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WHILE OPENING DOORS  
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# VALLEY FORGE TOURISM & CONVENTION BOARD

## **STRENGTHENING ECONOMIC PROSPERITY IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY WHILE OPENING DOORS FOR THEIR MEMBERS**

**T**ourism is a major economic force in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania— to the tune of \$1.65 billion per year, and growing at a rate of five percent per year, accounting for more than 20,000 jobs in the county. With 1,600 restaurants, 53 golf courses, more than 200 arts and culture venues, almost 100 miles of trails, and a variety of unique downtowns and malls — including the world-famous King of Prussia Mall — There's a lot to see and do in Montgomery County.

A majority percentage of that tourism-related economic activity in Montgomery County can be attributed directly to the innovative organizational, sales and marketing efforts of Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board (VFTCB) — the official tourism promotion agency for Montgomery County. VFTCB's mission is to strengthen economic prosperity within Montgomery County, and they do that in part by aggressively marketing Montgomery County far and wide to attract meetings, conventions, special events, weddings, and tourists to keep the 80 plus hotels full and their hospitality industry-related members busy.

Membership has its rewards, as they say, and membership in Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board (VFTCB) offers a vast array of marketing, networking, referral and educational rewards that open the door to unlimited opportunities for the organization's members throughout Montgomery County.



(L to R) Lisa Karl, Vice president of Sales and Strategic Partnerships; Megan Tomlinson, Director of Events, Membership and Services; and Debbie Repas, Membership Sales Manager.





Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board has received a multitude of awards for its marketing & membership initiatives.

Unlike a chamber of commerce that serves all types of businesses within their geographic region, VFTCB focuses on promoting and assisting businesses specifically in the hospitality industry throughout all of Montgomery County, including hotels & meeting facilities, wedding venues, restaurants & caterers, photographers & videographers, malls & individual retail stores, as well as a variety of sports and recreational attractions. The organization's 660+ members (and growing) benefit in a variety of ways — from listings on VFTCB's award-winning website; to tapping into VFTCB's growing social media presence; taking advantage of the digital, print & billboard marketing for members; to landing one of the hundreds of pieces of business they send to members every year.

But membership isn't just about VFTCB's marketing and sales efforts, it's about learning, it's about making connections and it's about being part of a growing community of hospitality professionals. It's about the opportunity to connect with fellow members to develop new business relationships.

Megan Tomlinson, VFTCB Director of Events, Membership and Services, empha-

sized that in addition to the wide range of creative marketing efforts that benefit members, VFTCB's opportunities for member-to-member networking are a tremendous benefit. "Our networking events are a great opportunity to connect with other business professionals from the county who you might not otherwise do business with," she said. "We hold events almost every month in different member locations on different topics that we help educate our members on things that are trending or things that they need help with. We hold a tourism rally and a golf outing every year. The tourism rally is a complementary lunch for all of our members. The golf outing is another networking opportunity. Members can get one-on-one interaction (with other members) out on the course. Our largest event is our annual luncheon. It's gone from 200 people to more than 650 people attending in the past five years. Every year it gets larger and more fun. And we use members for everything that we do. It's great because we not only produce an event for our members, but we give business back to our members through our organization as well," she said.

(Continued on page 8)

## The VFTCB Creative Print Strategy for Prosperity

Print publications are just one strategy that VFTCB utilizes to get members in front of travelers and locals who are looking for things to do, restaurants, shopping, hotels, meeting space and services. Every member of the **Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board** receives a listing in the official *Visitors Guide*. Restaurant members also receive a listing in *Crave Montco*. Golf course members receive preferred placement in the *Montco Golf Guide*. Hotels receive listings in all guides. The VFTCB distributes more than 150,000 visitors guides, dining guides, arts guides and comic books annually.

### OFFICIAL VISITORS GUIDE

The official Visitors Guide for Valley Forge and Montgomery County, Pa., is our most popular publication. Each year, we print more than 100,000 guides that are distributed across the United States and Canada in a variety of ways, including: Orders through ValleyForge.org; Tourism Information stands in welcome centers, rest stops and attractions; Welcome bags for groups staying in Montco area hotels; and Member restaurants, hotels and attractions. Copies are also available in the Visitor Center at Valley Forge National Historical Park

### CRAVE MONTCO

Crave Montco is the official dining magazine of Montgomery County, Pa., and includes feature articles, top 10 lists and listings for area restaurants. The magazine is printed twice yearly with more than 15,000 copies in each run. Crave can be found in area hotels, at the #MakeltMontco traveling kiosk, at member restaurants and at the Visitor Center at Valley Forge Park. Crave is also used as part of our hotel welcome bags and can be ordered at CraveMontco.com.

### ARTS GUIDE

Highlights the vibrant art scene in Montgomery County, including the historic theaters, galleries, and festivals. The guide is printed twice a year, in the spring and fall. The spring issue is released at the Philadelphia Flower Show. More than 20,000 arts guides are distributed to arts attractions, hotels, and is available at the Valley Forge National Historical Park Visitors Center. A digital version is also available.

### COMIC BOOK

Patriot Tales launched in August 2018 and continues to grow. The comic book series is intended to connect with families and encourage them to discover and explore the history of Montgomery County and Valley Forge National Historical Park. In 2019, the VFTCB added two more editions of the popular comic book, which was featured on the Today Show. A fourth edition will be released in 2020.

### MONTCO GOLF GUIDE

Destination Montco Golf's official golf guide for Montgomery County, Pa., is the ultimate resource for golfers. The annual publication highlights the county's more than 50 golf courses, as well as nearby hotels. Ten thousand copies of the guide are distributed through a partnership with **Sports Illustrated's GOLF Magazine**, reaching subscribers across the country and a digital edition is published each fall.





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## COVER STORY

*(Continued from page 7)*

"These events provide additional lead-generating opportunities as well as opportunities for personal development."

VFTCB also organizes special events to benefit the community. The Valley Forge 5-Mile Revolutionary Run, held each April in Valley Forge National Historical Park, is a family friendly event, with all the proceeds going to benefit improvements and additions in the Park. "It's really a community driven event," Tomlinson said. "People from all over the county and outside of our county come and walk or run and they bring their kids. It's just a great day in the park to experience," she said.

VFTCB also organizes the "Freedom from Hunger" food drive event every September to raise awareness of food insecurity in Montgomery County. "We typically will kick it off with a soup kitchen takeover somewhere within the county," Tomlinson said. "We make the lunch for everybody in the area who can make it to the kitchen that day, and throughout the month we raise both dollars and collect canned goods. It's an initiative that we started after the Pope was here," she said. "Instead of offering him a gift, we made a commitment to run this food drive."

In addition to special events, mixers, and networking events, VFTCB also offers special members-only events, providing a chance to learn from industry experts on a wide range of topics. Exclusive VFTCB member events and are followed by an hour of networking.

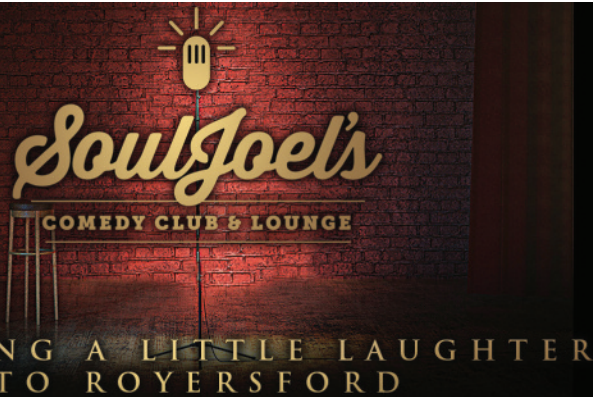
VFTCB also hosts a monthly orientation and training session for new members, new contacts, and anyone wanting to better understand the organization. Additional opportunities are available throughout the year, including quarterly Group Tourism information sessions and quarterly meetings for hotel GMs and Directors of Sales.

It's all about communication, and VFTCB strives to keep its members informed via

an exclusive bi-weekly member newsletter which includes news stories, industry trends, the latest stats, member spotlights and more features of interest to its members.

But when it comes to VFTCB membership, networking and learning opportunities are just the beginning. The organization really rolls up its sleeves when it comes to marketing benefits and opportunities for their members. "We want to keep the members that we have, and we want to add new members," Tomlinson explains. "In order to achieve that objective, a lot of the brands that we've created under the umbrella of the organization are used to help our members. For example, we have a brand called **Montco Makers** that speaks to all the wineries and breweries and distilleries in Montgomery County. We have a brand called **Shop Montco**. Yes, we have the largest mall in the United States retail store-wise, but we also have amazing small towns and all the great little downtowns that are in Montgomery County. We have brands that represent our sports market. Sports accounts for 60 percent of the room nights brought into Montgomery County by our sales team. We also have a **Revolutionary Events** brand that speaks to our corporate customer base. We have a brand for the **Valley Forge Revolutionary 5-Mile Run**, which supports that great fundraising event. We have **Crave Montco**, which talks to the dining scene. All these brands overlap our membership in one, two, sometimes five ways. Members not only can get exposure through listings in the appropriate publications with the brand, but it also speaks to their business. And they can use the hashtags. They can use our social media pages — All additional benefits of membership to help them increase their business," Tomlinson said.

"Members also get listed in our publications and on our website, and they can put events on our website calendar as well," adds Rachel Riley, VFTCB Director of Communications. "That gets pushed



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out through our email news and social channels exposure as well. So, if a member has an event, we can promote it on social media and distribute press releases to our media distribution list. From branded marketing to digital PR and social, there are so many different benefits to membership," she said.

In fact, VFTCB's marketing efforts that benefit its members are as varied as they are creative.

Digital marketing via VFTCB's award-winning website, for one, is a great showcase for members. ValleyForge.org is one of the fastest growing websites in the tourism industry, seeing nearly 90 percent growth in visitation in each of the last three years. Built to drive business for members, ValleyForge.org and its branded microsites have more than 900 pages of content, and each of those pages had one of three goals — Drive users to member listings; Drive users to view member events; and/or Drive users to view/order one of VFTCB's member-centric publications.

The VFTCB's social media presence is growing rapidly with followers more than doubling year-over-year. They are active on all major social media channels, including Facebook; Twitter; Instagram; YouTube; and LinkedIn. The Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board has more than 158,000 followers across all of its social media channels. Between January 1, 2019, and November 12, 2019, the VFTCB's following grew by nine percent.

In terms of branded print marketing for members, VFTCB distributes more than 150,000 printed publications each year, including visitors' guides, dining guides, a bi-annual arts guide, and a comic book, now in its fourth edition. While everything seems to be going digital, there is no replacement for a marketing piece that lands in the consumer's hands. In fact, more than half of all travelers still use some form of printed material while planning their trips.

VFTCB's publications — the **Valley Forge Visitors Guide**, the **Montco Arts**

**Guide**, **Crave Montco** and **Montco Golf Magazine** — are just another way of getting their members in front of travelers and locals who are looking for things to do, restaurants, shopping, hotels, meeting space and services. Every member of the Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board receives a listing in their official **Visitors Guide**. Restaurant members also receive a listing in **Crave Montco**. Golf course members receive preferred placement in the **Montco Golf Guide**. Hotels are listed in all guides.

As a marketing organization, VFTCB works to promote Valley Forge and Montgomery County across all media. You will see their ads on billboards, in magazines, at train stations, and across all digital platforms. Members have a unique opportunity to buy co-op space in their campaigns. Every time a member buys into their co-op programs, the money goes back into their marketing, allowing them to buy more ads and drive more business in our community.

"We also have a traveling kiosk and Mini Cooper that are branded," adds Megan Tomlinson. "We take those with our traveling mascot 'Monty the Fox' to arts and music festivals, beer festivals and other special events all around the county to all the different towns. That's yet another opportunity for member businesses to be promoted and represented in areas that they may not normally get to be in," she said.

Finally, the sales team of the Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board sends more than 500 business leads to member businesses each year. These requests include meetings, conventions, sports events, weddings and celebrations in our region. Business leads are the most tangible benefit for VFTCB membership. The only businesses that receive these leads and service requests are members of the organization. The organization has an 11-person sales staff that is dedicated to bringing business to Valley Forge and Montgomery County, connecting meeting planners, brides-to-be, tournament organizers and others to its members.

(Continued on page 10)

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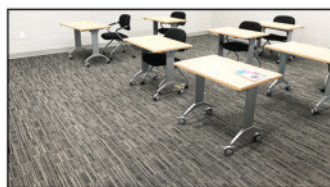
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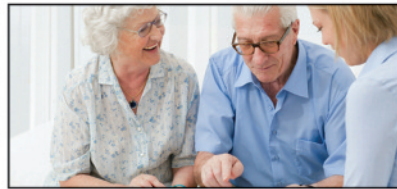
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## COVER STORY

(Continued from page 9)

"Once our sales team brings the business to Montgomery County, then we reach out to all of the customers and offer our complimentary services," Tomlinson explains. "That starts with getting them exposure to all of our members. We always refer members first and foremost. It could be anything from where to hold a board meeting, an off-site meal, to doing a networking event, to doing a team-building event. We're always referring our attractions, our restaurants, and all of our service providers to all the groups that are coming in," she said.

"One of the things we really try to promote within our member base is using each other for business," Tomlinson said. "Sometimes a restaurant might be hosting a private event that they might not normally host, and they need glassware or more high tops or linens. They can come to us, and we will refer them to another member. So, they are doing business together. And that's probably one of the greatest returns that we see for our members. Member-to-member business interactions," she said.

"We're in the tourism and hospitality business," Rachel Riley concurs. "Hospitality should be our expertise and I think it is. It's all about relationships. So, whether we're connecting people to other members that may be appropriate, or to others within the county who can help them, I think relationships is one of the biggest benefits and key things that we can offer our members."

"We're always looking to grow our member base," Megan Tomlinson emphasized. "That's the biggest thing. We want people to know all there is to do in Montgomery County. The organization, from a member standpoint, in five years, has grown from 265 members to 660 members. I think that speaks to the value of membership and everything we do as an organization," she said.

"We're always keeping things fresh or refreshing," Riley added. "We're always

striving to come up with new ideas and different and unique ways to highlight our members and offer them incentives and added values. We'll be re-vamping some of our events next year, just to give them something different," she said.

"And we always think outside the box," Tomlinson added. "We don't do the same thing twice. We may hold meetings again, but they're never the same as they were before. They're always in a different location, there's always a different topic. There's always a different theme. There's always a different "wow" and speakers. So, we don't do your normal events. We don't do the typical event that a tourism board does. I think the 'What are we going to do next?' is a lot of fun for our members too. A lot of our members come to our events because they want to network, and they want to meet people. They want to get out and see everybody, but they also want to see what we're going to do next. So, I think that continues to push all of us to do better and be more creative. The pressure is always on, but it's a good pressure," she said.

VFTCB is consistently reaching out with new opportunities for its members. Their sales team is always here to work with members to help land the business. For additional info on membership, please contact Debbie Repas, Membership Sales Manager at 610.834.7961; email: [repas@valleyforge.org](mailto:repas@valleyforge.org), and visit: [www.valleyforge.org/members/](http://www.valleyforge.org/members/).

Valley Forge Tourism & Convention Board is headquartered at 1000 First Avenue, Suite 101, King of Prussia, PA 19406; 610.834.1150.



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TOURISM & CONVENTION BOARD