

## Arkansas bureau recruits athletes

Thirty students from the University of Central Arkansas have been signed to “Name, Image and Likeness” (NIL) agreements with the Conway Convention & Visitors Bureau, the group announced.

Conway CVB said it is the first public entity in the country to enter into NCAA NIL agreements. The plan is to utilize the student athletes as ambassadors for the city’s “quality of place,” touting Conway’s amenities to residents and visitors.

State legislators passed an NIL law this past session. It goes into law on Jan. 1, 2022. It allows athletes at institutions of higher education to be compensated for their name, image and likeness.

“Conway is a growing college town with great restaurants and parks. We have a lot to offer students, visitors, and young professionals,” said Rachel Shaw, Executive Director of the Conway Convention & Visitors Bureau. “No one is in a better position to explain what it’s like to move here and thrive than this group.”

The 30-person inaugural group will equitably represent all men’s and women’s sports. In the coming weeks, individual athletes will go through a selection process with the CVB and begin to promote the city through video testimonials, ad campaigns, and their own social media accounts.

Shaw estimates that most of the students will earn between \$500 to \$2,000 during their time in the program.

– *talkbusiness.net*



Photo: Roger L. Pawlowski

Some supporters believe wrecks like the Washington (above) could encourage tourism.

## Designated marine sanctuary sought

Lakes are often tourist destinations, but not usually for what’s underneath the water.

There are more than 60 shipwrecks at the bottom of the eastern portion of Lake Ontario, representing more than 200 years of history.

For this reason, it could soon be marked a National Marine Sanctuary.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration released a draft proposal last month.

Lawmakers like U.S. Rep. John Katko have been advocating for this potential national recognition.

“It could be a play land for divers and tourists,” Katko said. “There’s less than 20, I believe, marine sanctuaries in the nation so for them to get that designation would be a very big thing.”

The proposed underwater national park includes parts of New York state’s Wayne County, known for its lakefront at Sodus Point.

The Wayne County historian says this has been in the works for 20 years and would create significant economic impact.

The NOAA draft itself offers a few budget options, saying the proposed Lake Ontario National Marine Sanctuary could potentially cost up to \$1 million a year to pay for staff, research, public outreach and more.

Not everyone is on board with it.

“The benefits I think are fairly minimal,” said Jim Kennard, local shipwreck explorer.

Kennard of Fairport has been exploring local shipwrecks for over 50 years.

He says a lot of the research has already been done.

“They want to also come and survey the whole area again, now that costs millions of dollars, we’ve already done it, sonar professionals,” he said.

– *rochesterfirst.com*

# TENNESSEE ON ME ✈️

## Airfare promotion continues to draw fire

Tennessee paid thousands of dollars for social media influencers to promote a contentious new initiative that uses \$2.5 million in taxpayer dollars to offer flight vouchers largely to out-of-state residents.

According to documents obtained through a public records request, the Department of Tourist Development paid an estimated \$11,000 to at least 11 local influencers to post on Instagram, Facebook and TikTok touting the new program. Emails show the state had originally budgeted \$30,000 for influencers.

To date, the state has spent more than \$230,000 out of its \$270,000 tourism marketing budget to advertise the program online. That has raised eyebrows among

both Republican leaders and Democratic lawmakers wondering why tax dollars are being spent on tourists' airfare.

The program has faced even further scrutiny after it was unveiled around the 4th of July holiday weekend just days after Republican Gov. Bill Lee halted extra federal unemployment aid for low-income Tennesseans who had been affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. The reveal — which included a promotional video with country music star Brad Paisley — caught state leaders off guard, sparking the Tourism Commissioner Mark Ezell to later apologize last week to a legislative panel on his agency's rollout of the program.

— *Associated Press*

## Vermont farms want to expand agritourism

Many Vermont farmers plan to expand their agritourism offerings according to new survey data from the Vermont Tourism Research Center at UVM.

Researchers surveyed more than 1,800 farmers with existing agritourism businesses between November 2019 and February 2020. The survey, which had

respondents from all 50 states, included 222 Vermont farms.

Agritourism, as a term, generally includes any activity that attracts visitors to a working farm.

Nearly 60% of the Vermont farms said they plan to expand their agritourism offerings.

— *vt-digger.org*

## Questions raised over influencers

An Austin, Texas, TV station recently addressed the state's payments to influencers. Here are excerpts from the story:

The State of Texas is using taxpayer money to fund influencer marketing campaigns that promote travel to the state.

Since 2019, Texas has used taxpayer money on 25 social media influencer marketing campaigns. That cost a total of \$118,267.40.

Jane Ko runs one of Austin's most popular Instagram accounts: A Taste of Koko. Since she started blogging about Austin 11 years ago, her account has grown to more than 100,000 followers.

A spokesperson for the Office of the Governor's Economic Development and Tourism Division sent KVUE the following statement in response:

"Travel Texas partners with social media content creators, often referred to as influencers, to highlight the state as a destination of choice for travelers. Content partnerships with Travel Texas are thoroughly vetted by the experts at our social media agency to ensure they will deliver a return on investment in line with industry standards for successful content views and engagement. Influencer content is an effective way to highlight many different aspects of travel around the state of Texas to highly tailored audiences based on their personal interests, location, age and more."

The spokesperson for Travel Texas said in 2019, \$83 billion in travel spending led to a \$169.8 billion impact on the Texas economy.

— *kvue.com*