

# *The Vernon Advocate*

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## *Making Application for a FY 2023 Cooperative Marketing Grant Vision Statement for Vernon Area Communities, Businesses and Residents*

**Overview:** For too long the beauty, travel and tourism assets of the Vernon area of Sussex County have been left undiscovered by those seeking to enjoy all that northern New Jersey has to offer. With a lion's share of the marketing and promotion of New Jersey going to the Jersey Shore and other parts of the state, affirmative steps need to be taken to redirect attention to what the Vernon area of Sussex County has to offer to travelers, tourists and those seeking quality recreation.

Significant efforts have been made by the Sussex County Chamber of Commerce in working with the New Jersey Division of Travel and Tourism to document the extraordinary assets available in northern New Jersey through the creation of the Skylands Region presence which has identified and produced material listing these assets in Morris, Somerset, Hunterdon, Warren, and Sussex County.

The good news is that the Skylands Region provides information about the wide range of assets and destinations included in these five counties. The bad news, is that there so many options that the visitor looking to make a visitation decision can get lost in the number of attractions and unable to find a specific destination of personal interest. There are just too many choices.

The Vernon area of Sussex County is unique. It is the home of some of the state's most valuable travel and tourism attractions in New Jersey unavailable in any other part of the state. But far too few potential visitor is aware of these assets and little attention is given to them by the existing sources. The media outlets rarely have stories about the Crystal Springs Golf Resort or the Mountain Creek Ski Resort while significantly more is communicated about Pennsylvania's Pocono Mountain resorts.

The advantages that can be gained from a collective marketing plan designed to promote the assets of the Vernon area has long been considered as a way to reduce the individual marketing costs of area businesses while significantly expanding the awareness of the Vernon area travel, tourism and recreational assets. An effective collaborative marketing program can dramatically increase business revenues and contribute to the reduction of local taxes.

All of these factors provide strong justification for taking advantage of an opportunity to learn more about the potential of a Vernon Area Collaborative Marketing Program. This can be achieved by seeking seed money from the Division of Travel and Tourism in the form of a [FY 2023 Cooperative Marketing Grant](#).

**The Vision:** The application for and approval of a [FY 2023 Cooperative Marketing Grant](#) can serve as the seed money and catalyst for what could become a working strategy to routinely develop and implement Vernon area specific marketing and promotional initiatives to expand awareness, increase visitor rates and generate increased revenues for area businesses while improving the economy of area municipalities..

The grant application process provides the opportunity for key political and business influential to get together as partners and participate in the development of [FY 2023 Cooperative Marketing Grant](#) application process at no risk or cost to them as partners.

If the effort to receive a [FY 2023 Cooperative Marketing Grant](#) fails at least the area businesses have had an opportunity to assess the potential value that might come form a collective marketing

program. The experience will provide a clearer idea of what it might take to develop such a program without the help of the Division of Travel and Tourism to further support a decision to explore the steps required to put a program in place without grant support.

*The Development of a Vernon Area Collaborative Marketing Plan Proposed by Dr John T. Whiting.*

A basic lesson learned by marketing experts is that attempts to market too many products in a single marketing initiative leads to the loss of sales due to an inability of the market to focus attention on and become interested in one product. It is far more productive to focus on use the most well known and attractive products to capture the interest of potential consumers and leverage that interest into other less attention grabbing products.

The problem faced by many travelers, tourists and those seeking a fun recreational experience is that there are too many options to sort through to make a buying decision in Sussex County and the sources or that information is not easy to access. When presented in a long list of potential destinations they tend to get lost in the crowded list of options and unable to efficiently source the information that will lead them to a decision..

The Vernon area is blessed with many major attractions. A well conceived marketing plan would make the major attractions the core of the marketing strategy to get the attention of potential visitors. During a recent ski season approximately 14,000 skiers visited the Mountain Creek Ski Resort and during a typical golf season many thousands of people visit the Crystal Springs Golf Resort. This represents the potential draw of these two local assets that could provide a foundation for a highly successful marketing plan.

A marketing plan built around all that is available at Crystal Springs Resort and the Mountain Creek Resort and their year round amenities supported by awareness of the proximity to the Appalachian Trail and the new Hard Rock Café Hotel and such music venues as the Blue Arrow Farm can get the attention of more people than an attempt to market all of the assets in the area in an separate basis by the individual businesses.

*The Key Role of the Skylands DMO in the Vernon Area Collaborative Marketing Grant Application*

The Sussex County Chamber of Commerce has been identified by the New Jersey Division of Travel and Tourism as a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) and has received funding through a grant initially received in 2016 leading to the creation of the [Sussex Skylands Destination Marketing Organization](#).

This organization has done an extraordinary job in collecting, developing and disseminating information about the travel and tourism assets available in the counties they cover including Morris, Somerset, Hunterdon, Warren, and Sussex County. The Skylands DMO will be a valuable Partner in providing information and materials specific to the Vernon area making it possible to access valuable resources and materials without the need to spend the time or expense that might come from an attempt to duplicate efforts and success they have already achieved. Close coordination, cooperation and integration with the Skylands DMO will be a critical component in the development of the Vernon Area Collaborative Marketing grant application.

*Focused Market Targets*

To achieve a more precise marketing strategy and simplify the decision making process for potential visitor the marketing plan proposed by Dr. Whiting will create silos of market segments as a basis for

more precision in marketing plan decision making. Examples of possible of market silos to guide the development of the Vernon Area Collaborative Marketing Plan would include:

- Individual single day visitor targets
- Married/Significant other couples
- Families
- Educational Institutions
- Organizations/Groups
- Corporate/Business/Political organizations
- Banquet/Parties/Celebrations
- Weddings/Graduations/Anniversaries
- Sponsors/Promoters of golf, skiing, hiking, touring and other events

These market segment silos would be further subdivided into interest based categories to further ease the decision making process for potential visitors. These sub categories would include:

- Single day visits
- General multi-day vacation
- Hiking
- Swimming
- Restaurant visitations
- Camping
- Music
- Golf
- Skiing
- General recreation
- Photography and other artistic activity

The selection process for those targeted by the Vernon Area Collective Marketing Plan would follow the model used by the airline industry to schedule would be travelers to a flight to a specific destination with specific travel requirements and expectations using similar filters to more precisely focus the travel and tourism options for those planning a visit.

Once target markets recognize the availability of these high interest destinations, unavailable in other parts of the state, they will begin to develop visitation and vacation plans around those core attractions, with all of the surrounding businesses being the beneficiary. This will also benefit the municipalities and residents who will enjoy the residual benefits in the economy and a favorable impact on their tax obligations.

The initial decision would be the determination of the core attractions that have the potential to drive the most visitors to the Vernon area and then build a marketing plan around those assets. This is somewhat like the model used to promote the Pocono Mountain region.

### ***The Goals to be Included in a Grant Application.***

The grant application guidelines indicate that the type of project proposals that will be considered include “General Marketing Plan developed to attract tourists’ and stats further that “The panel will evaluate all proposals against the stated criteria and achieve consensus on the merits of each.” The grant guidelines state:

1. The applicant organization must have and illustrate in the proposal a significant interest in the promotion of a tourist destination/attraction/activity.
2. The organization should provide evidence of its experience producing effective marketing programs or events.
3. If the event or program is a new venture, a decision will be based on the strength of the project's marketing plan..

The application will include both short term goals to be achieved through the support of the FY 2023 Cooperative Marketing Grant and long term goals specifying how the grant will provide the foundation for and ongoing Vernon Area Collective Marketing Program to guide the promotion of the area for years to come.

*The Short Term Goals of the Application.*

The short term goals to be supported by and achieved within the scope of the grant would include:

- Identification, organization and the establishment of the Vernon Area Collective Marketing Program Non-Profit organization and Board of Trustees to monitor the grant administration, implementation and compliance with grant requirements.
- The development and adoption of a grant implementation budget providing detail as to how the grant funds will be monitored, approved and dispersed.
- Development and adoption of a plan to take the actions and achieve the goals defined in the grant.
- The identification of the specific tasks to be completed to produce the grant deliverables, and the actions and timelines to achieve that goal including:
  - Formalize the management and administrative structure to carry out the Vernon Area Collective Marketing Program grant project.
  - The identification of the components of a Vernon Area Collective Marketing Plan and engage in the process of developing prototypes of those elements:
    - ❖ Market research and analysis
    - ❖ Identification of target markets and how they identify and make decisions regarding travel, tourism and recreation venues
    - ❖ Identification of personal media outlet contacts and cultivation of relationships to enhance their publication of submitted press releases and other promotions.
    - ❖ The research and development of marketing and promotional strategies to tap into the target markets, build awareness and generate new and repeat visits
    - ❖ Develop and test sample marketing and promotional materials to evaluate the potential to attract new visitors including:
      - \* TV
      - \* Radio
      - \* Print
      - \* Social Media
      - \* Websites
      - \* Advertising agencies
- Develop and routinely apply an performance evaluation protocol to measure the degree to which the marketing initiatives are increasing awareness and visitor rates.
- Identifying and actions required to comply with the rules governing grant recipients by the Division of Travel and Tourism and to file the final report at the conclusion of the grant period.

*The Long Term Goals Following the Vernon Area Collective Marketing Program Grant*

The resources supplied by the grant will provide a hands on opportunity for the Partners to participate in a collective marketing program, assess the degree to which it provides value to the promotion and marketing of the Vernon area.

An evaluation of this experience will make it possible for the Partners to make an informed decision regarding the continuation of the program, modification or termination.

The grant will have provided a low cost, high return opportunity to make what could be a dramatic increase in the awareness, visitation rate and revenue gains that can come from communities, businesses and related parties working together to benefit the general area and its residents.

**About Dr. John T. Whiting:** Dr. Whiting and his wife Buffy have been long time residents of Vernon and active participants in many of the areas recreational venues including skiing, golf, enjoying many of the areas outstanding restaurants and music venues.

Dr. Whiting has been a longtime advocate of a collective marketing plan to promote Vernon area assets dating back to the late 1980s when he initiated a collective marketing effort and served as a co-chairman of the Vernon Tomorrow non-profit to pursue that goal. The economic down turn derailed that effort.

He and his wife have worked behind the scenes to build awareness and promote many Vernon area assets. He has photographed hundreds of area events and written and had published over 150 newspaper articles in the local and regional newspapers featuring golf skiing and local businesses. His most recent article published in the Advertiser News celebrated the opening of Hef's Hut at the Great Gorge Golf Club.

Dr. Whiting has a PhD from Rutgers University and has been the principal of E-business Management Consulting, Golf Event Photos and the Vernon Advocate, all firms dedicated to improving business performance, promoting quality events and general problem solving targeted at building awareness that success can be achieved by making the effort, disciplined decision making and making it fun.

During his career Dr. Whiting has had significant success in writing Federal, State and private grants and getting them approved.

He and his wife welcome the opportunity to volunteer their experience and expertise in pursuing a FY 2023 Cooperative Marketing Grant as their way of giving back to Vernon, its businesses and residents for the fun, enjoyment and friendships they have been blessed to enjoy over the years.

Developed by: Dr. John T. Whiting, Proud Vernon Resident

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