



BLACKSTONE VALLEY
TOURISM COUNCIL



2013 Annual
Report

The 28th Annual Awards Dinner

Thursday, October 3, 2013

Recognitions.....

Footprints in History

Stillwater Mill
Harrisville, Rhode Island

Blackstone Valley Distinction in Business

Central Falls Provision
Central Falls, Rhode Island
Athena's Home Novelty
Woonsocket, Rhode Island

Blackstone Valley Excellence in Arts and Business

Herb Weiss, Economic and Cultural Affairs Officer
Pawtucket, Rhode Island

ARISTA Prize - Rhode Island

Blackstone River Theatre
Cumberland, Rhode Island

ARISTA Prize - New England

William Catania, President
Catania Hospitality Group
Hyannis, Massachusetts

ARISTA Prize - National

Alex and Ani, LLC
Cranston, Rhode Island

William Blackstone Society Inductions

Michael A. Hebert, Historical Preservationist/Archeologist
Rhode Island Department of Transportation
Providence, Rhode Island
Daryl Sherman, Singer/Pianist
New York, New York

Special Thanks to our Host and Sponsors



Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, Inc.

Blackstone Valley Visitor Center
175 Main Street, Pawtucket, RI 02860
401-724-2200
tourblackstone.com

Welcome



David Balfour

As chairman of your board of directors, I am pleased to welcome you to the 28th Annual Meeting of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council. I want to extend my thanks to our members and especially to our dedicated volunteers without whose help we could not have met our objectives. Our budget has continued to grow, in spite of national and state economic restrictions.

In the past year, our growth has continued, and we have been the subject of both national and regional commendations, some of which we have mentioned in tonight's program.

This year we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the launching of the Blackstone Valley Explorer, which continues to carry passengers as they learn about the history and varied uses of the Blackstone River.

We appreciate the work of our friends at the Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor, and we continue to hope the Congress of the United States will authorize the creation of a national park along the river.

As we keep meeting our challenges, we thank you for your ongoing support.



*With deep appreciation,
David W. Balfour, Chairman*

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Amos Douglas, RISCPEP

The Council hosted Anush Hovakimyan, executive director of the Goris Tourism Office/Development Center, Humphrey Fellowship Program, Institute of International Education.

Blackstone River State Park Visitor Center Volunteers

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Beverly Daignault

Gerry Noel

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Claudette Moore

Minn Robidoux

Ruth Pacheco

Jim Wilbur

Roxanne Arruda

Pat Bannon

Eric Sjoblom

Bernie Plante

Tom Perkins

Jim Tracy

Joan Valaitis

Andrew Whalen

Blackstone Valley Explorer Crew

Captain Bob Dombrowski

Captain Kenneth Hudson

Captain Howard Labitt

Captain Sheila Paquette

Captain Matthew Pendergast

Captain Joe Walkden

Cashier Dennis Lloyd

Tour Guide Gerald Carbone

Tour Guide Dianne Mailloux

Tour Guide Patti McAlpine

Tour Guide Steve Todaro

Volunteer David Westcott

* deceased

Year in Review

The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council has long made the Blackstone River a centerpiece for promoting the region, and with good reason.

By John Larrabee

Over the past four decades, Rhode Islanders have witnessed a remarkable transformation of the waterway. Back in the 1970s, the riverbanks still bore ugly scars inflicted in the mill era from trash heaps to tire piles to brown field sites. Today, regular cleanup efforts by volunteers, non-profits and government agencies have all but erased that damage, making the river near-pristine once more. Paddle the waterway and you'll see deer on the shore, hawks in the sky and blue herons wading in the shallows.

A VERY HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

The BVTC highlights the restoration of the river by bringing folks as close to the water as possible. This year's milestones included the 20th anniversary of the first tour aboard the Blackstone River Explorer, the Council's own 49-passenger watercraft. From Central Falls Landing, people can climb aboard and cruise the waterway any Sunday from May to October. While drifting on the river, passengers forget that in some spots urban centers are just beyond the trees. To date, more than 300,000 visitors have experienced the river tour.

"I've always called it 'the Convincer,'" says Dr. Robert Billington, executive director of the BVTC. "We've taken everybody on that boat -- our mayors and town administrators, all the members of the congressional delegation, everyone. It convinces them the river has something to offer."

In August, there was an afternoon reception at the Landing and aboard the watercraft. The boat was rededicated with a prayer by the Rev. Julio Filomeno of the Pawtucket United Church of Christ and an invocation by the Rev. Nelson Estrada of Pawtucket's Chinese Church, which sits beside the river. The Rev. William Blackstone, the pioneer for whom the river is named, was portrayed by National Park Service Ranger John McNiff. The ship's bell was rung 20 times, marking each year of service.

NATIONAL DESIGNATION SOUGHT

In May, the river lured an important delegation to the region. U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and National Park Service Director Jonathan Jarvis were among Washington VIPs that came for a close look at some landmarks that would be part of the proposed Blackstone Valley National Historical Park in Northern Rhode Island and Massachusetts' Worcester County.

The proposed park would tell the story of America's Industrial Revolution in the place where it began two centuries ago. U.S. Jack Reed (D-R.I.) has filed national legislation to create the historic district, which would include Pawtucket's Old Slater Mill; Cumberland's Ashton Mill Village; the Blackstone River State Park, which winds through Woonsocket, Cumberland, Lincoln and North Smithfield; and the Massachusetts' villages of Whitinsville and Hopedale.



DESTINATIONS ADDED TO TOURS

Spring is the season for exploration, and BVTC's Discovery Tours are the perfect vehicle for doing that. The motor coach day trips are held in May during National Travel and Tourism Week. In past years, the destinations were all in Northern Rhode Island. This year, however, the Council added a twist on the region's "So New" promotion, a marketing initiative to promote southern New England states as a single tourism destination. Some buses headed over the border to Connecticut's Mystic Aquarium, to Worcester's Higgins Armory Museum, to Longfellow's Wayside Inn in the Boston suburb of Sudbury and elsewhere. Tourism planners in the adjacent states reciprocated, sending visitors to the Ocean State. Sightseers also enjoyed a bicycle tour on the Blackstone River Bikeway and a kayak tour on the river.

This summer the BVTC expanded its Leisurely Bike Tours, four-hour guided weekend bicycle trips through Northern Rhode Island. The schedule now includes a Villages of Burrillville tour that offers a wonderful perspective of the town's history and nature through the rolling hills of Harrisville and Pascoag. The popular tours -- which run from May through October -- also include popular trips through Lincoln that begin or end at the historic Capt. Wilbur Kelly House and extend to the Gateway Visitor Center on Route 295.

SPRINGING INTO CELEBRATIONS

A highpoint of spring was the second annual induction ceremony at the Rhode Island Music Hall of Fame. The BVTC helped establish the museum-in-progress housed in Pawtucket's Hope Artiste Village. It is dedicated to those euphonious past and present legends that have put New England in the national spotlight, and it's a great fit with the So New promotion.

The annual induction bash, a much-anticipated event and

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major fundraiser, is full of music and memories. Among the 2013 inductees were: the original family rock band The Cowsills; rhythm and blues favorites Steve Smith & The Naked8; and folk blues guitarist Paul Geremia. Posthumous recipients were soprano Sissieretta Jones, who broke race barriers in the 1800s; and vaudeville's Yankee Doodle Dandy George M. Cohan, who was born in Providence.

Another spring celebration is the Person of the Year fundraiser in Glocester, which generates funds for the renovation of the Colonial-era Dr. Reuben Mason House and a planned Dorr Rebellion Museum. This year's honoree was former town Police Chief Jamie Hainsworth, who is the United States marshal for Rhode Island.

COMPLIMENTS TO THE CHEFS

In most hip regions, a food tour means a night spent sampling appetizers at one bistro and then another. But a nibble here and there could never work in Rhode Island. It's New England's smorgasbord, with restaurants of every kind serving up some of the world's best fare. That's why the BVTC's food tour is different from others -- it never ends.

Every Wednesday night participants gather at a different restaurant, where the chef offers a special meal and a cooking demonstration. Over the past four years, regulars on the Secret Ingredient Tour have sampled everything from drive-in hamburgers at A&W Root Beer in North Smithfield into family-style chicken to specialties such as sushi rolls and shrimp diavolo.

A new stop was Central Falls Provision, a 90-year-old family-owned business that makes Polish kielbasa and home-style sausage. The Skoczylas family set up a tent and a grill outside its facility and turned the event into a backyard cookout.

RHODE ISLAND BLOSSOMS

The BVTC's efforts aren't limited to planned events. A surprise came when Sen. Reed learned Rhode Islanders had no state society in Washington, D.C. Transplants from every other state have long had such social clubs in the nation's capital, and the organizations can play a big part in getting things done. They give newcomers and visitors a place to swap news and meet movers and shakers at the national level. What's more, the collective state societies have a major role in the National Cherry Blossom Festival, an annual celebration in the capital commemorating Japan's gift of 3,000 cherry trees in 1912. The groups sponsor a ball, and each state brings a cherry blossom princess to Washington for the festivities.

Under Billington's direction, the BVTC staff moved fast, establishing a State Society of Rhode Island; organizing a board of directors before the national event in March and issuing a call for cherry blossom princess applicants.

The selection process focused on finding a Rhode Islander who could pitch the state with enthusiasm and verve. The honor went to Stacie Waleyko, 23, a University of Rhode Island alum with an impressive resume as a fashion model and a software engineer for the 3D Group for Interactive Visualization in East Greenwich. At a Statehouse ceremony on March 20 -- the first day of spring -- Gov. Lincoln Chafee presented her with the sash. Then it was on to the Potomac. An unabashed back-home booster, Waleyko packed her

suitcase with clothes, accessories and shoes that showcased Little Rhody designers.

U.S. Rep. David Cicilline escorted Waleyko to the ball at the Renaissance Washington D.C. Hotel, where the Japanese ambassador gave a spin to an oversized wheel of fortune, awarding the crown by chance to a young lady from Oklahoma.

LIGHTING THE WAY

While Waleyko missed out on the winner's goodwill tour of Japan, she was able to don the sash again for Rhode Island's own Cherry Blossom Festival, a May weekend event held in Pawtucket and Central Falls. The BVTC helped organize the first celebration in 2010 to mark the planting of 65 cherry



trees along Roosevelt Avenue. The Council continues to be a partner in planning the festivities. More than 200 cherry trees are growing along the route, creating a vibrant urban promenade, and the festival draws attention to the new streetscape. It also raises money to pay for future plantings, and the continued maintenance of the sidewalk arboretum.

This year's festival included some extra sparkle to celebrate Central Falls pulling itself out of municipal bankruptcy, closing the curtain on a 15-month financial crisis. On May 4, a crowd gathered near the venerable stone bridge that links the city to Pawtucket. Twilight faded, and then 110 LED lights flashed on, tracing the bridge archways and creating a twinkling reflection on the water.

The two city governments were the bridge illumination's primary sponsors while the BVTC raised private donations. Planners were mindful of costs and conservation. The Narragansett Bay Commission provides a link to the electrical grid and the bulbs are super efficient, keeping the electric bill to \$11 a month. The lights shine on Friday and Saturday nights and holidays, reminding all that Central Falls is now "a city with a bright future."

UNIQUE SITE IN CENTRAL FALLS

If you get the urge for a deep Thoreauvian experience, you can find it on the shores of the Blackstone River. River Island Community Park in Central Falls is now the site of the state's first urban campground, one of just six in the nation. Cross a foot bridge and you'll find yourself on a four-acre island, surrounded by chirping birds, shade-casting oaks and the sun-dappled river. There's a brick fire ring, picnic tables and enough space for several tents. Boy Scout Troop 3 spent hours clearing brush from the site, working under the direc-

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tion of BVTC staffer James Toomey and Eagle Scout prospect Sebastian Zuleta.

The Scouts were also the first campers. Their June 14 expedition was a real outdoor jamboree, with sack and three-legged races on the park's mainland playing field. Central Falls Mayor James Diossa was on hand for the hot dog roast and campfire sing-along. The boys later drifted to sleep beneath the trees -- a real night in the wilderness just 15 minutes from the State House. The campground is now available to other organized groups with a permit from City Hall.

A TALE OF DEVOTION

Woonsocket's beautifully-restored Victorian-era train depot has been a draw for tourists from Japan since 2009, when it was used as the setting for the film "Hachi: A Dog's Tale," starring Richard Gere. The movie is an American retelling of a much-beloved Japanese tale; the true story of a dog that greets his master daily on his return from work and continues to do so years after the man's death. The Japanese have come to view the dog -- an Akita named Hachiko -- as a national symbol of loyalty and devotion. There's a bronze statue of Hachiko at Tokyo's Shibuya Station, where the dog stood watch, and there's also a statue at the Woonsocket station, a gift to the city from the local Beacon Charter School for the Performing Arts.

In August, the BVTC and the state were invited to help observe Tokyo's Hachi Summit, an event focused on the virtue of loyalty. Billington sent a greeting letter and arranged for Gov. Chafee and Woonsocket Mayor Leo Fontaine to do the same. The Council also sent a Hachi banner and brochures describing the Woonsocket monument, which sometimes draws Japanese visitors.

"HOW SWEET IT IS"

Last year the Council helped Central Falls create the Chocolate Mill Overlook, a beautifully-landscaped space near the site of one of North America's earliest water-powered chocolate mills. Founded roughly a decade before Slater Mill, the long-gone William Wheat Chocolate Mill provided products to nearby citizens and military personnel and mariners as medicinal sustenance.

In August, Billington traveled to the Virginia headquarters of confectioner Mars Inc., to discuss the possibility of creating a chocolate history museum in Central Falls and having Mars help finance the proposed project. He was joined by local businessmen Louis Yip and Sonny Ng, owners of the site. "We had a great meeting," Billington says. "Now we're enhancing the proposal."

BEAT THE DRUMS FOR PROGRESS

In Pawtucket, the end of summer means Taiwan Day, a festival the BVTC has sponsored since 2000. The highlight of the early September event is the dragon boat races on the Blackstone River, modeled after a popular Asian sport. The ornate human-powered skiffs the Council provides to competitors were donated by the ever-civic-minded Yip and the Republic of China government. Each boat is crewed by a helmsman, 20 paddlers and a drummer whose insistent thumping sets the pace. While thousands of spectators cheer from shore, the rival teams vie to set the best time on the 1,000-foot three-lane course.

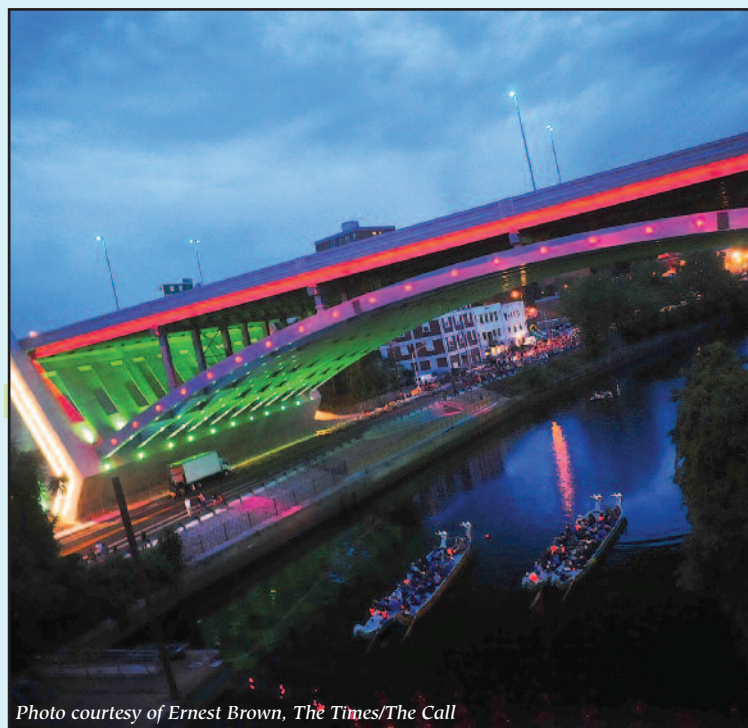


Photo courtesy of Ernest Brown, The Times/The Call

The big finish to the festival was the lighting of the new six-lane bridge that routes I-95 across the Pawtucket River. The five-year, \$100-million bridge reconstruction project came to a close this year, and not a moment too soon. Detours had become a real headache, with truckers driving through residential neighborhoods in search of alternate routes. In the end, the state has a safe and attractive bridge. The span features art-deco-style details and a graceful steel arch that is illuminated at night with crystal-blue LED lighting.

"The new I-95 bridge has ... a lot of pizzazz," says Billington. "We made sure they got artists involved. What we've got now is something distinctive. It reminds people that Pawtucket is an arts city and that even the city founder Joseph Jencks was known as an artist."

Something else new is an effort to help Burrillville launch a low-cost marketing campaign to boost visitation. The Council helped develop a plan that highlights the outdoor recreation, history and rural charm of the town. Working with Burrillville Town Planner Tom Kravitz and Town Manager Michael Wood, the Council developed a Web site, VisitBurrillville.org, and created an integrated campaign with rack cards, postcards and a Facebook page that direct people back to the site, which contains self-guided tours developed by the BVTC.

CENTERS OF ATTENTION

The BVTC has taken steps to keep visitor facilities in Northern Rhode Island in full operation. Last year the Visitor Center in downtown Pawtucket closed for about four months due to a lack of funding. With 100,000 visitors walking through the door every year, that was a real loss. The BVTC came forward with a plan to keep the center open year-round and its budget in the black. The Council has re-branded the facility The Center by the Blackstone and launched a campaign to market the space as an event venue. The goal is to raise \$10,000 in rental fees. The council received a \$40,000 grant from the Rhode Island Foundation's Initiative for Non-Profit Excellence, which will

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help the Council operate as it approaches its 30th anniversary in 2015.

Across the Valley in Lincoln, the BVTC has signed a contract with the state Department of Environmental Management (DEM) to manage the Gateway Visitor Center on Route 295 and find a food vendor for the location. The visitor center is near the Blackstone River Bikeway and provides patrons with a convenient location to park their vehicles and unload their bikes. The highway stop features an attractive colonial post-and-beam building and a state police satellite office.

The Council is working with Cumberland Town Planner Chris Carcifero to revitalize Valley Falls Heritage Park. The unusual facility is located in the foundation of the razed Valley Falls Mill. "We've taken hundreds of schoolchildren to the park," says Billington, "and now the town is taking a new interest in property. They're putting more money into it, and bringing electricity to the site." In addition, the Council and town worked to secure funding from the DEM and the National Park Service to restore the interpretive signs at the historic site.

DOCUMENTARY SCREENING ON TAP

If you're a history buff, be sure to mark November 7 on your calendar. That's when the Public Broadcasting Service documentary "The Ghost Army" will be shown at the Stadium Theatre in Woonsocket. The film tells the story of a World War II unit of camouflage specialists that used inflatable tanks and trucks and other elements of subterfuge to mislead German forces about the position and direction of Al-

lied troops. The Blackstone Valley is in the story because tank models were manufactured at a U.S. Rubber mill in Woonsocket.

At the nearby Museum of Work & Culture, movie-goers will be able to enjoy a traveling exhibit associated with the film. Many of the Ghost Army soldiers were artists or designers in civilian life. The museum exhibit is a collection of oil paintings, watercolors, pencil sketches and cartoons they created during idle moments in the war zone. On movie night, there will also be a special reception with filmmaker Rick Beyer. The BVTC is the sponsor of the screening and the exhibit.

"ALL ABOARD"

The year will end with one of the BVTC's most successful programs, the Polar Express excursion, a 90-minute Christmas show on rails inspired by Chris Van Allsburg's classic children's book of the same name. Families board the Providence & Worcester line at the Victorian-era Woonsocket Depot and head off on a trip to nowhere. The train is filled with singers and actors playing characters from the book. Santa and Mrs. Claus wander from coach to coach, greeting young passengers and handing out gifts.

The excursions begin in mid-November and always sell out. The BVTC is boosting the number of trips this year to 27, which will allow another 1,000 passengers to ride the train. To enhance the trip, the Council will give passengers engraved Polar Express bells, a travel mug and a special coloring book that includes scenes from the Woonsocket Depot.



The Blackstone River was responsible for powering the mill industry in what is now Central Falls. The river is named for William Blackstone who, among his many other accomplishments, was the first to harness the power of the

Blackstone Valley Explorer 20th Anniversary Committee

Dianne Mailloux
Eileen Mendrek
Patti McAlpine
Bob Dombrowski
Matt Pendergast
Dave Westcott
Barbara Dixon

William Blackstone Society Members

Leonard J. Panaggio1989
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Luther H. Blount1991
David Gulvin.....1992
Albert T. Klyberg.....1993
David Macaulay1994
Robert D. Billington, Ph.D. 1994
Louise Lind.....1995
Clinton Johnson.....1995
Thomas J. Shanahan1996
Robert E. Metivier1997
Carol A. Metivier1997
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John Chan1998
Michael D. Cassidy1999

David W. Balfour.....2000
Dana M. Newbrook.....2001
Elizabeth "Betty" Johnson ...2002
Wilfrid L. Gates, Jr.....2003
Rose Lavoie2004
Tom Ward.....2005
John Worsley2006
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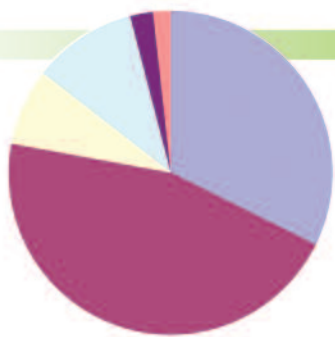
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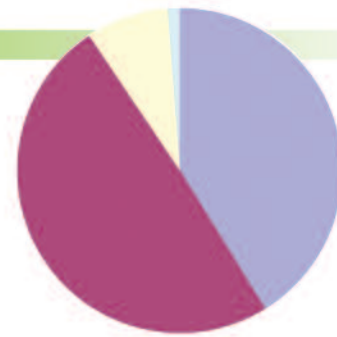
Financial Report



Source of Funds 2012-2013

Hotel Occupancy Tax	\$345,869.66
Program Driven Marketing	\$487,802.33
Management Contracts	\$82,075.25
Grants, Donations and Sponsorships	\$111,486.53
Special Events	\$24,365.00
Group Tours	\$18,888.50
Total	\$1,070,487.27

Expenses 2012-2013



Program Directed Marketing	\$394,503.67
Personnel	\$473,238.90
Operations	\$78,812.95
Grant Distribution	\$11,510.00
Total	\$958,065.52



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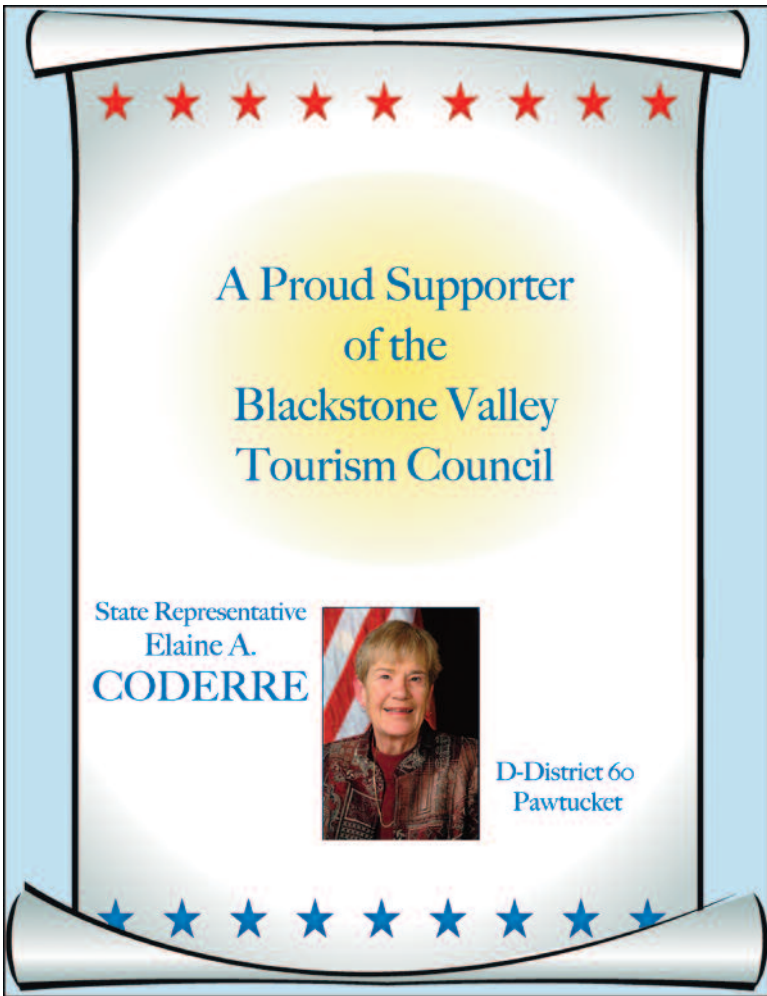


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Daryl Sherman

2013 William Blackstone Society Inductee



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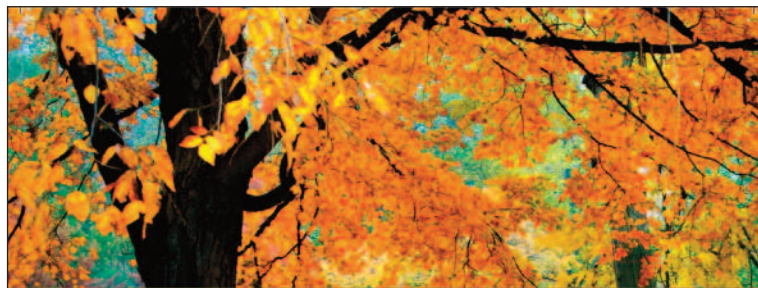
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We look forward to continuing our shared bond as we focus on strengthening our community and creating an even more prosperous and beautiful Blackstone Valley of tomorrow.

Thank You

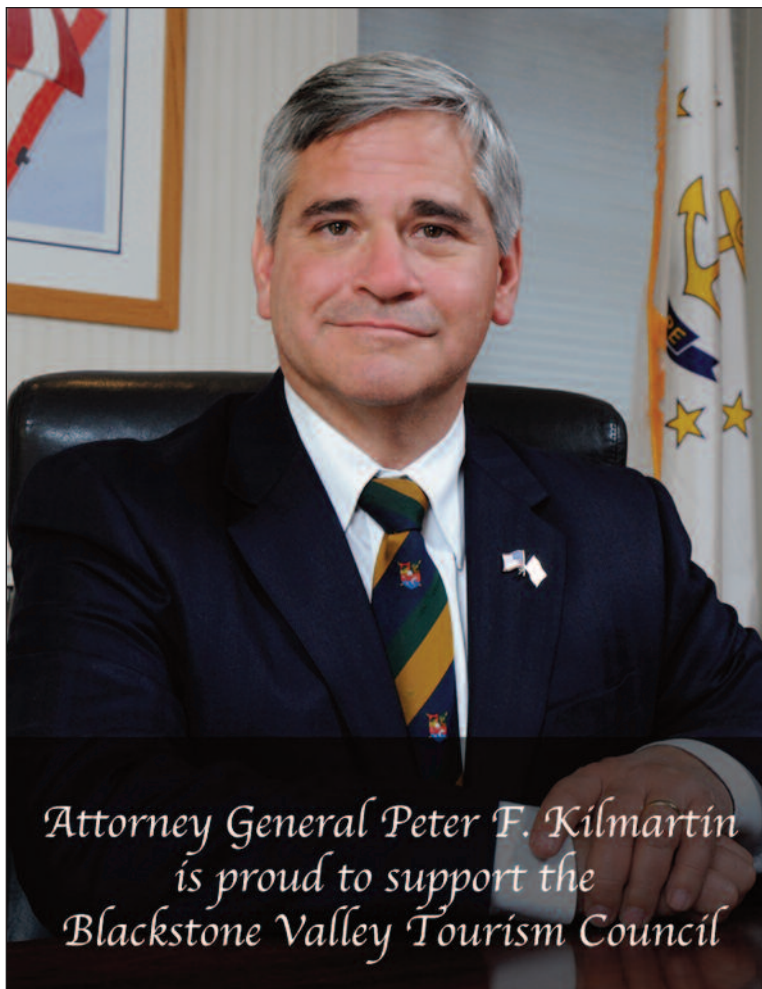


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