

A large concrete arch bridge spans a river, with a decorative railing on top. In the foreground, there are out-of-focus white flowers. The background shows green trees and a clear sky.

Visit
Sosi

DANVILLE
PITTSYLVANIA CO.

VA

ANNUAL ACTIVITIES AND IMPACT REPORT



WHAT'S INSIDE

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VISIT SOSI IS A VERY COOL WAY TO EXPLORE DANVILLE AND PITTSYLVANIA COUNTY.

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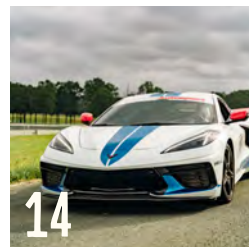
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A MESSAGE FROM VISIT SOSI

Whew, what a year! Over the last 12 months, the energy in Danville and Pittsylvania County Virginia has been truly electric and the new tourism program, managed through the Danville Office of Economic Development and Tourism, has been at the heart of much of the action.

It's amazing what a region can accomplish when everyone pulls in the same direction.

Over the last twelve months, together, we've formalized our tourism and destination marketing program, aligned resources and infrastructure to allow City Staff to better support the local tourism economy, published a community led, data-backed tourism master plan to guide future programming and investments, launched a new brand identity and website, trained more than 175 local front line workers on hospitality best practices, launched new workforce development programs to support our growing sector, and partnered with local businesses to showcase our abundant tourism assets in a wide-variety of exciting new ways.

In the last year, we've also quite literally grown our destination. We welcomed the Danville Casino and the Holbrook Hotel. We've witnessed the groundbreaking and transformation of the former White Mill into its new era as Dan River Falls and we've developed new assets like the self-guided Old West End Historic Walking Tour, the Outdoor Adventure Guide, and the Regional Map.

These investments aren't just serving visitors, they are helping to build a sustainable local economy for residents. The tourism industry is offering more entertainment options, creating more beautiful spaces to relax and play, providing additional community services, and introducing new career opportunities for locals along the way.

All of this work and advancement is building local pride, and I am so very thankful for the hundreds of partners who have joined with us and supported our efforts over this first full year of program implementation. We are just getting started, but I couldn't be happier to be investing in the region alongside all of you.

Lisa K. Meriwether
Tourism Manager
Visit SoSi



Lisa K. Meriwether
Tourism Manager
Visit SoSi

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ALL OF THIS WORK IN ADVANCEMENT IS BUILDING LOCAL PRIDE, AND I'M SO VERY THANKFUL FOR THE HUNDREDS OF PARTNERS WHO HAVE JOINED WITH US AND SUPPORTED OUR EFFORTS.

“THERE’S NEW SHOPS POPPING UP,
THERE’S NEW RESTAURANTS THAT
ARE COMING TO THE AREA. AND,
THE BIGGEST CHANGE I THINK THAT
I’VE SEEN IS THE FOOT TRAFFIC.
THAT HAS BEEN REALLY COOL.

Susan Moss, Moss Mountain Outfitters



MEET THE VISIT SOSI TEAM

Stop by the Danville Visitor Center at 645 River
Park Drive, Danville, VA 24540 to say hello!



Lisa K. Meriwether
Tourism Manager



Alik E. Leonard
Tourism Sales
Coordinator



Laura Ashworth
Marketing & Research
Manager



Hannah Barker
Marketing
Communications
Coordinator



Lisa Greer
Visitor Center
Manager



Joe Eisenberg
Travel Counselor



Beverly Harville
Travel Counselor



Lesly Martin
Travel Counselor



Susan Pruitt
Travel Counselor



Vanessa Wise
Travel Counselor

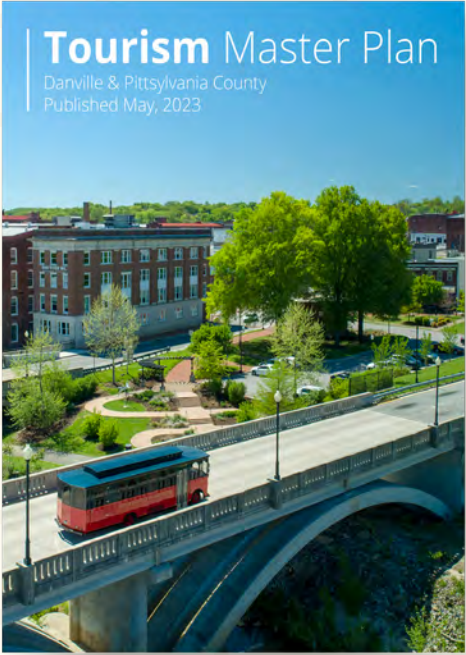
The Visit SoSi team is part of the Danville Office of
Economic Development & Tourism, which also includes:

Corrie Teague Bobe, Director of Economic Development & Tourism

Kelvin Perry, Assistant Director of Economic Development & Tourism

Kim Custer, Special Projects Manager

Samantha Bagbey, Project Manager



DANVILLE VISITOR CENTER: READY FOR REGIONAL GROWTH AND EXPANSION



In July of 2022, in preparation of the formal launch of the new tourism program, the Danville Office of Economic Development and Tourism assumed operations of the local Danville Visitor Center located at 645 River Park Drive, Danville, VA 24540.

They hired Lisa Greer to serve as the Danville Visitor Center Manager, and added a team of five friendly part-time visitor center staff to greet guests 7 days per week from 9 am – 5 pm. The center is now open and welcoming area visitors every day of the year except Christmas, Thanksgiving, and New Year's Day.

The Danville Visitor Center is one of 65 state-certified information centers that provide Virginia visitors with reliable information about local food, lodging, entertainment, and attractions in each unique destination across the state. These certified facilities adhere to common performance standards and compliment the 12-official state-operated Welcome Centers that sit at major border crossings and Commonwealth access points.

These highly-networked facilities share local brochures, training information, and attraction details to help ensure visitors maximize their travel experiences while visiting Virginia. Local Danville Visitor Center staff actively share information and ideas that encourage travelers to stay longer, and spend more, during their time in the Commonwealth. Visitor Centers like this one provide fundamental industry infrastructure that supports the \$7.3 million dollar economic impact that visitors add to the state's economy every day.

This year, in preparation for the region's anticipated growth and tourism industry expansion, the Visit SoSi Travel Counselor Team trained with the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) and applied state-level Welcome Center standards to all operations and promotional efforts. Between Spring 2023 and Spring 2024, the Danville Visitor Center supported more than 20,000 visitors.

Area business owners and event planners that cater to out-of-town visitors are invited to stop by the Danville Visitor Center to introduce themselves to the travel counselors and share more information about their offerings with the onsite staff. Local businesses who have been through extranet training are also invited to leave brochures, promotional fliers, and other relevant visitor information to be shared with regional guests. If you haven't been through extranet training but would like the Visitor Center's help supporting your business or attraction, sign up at VisitSoSi.com.



MASTER PLANNING FOR THOUGHTFUL TOURISM INDUSTRY GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY

In May of 2023, Visit SoSi published its first ever Tourism Master Plan. The 108-page report was the final deliverable in an inclusive year-long community process.

The final master plan included data-backed recommendations to help grow and sustain the tourism economy across Danville and Pittsylvania County, VA over the next five to ten years.

The comprehensive report provided robust investment recommendations and project detail that is now helping to shape the ongoing priorities and investments coming out of the Danville Office of Economic Development and Tourism, Tourism Division in support of the Visit SoSi program.

Tourism is a large, complex, and often fragmented industry. By aligning industry stakeholders, development specialists, and local citizens around a shared vision for industry success, the Visit SoSi Tourism Master Plan is helping the community realize positive economic value at scale while proactively mitigating risk, engaging stakeholders, and driving synergistic community benefits that support local quality of life, job creation, beautification, and community services.

The report is public and can be downloaded from VisitSoSi.com.





Right: Lisa Meriwether, Visit SoSi Tourism Manager, and Rita McClenny, President and CEO, Virginia Tourism Corporation at the May 2023 Visit SoSi Brand Launch Event

INTRODUCING SOSI: A NEW TOURISM BRAND FOR A TRANSFORMATIONAL MOMENT

In May of 2023, the Danville Office of Economic Development and Tourism, Tourism Division kicked off their first full year of destination marketing programming by launching their new brand standards. After a year-long community driven process, they unveiled a new name for the regional destination which includes both the City of Danville, Virginia and Pittsylvania County, Virginia.

City and County leadership had decided to collaborate on regional destination promotions because research has long indicated that visitors seek out regions and tend to ignore municipal boundaries. Community leaders felt they could better leverage their resources and earn stronger return on investment by collaborating than they could by going to market separately and competing against one another for the same group of potential visitors. However, a fresh new regional brand was required to effectively attract the cultural travelers who are known to provide maximum economic value.

The team hired to do this work, Eddy Alexander, spent significant time in the community and met with industry stakeholders and investors before testing their creative concepts and ideas.

The final Visit SoSi brand was the result of a robust 9-month community-led and data-driven process that accounted for more than 2,000 community survey responses, extensive visitor demographic and behavioral research, 16 focus groups (12 in-market and 4 out-of-area), and countless one-on-one

community interviews, product visits, and stakeholder conversations.

The new regional name Visit SoSi came from two distinct ideas 1) that the region is geographically located on the Southern Side of Virginia and 2) that the region surprises many visitors by offering "So Much To See, and So Much To Do."

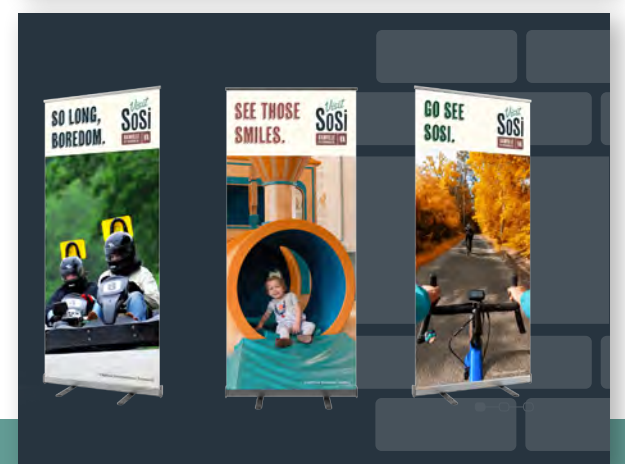
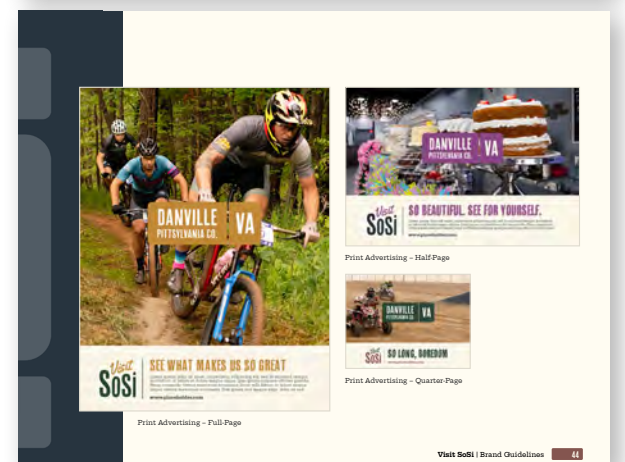
As focus groups gathered to test and prioritize a variety of potential brand concepts and design directions, they repeatedly and overwhelmingly preferred this final option. The test groups indicated that they found it provided a confident, differentiated, and playful new twist on the region – highlighting the area's personality, rise, and momentum.

The new Visit SoSi brand uses clean, differentiated, high-energy colors and visuals to encourage locals and visitors alike to take a fresh look at all the area has to offer, to smile, and to celebrate the community's warmth, wit, and evolution.

Participants noted that this design direction, messaging, and creativity was "fun," "fresh," "flexible," "appealing," "unique," "approachable," "memorable," and "welcoming."

The corresponding brand strategy is also highly diversified, allowing a consistent package to be used to promote the region's outdoor recreation, food and beverage, lodging, entertainment, art, history, culture, architecture, festivals, events, agritourism and so much more.

Designed to appeal to a wide group of travelers with discretionary income and adventurous spirit, the new brand is now being used to invite target audiences to take a fresh look at the region and to make note of the abundance of activities and offerings available in and around Danville and Pittsylvania County, VA.

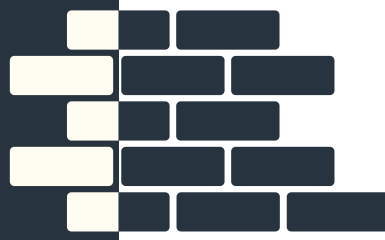


ADVOCACY

Visit SoSi staff participated in the 2023 and 2024 Tourism Industry Day on the Hill and represented Danville and Pittsylvania County Tourism in Richmond, VA. They met with 10-12 different elected officials and discussed the Visit SoSi brand and the impact of tourism on the regional economy and economic development landscape.

Left: Former Delegate Bill Janus; Mike Rose, Director of Marketing, VIRginia International Raceway; Steve Helms, Vice President and General Manager, Primland Resort; and Lisa Meriwether, Visit SoSi Tourism Manager, at the 2024 Tourism Industry Day on the Hill

LOCALS FIRST CAMPAIGN



Before promoting the region and all of its tourism assets to visitors, the Visit SoSi team knew they needed to introduce the new name, branding, and messaging to those locals who make the experience of visiting what it is. The 2023-2024 Locals First Campaign kicked off in the fall with the goal of effectively introducing the new Visit SoSi brand and destination messaging to local community members — setting the stage for steady tourism promotion and growth in Danville and Pittsylvania County, VA.

Campaign tactics included print, social, digital, and broadcast channels and required the creation of many new creative assets that were then distributed through nine different local media partnerships including: Cardinal News, The Danville Register and Bee, Chatham Star Tribune, WAKG Radio, WBTM Radio, WDVA Radio, Southside News Today, Google Display and Video (YouTube) Networks, and Meta (Facebook and Instagram) digital advertising.

RESULTS

- Visit SoSi print advertisements were distributed in 144,000+ local newspapers and magazines
- The Locals First campaign achieved 100,000+ Visit SoSi radio mentions (avg. frequency of 16 impressions per listener)
- The Locals First Campaign achieved 350,000 digital ad impressions and received more than 16k engagements on social media
- The Google advertising campaign alone earned 4.6+ million targeted impressions (avg. 44 impressions per target audience member) and resulted in 28,000+ landing page visits
- The digital ad click through rate (2.37%) outpaced industry targets by 130%



CUSTOMER SERVICE & HOSPITALITY TRAINING FOR FRONT LINE WORKERS

In preparation for significant industry growth, the Danville Office of Economic Development and Tourism again partnered with Eddy Alexander to build a custom curriculum and deliver branded customer service and hospitality best practices training workshops all across the region.

Between June and November 2023, they held 12 3.5 hour sessions across Danville and Pittsylvania County, VA. During this period,



they successfully trained 176 professionals from retail, lodging, food and beverage, entertainment, and cultural arts and education sectors. Content included making the visitor feel welcome, using the brand to build loyalty and repeat regional visitation, providing the economic impact of hospitality, and more.

Did you miss out? Don't worry – the workshops are scheduled to start back up again in the second half of 2024. Sign up for industry updates on the partner page of the Visit SoSi website to be notified when class sign-ups reopen.

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

Over the last eighteen months, Danville and Pittsylvania County have secured more than \$900M in destination development investment and welcomed the new Danville Casino and Holbrook Hotel. Construction has also begun on Dan River Falls, the new Riverfront Park, and more!

Right: Lisa Meriwether, Visit SoSi Tourism Manager; Sandra Tanner, Destination Development Specialist, Virginia Tourism Corporation (Ret.); Rita McClenny, President and CEO, Virginia Tourism Corporation; and Corrie Bobe, Director of Economic Development and Tourism, City of Danville, VA at the Caesars Virginia Groundbreaking



NEW PROMOTIONS: PACKAGING OUR PRODUCT

Over the last twelve months, the Visit SoSi team has been hard at work developing a number of new brochures and promotional materials that help share the region's story, make local assets and attractions more accessible, and enable visitors to more easily plan a fun-filled trip to the area.

Visit SoSi Website

The new Visit SoSi website launched in December of 2023 and now serves as the promotional hub for all regional activities, attractions, and events. Local stakeholders are encouraged to attend one of Visit SoSi's monthly extranet trainings to ensure their businesses and events are accurately represented on this website.

Sign up on the partners page of VisitSoSi.com.



Regional Map

The new area tourism pad maps are large enough to mark up with a highlighter and enable local industry representatives to serve as area ambassadors, helping visitors easily find their way to top regional attractions.



VISIT SOSI FRIDAYS

On Fridays, Visit SoSi takes over River City TV. Mark Aron, Multimedia Design Manager, and Tourism Manager Lisa Meriwether travel the region highlighting local tourism assets and attractions. There is So Much to See and So Much to Do!

Visit SoSi Visitor Guide

In the fall of 2023, Visit SoSi published the region's first-ever visitor guide which highlighted the area's diverse offerings across the region. Pick up a copy to learn more about Visit SoSi's history and culture, art and architecture, outdoor adventures, events and festivals, family friendly attractions, and more!



Old West End Historic District Self-Guided Walking Tour

In the spring of 2023, Visit SoSi teamed up with the Old West End Neighborhood Association to create a new interactive self-guided walking tour that features the architectural history of many of the notable homes along Millionaire's Row and throughout the Old West End Neighborhood (between Schoolfield and the River District in Downtown Danville).

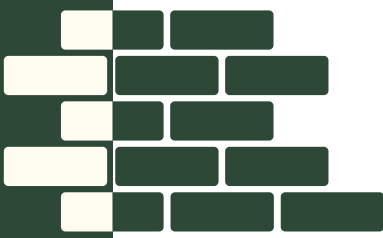
Visit SoSi Outdoor Adventure Guide

Visit SoSi's newest brochure is a regional outdoor adventure guide that highlights the region's diverse and abundant outdoor and agricultural experiences including hiking, biking, racing, farm tours, rodeo's, markets, wineries, breweries and so much more.

Copies are available in the Visit SoSi Visitor Center and throughout the county. Contact the Visitor Center to request copies to distribute from your business.



All promotional materials are available to download at [VisitSoSi.com](https://www.VisitSoSi.com).



VIRGINIA INTERNATIONAL RACEWAY NAMED VIRGINIA STATE ATTRACTION OF THE YEAR

In August of 2023, VIRginia International Raceway (VIR) was named the top tourist attraction in the state by the Virginia Restaurant Lodging and Travel Association (VRLTA). VIR was celebrated for its significant contribution to the state tourism economy and was recognized for its revitalization of a historic asset important to the Commonwealth, its innovative and effective business modeling, and its regional collaboration.

LISA MERIWETHER NAMED VSAE ASSOCIATE MEMBER OF THE YEAR

In December of 2023, Lisa Meriwether, Visit SoSi Tourism Manager was named Associate Member of the Year by the Virginia Society of Association Executives at their annual December awards banquet. Lisa has been a contributing member of this important industry association for 20+ years and the society recognized her significant career accomplishments, including her work advancing the tourism economy in Danville and Pittsylvania County, VA.

CAESARS GIVES \$504K TO AVERETT UNIVERSITY TO SUPPORT HOSPITALITY WORKFORCE

Caesars Entertainment gifted \$504k to Averett University to further develop their hospitality and tourism academic programs. Averett's new concentration and minor in hospitality management and tourism is part of the university's business management program and offers courses on the hospitality and tourism industry, lodging operations, and food and beverage management. Each student will end the program with a capstone internship at a local hospitality-related business.

HOLBROOK HOTEL OPENS IN DANVILLE – ADDS 45 LUXURY SUITES TO MARKET

In November of 2023, the new Holbrook Hotel opened at the intersection of Danville's historic Old West End and Holbrook Ross neighborhood. The new hotel features the historic redevelopment of an old Doctor's Building that was built in 1957. The building was constructed in the International Style and is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register. The hotel includes 45 luxury suites with kitchenettes and a mid-century aesthetic.

THE BRICK RUNNING AND TRI STORE EXPANDS

The Brick Running and Tri Store at 10 Main Street in Danville specializes in the sale of shoes, apparel, equipment, and nutrition for walkers, runners, and triathletes. Owner Adam Jones opened the store 10 years ago, and, with the help of the River District Association's Dream Launch Pitch Competition and the Industrial Development Authority (IDA), which owns the building, they are now expanding to add additional retail space for bike sales and gear, as well as bike repair services.

RIVERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT REVITALIZES DANVILLE'S RIVERFRONT AND WHITE MILL

The Danville Industrial Development Authority and The Alexander Company are partnering to restore the iconic 550,000-square-foot distinctive former White Mill along Danville's downtown riverfront. The building is being turned into an adaptive multi-use community hub that will include 147k sq. ft. of commercial space (office, retail, and restaurants), 150 multi-family apartments, indoor and outdoor community spaces, and indoor and surface parking. A new public riverfront park, is also being developed with an eye toward enhancing quality of life for Danville residents, increasing tourism, and contributing to the continued revitalization of the Danville River District.

AVERETT UNIVERSITY OFFERS FREE REGIONAL TOURISM TRAINING WITH \$250K GRANT FROM THE CITY OF DANVILLE

On the heels of launching their new hospitality training program, Averett University leveraged a \$250k grant from the City of Danville to offer a new leadership and professional development program to area restaurant, hotel, and other hospitality leaders. The curriculum was designed to enhance service excellence and develop the local workforce at no cost to students or area employers. Through this initiative, Averett worked to provide mid- to high-level hospitality management and business leaders with necessary skills, procedures and tactics to better manage employees and improve service quality. Following the course, participants had the opportunity to sit for nationally recognized certifications offered through the American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) and the National Restaurant Association.

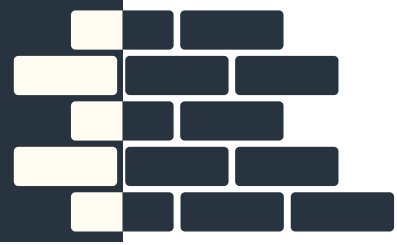
DANVILLE NAMED 2024 ALL-AMERICA CITY FINALIST

Danville is one of 20 U.S. cities named as a 2024 finalist in the National Civic League's 2024 All-America City Awards. Each year the National Civic League recognizes communities that demonstrate innovative, inclusive, and effective efforts to tackle critical challenges. This year's competition is the first entry submitted by the City of Danville since it was selected as an All-America City in 2020. Danville was also named an All-America City in 1977. The 20 All-America City finalist communities will compete June 7-9 in Denver, CO, for the award, which is given to 10 communities each year.

DANVILLE RIVER DISTRICT NAMED 2023 GREAT AMERICAN MAIN STREET

On March 27, 2023 The Danville River District Association was honored by Main Street America when they received one of three prestigious Great American Main Street Awards (GAMSA). The Great American Main Street Competition recognizes communities for their excellence in comprehensive preservation-based commercial district revitalization. Winners were selected by a national jury of industry professionals and local leaders specialized in the fields of economic development and historic preservation. The River District Association was also recognized for creating a fertile environment for economic vitality through exceptionally strong collaborative leadership and partnerships.

VISIT REGIONAL TOURISM BY THE NUMBERS



\$144M

in visitor
spending**

\$900M

new destination
development
investment
secured*

\$7.5M

direct tourism
industry tax
collections**

1,445

local tourism jobs
directly supporting
visitation*

213

events, assets,
and attractions
promoted

4.6M

Visit SoSi digital
ad impressions
earned

100K+

Visit SoSi radio
ads aired

350K

Visit SoSi social
media ads
distributed

144K

Visit SoSi magazine
and newspaper
ads printed

*This figure includes investments made, pledged, and announced between Jan. 1, 2023 and April 15, 2024.

**2022 Data from Virginia Tourism Corporation/Symphony – Tourism Economics Research. All other data provided represents information collected between Jan. 1 of 2023 and April 15, 2024.