They enjoy both a meal and a cooking demonstration.



For three years, the tour has helped area restaurants reach new customers, not an easy task during an economic downturn. The effort is still

going strong. Upcoming destinations include: Yamato Steakhouse in Smithfield, Andrew's Bistro in Cumberland, and The Burrito Company in Woonsocket.

The Blackstone Explorer, the tour boat the council purchased in 1993, continues to journey up and down the river. Passengers on the seasonal tours are often surprised to discover the river's shores have become a backyard wilderness, a habitat for to hawks, herons, mergansers and mallards. These days there's an environmental educator on board to explain it all. The Explorer also boasts US Coast Guard safety certification, and the three captains are all experienced, licensed professionals.



Buses are traveling the Valley, too. In May the BVTC sponsored seven No Place Like Home road tours, each with a different theme. The Country Fun tour included a pancake breakfast at Gloucester's Chepachet Farm; a stop at Burrillville's Spring Lake Arcade to play vintage arcade games; and dessert at Wright's Dairy Farm in North Smithfield, home to one of the state's best bakeries (and 120 Holsteins.) Ghost hunter and author Thomas D'Agostino was the guide on another jaunt that visited haunted and historic sites. And The Family Guy tour took in landmarks featured on Fox TV's animated series. Some highlights: McCoy Stadium, Wes's Ribhouse in Providence, and The Drunken Clam in Johnston.

For several years now, the BVTC has been working with the non-profit Confectioners Mill Preservation Society to save the site of a late 18th-century Central Falls chocolate factory, which once stood on the banks of the Blackstone. Plans to actually reconstruct the mill are now on hiatus, but candy king Mars, Inc. recently agreed to contribute \$35,000 to build an interpretive park and canoe launch at the location. The project would also protect a giant cottonwood tree, perhaps the largest and oldest specimen in the state.

Another project still in the birthing stage is the Rhode Island Music Hall of Fame. Turns out a lot of talent has come out of the Ocean State, from beloved hometown bands



to composers of international renown. In the very near future, their names will be recorded in a pantheon, to be located in donated space at the Hope Artist Village in Pawtucket

These days the BVTC is moving into a new area: sharing their expertise with the world.



When the BVTC first took off a quarter century ago, the Blackstone Valley was seen as a collection of anonymous suburbs and mill towns gone to seed; today the region is a leading northeast tourism destination, for both visitors and the folks who call it home. The strategies used here are very similar to those now promoted by forward-looking planners and tourism professionals. They call it "sustainable tourism" -- creating programs that respect the environment and the host communities, while building a stronger economy and an enhanced experience for visitors. The BVTC's success with those concepts has been recognized by the United Nations World Tourism Organization, the World Travel & Tourism Council, and others.

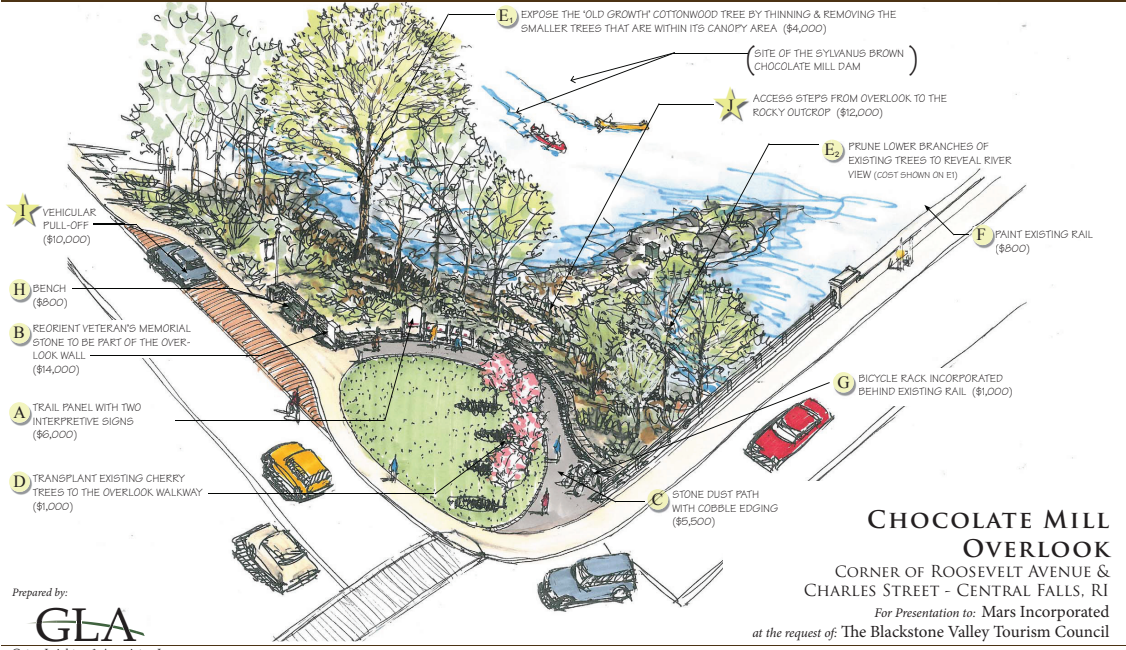
Now tourism planners from around the country and the globe are turning to the BVTC for advice. That's prompted Bob Billington and his team to move into education. They've put together the Sustainable Tourism Planning and Development Lab to teach their approach to others. Over the past six years, the Lab has conducted or participated in more than 20 forums and workshops.



For many of us, the ongoing recession has been a wake-up call. In good times we sometimes let money run through our hands, and that same careless habit often carried over to how we used our time. We frittered away our days without gleaning any real experience from them. Maybe during the good times your family vacationed in Orlando or Aruba. The rooms and the meals were as fabulous, or so you thought. But the hotel was just like every other resort hotel in the world. And while the waiters were polite, they were also anonymous.

Now that times have changed and we've tightened our purse strings, stay-cations are the rule. You might spend an afternoon canoeing on the Blackstone, and discover an idyllic wilderness in your own backyard. Or you could head to a restaurant you've never tried before, perhaps Thai Time in Pascoag or The Village in Pawtucket. You start talking to the owner, or the cook, or the couple at the next table, and by the time you leave you've established a lifelong friendship. Isn't that a great alternative to some resort that's so crowded, no one goes there anymore?

TELLING THE STORY OF CHOCOLATE MANUFACTURING IN AMERICA

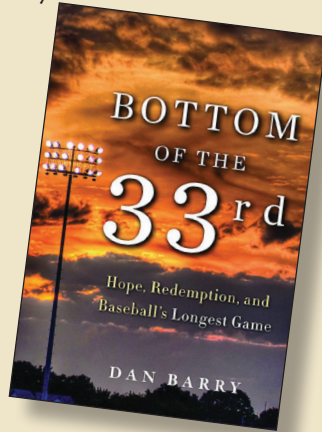


CHOCOLATE MILL OVERLOOK
 CORNER OF ROOSEVELT AVENUE & CHARLES STREET - CENTRAL FALLS, RI
 For Presentation to: Mars Incorporated
 at the request of: The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council

Blackstone Valley Excellence in the Arts

Dan Barry

Dan Barry is a national columnist for the *New York Times*. He has twice been a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and in 1994 was part of an investigative team for the *Providence Journal* that won the prize for a series on Rhode Island's justice system. He is the author of a memoir, *Pull Me Up*, and *City Lights*, a collection of his *New York Times* columns. He lives with his wife and two daughters in Maplewood, New Jersey.



Blackstone Valley Excellence in Business & Education



Margaret McKenna

Ms. McKenna has been president of The Wal-Mart Foundation since 2007 and served as president of Lesley University from 1985 to 2007. She currently serves on the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce and is a director of the Cisco Learning Institute. Ms. McKenna received her undergraduate degree from Emmanuel College and her law degree from Southern Methodist University. She was a civil rights attorney with the U.S. Department of Justice and held a variety of positions with the U.S. government from 1976 to 1981, including deputy counsel in the White House and deputy under secretary of education.



William Blackstone Society Induction



Eugene Peloquin

Eugene Peloquin organized a 66-volume archive chronicling the history of Rhode Island parochial schools. A retired high school principal, he volunteered to archive the collection of 150 years of catholic school history. The archive contains oral histories, photos and artifacts. The collection can be found at the Museum of Work and Culture.



Kathy Hartley

Kathy Hartley is the president of the board of directors of the Friends of Hearthiside. The group is committed to be the steward of Hearthiside. They promote the historical significance of the landmark and the cultural heritage of Lincoln. Hearthiside is considered to be one of the finest examples of an early 19th century Federal-style house in RI.

Footprints in History Award



The Community Players

The Community Players of Pawtucket will celebrate their 90th season this year, making it the oldest community theater in the Rhode Island. By the end of the season, they will have performed over 330 plays. Members of the theater are average citizens - teachers, nurses, lawyers, factory workers, students, housewives, secretaries, mechanics - people who enjoy the atmosphere of the theater, where the stagehand is as important as the actor.

3rd Annual ARISTA Award

The ARISTA is presented to organizations that regard as vital the protection and appropriate economic uses of the natural and human environment. It was inaugurated three years ago as an acknowledgement of the Sustainable Tourism Planning and Development Laboratory, for efforts to increase sustainable tourism in Rhode Island. We have since expanded the ARISTA to include organizations doing the same on a National scale. Due to interest shown from outside our borders, an International category will be developed in the future.

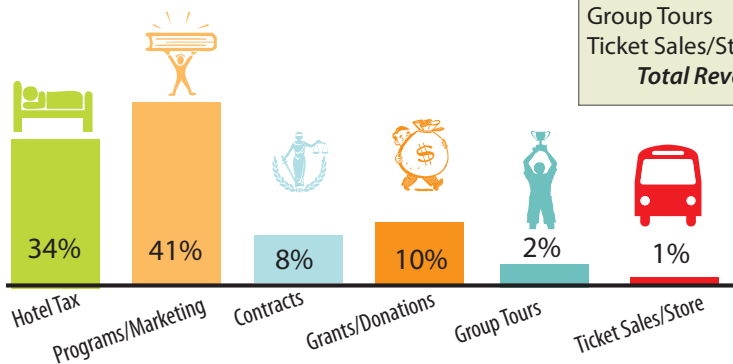
This year's ARISTA winners exemplify Sustainable Tourism principles in their efforts to improve visitor experience while involving the larger community and maintaining its values.

The 2011 ARISTA Rhode Island
KeepSpace
Westerly, RI



The 2011 National ARISTA
Tourism Cares
Canton, Massachusetts

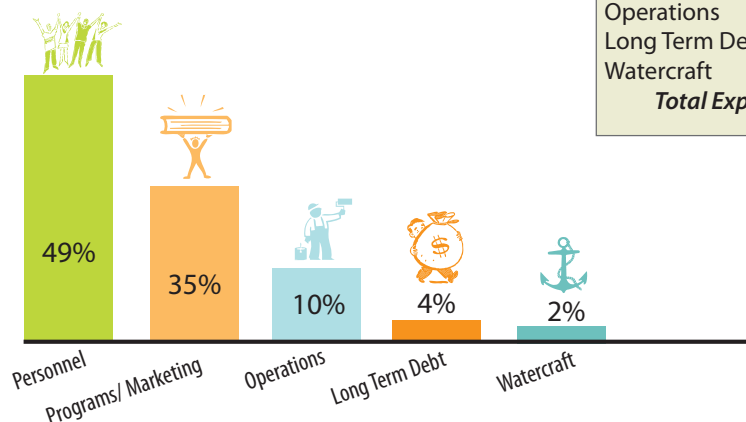
Source of Funds ~ 2010 - 2011



Hotel Occupancy Tax	\$290,594
Programs/Marketing	\$346,871
Contracts	\$66,800
Grants and Donations	\$88,698
Group Tours	\$20,139
Ticket Sales/Store	\$7,347
Total Revenue	\$848,348

Funding and Expenses

Expenses ~ 2010 - 2011



Personnel	\$390,029
Programs/Marketing	\$284,829
Operations	\$81,410
Long Term Debt	\$31,286
Watercraft	\$14,970
Total Expenses	\$802,524



William Blackstone Society Members

The William Blackstone Society is made up of people who have spent much of their lives making a difference in the Blackstone River Valley. The Society nominates and chooses its members each year from a wide list of nominees in the Blackstone Valley. This year we are pleased to welcome Kathy Hartley and Gene Peloquin into this esteemed group of Blackstone Valley place-makers.

David Balfour	Carol Metivier
Robert Billington, Ed. D.	Robert Metivier
Luther Blount *	Ben Mondor*
Michael Cassidy	Dana Newbrook
John Chan	Joseph H. O'Donnell, Jr.*
Gary Furtado	Leonard Panaggio
Wilfrid Gates	Thomas Shanahan
David Gulvin *	Rose Lavoie
Donna Houle	Tom Ward
Clinton Johnson *	John A. Worsley, Ph.D.
Betty Johnson *	Robert Conway
Al Klyberg	Peter Conway
Rose Lavoie	Helen Moroney
Louise Lind *	Peter Greenwood
David Macauley	John Gregory
Patrick Malone, Ph.D.	

* Deceased



Ken Salazar, US Secretary of the Interior meets with Bob Billington at the I-295 Visitor Center

The 26th Annual Awards Dinner Thursday, September 22, 2011

Twin River Event Center

100 Twin River Road, Lincoln, RI

5:30 ~ Reception & Silent Auction

7:00 ~ Dinner

8:00 ~ Presentations

Footprints in History Award

The Community Players of Pawtucket

3rd Annual ARISTA Awards

KeepSpace Westerly, Westerly, RI

Tourism Cares, Canton, MA

William Blackstone Society Induction

Kathy Hartley

Eugene Peloquin

Blackstone Valley Excellence in Business and Education

Margaret McKenna

Blackstone Valley Excellence in the Arts

Dan Barry

Special Thanks To Our
Host and Sponsors



Special thanks to **Sheahan Printing Corporation**
for the printing of our program.



The Blackstone Valley is where the Industrial Revolution began. But over the years the mills became silent and that chapter of America slipped into the history books. Today, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council is pleased to recognize products made from our region. From coffee milk to dynamite sandwiches, we're proud of the products being made right here in Blackstone Valley.

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Deb Fournier, General Manager, Hampton Inn

Tourism Council Websites

www.tourblackstone.com
www.blackstonevalleytourismcouncil.com
www.sustainablelab.com
www.dragonboatri.com
www.golfblackstone.com
www.blackstonealert.com
www.eventblackstone.com
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www.broadstreetexperience.com
www.blackstoneculinaria.com

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Pam Monohagen, Americorps VISTA Volunteer
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Rosemary Danforth, Group Tour Guide
Irene Blais, Group Tour Guide
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James Toomey, Blackstone Valley Visitor Center
Robert Dombrowski, Riverboat Captain
Kenneth Scott, Riverboat Captain
Matthew Prendergast, Riverboat Captain
Herbert Peters, Riverboat Captain
Raymond Massey, Riverboat Captain
Jeffrey Baris, Riverboat Captain

Blackstone River State Park Visitor Center Volunteers

Jerry Aissis	Minn Robidoux
Joe Billington	Bernie Plante
Bev Daignault	Jim Wilbour
Jim Fusco	Carol Majeau
Steve Menatian	Donna Mascio
Claudette Moore	Michael Moriaty
Eric Sjoblom	Gerry Noel
Ruth Pacheco	Tom Perkins
Lori Shaken	Joan Valaitis

Volunteers

Ann Thorndike
Anna Prymak
Barbara Leach
Richard Provencher
David Wescott



Since 1985, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council has planned and developed geo-tourism based programs for the Blackstone Valley communities of Pawtucket, Central Falls, Cumberland, Lincoln, Woonsocket, Smithfield, North Smithfield, Burrillville, Glocester. The Council works through a collaborative approach uniting the region's historic, natural, cultural, recreational, educational, and industrial and commercial resources. In addition, the Council actively participates in special events and public programs including the Sustainable Tourism Planning and Development Laboratory and educates tourism practitioners in place-making development strategies.