



Visitors Center Chapel Hill/Orange County

ALWAYS A WARM WELCOME.

VISITORS CENTER, CHAPEL HILL, NC

Connect with us online at visitchapelhill.org, call us at (919) 245-4320, or stop by the Visitors Center at 501 W. Franklin St. in Chapel Hill, N.C., from 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 10 a.m.-3 p.m. on Saturday.

VISITCHAPELHILL.ORG

CHAPEL HILL

HILLSBOROUGH & CARRBORO

ORANGE COUNTY VISITORS BUREAU



Mission

- To provide information about travel to and within Orange County, NC to visitors and potential visitors in the most friendly and comprehensive way possible.
- To use the Visitor Center as a marketing vehicle for local businesses by displaying information and referring guests to area restaurants, shops and special events.
- To support Orange County's \$187 million annual tourism industry through welcoming hospitality and one-stop service.
- To help North Carolina's reputation for being welcoming and friendly by offering a welcome center to all.

Goal



- The Chapel Hill Visitors Center promotes thousands of tourism-related businesses in Orange County—attractions, UNC-Chapel Hill, accommodations information, events.
- The Visitors Center works with event planners to spotlight upcoming promotions.
- The Visitors Center helps keep visitors in Orange County and contributes to a longer stay:
 - More people, staying longer, spending more money.
 - Guests originate from all over the world.

20 Years of Visitors Services

- In 1996 the Chapel Hill/Orange County Visitor's Bureau moved to new headquarters, in the back offices of the historical Bentley Building at 501 W. Franklin St. *(They were housed on the corner of Colombia and Franklin beginning in 1992).*
- Once in the Bentley Building, a walk-in Visitors Center was added to accommodate the area's growing tourism industry. (2002).
- Today a staff of six work at the Visitors Center.
- Space provided to Guardian Ad Litem in Bentley Building.

Location and Wayfinding

- The Visitors Center is located in the heart of Franklin Street.
- The Board of Orange County Commissioners (Circa 1992) recognized that a Visitors Center should be near hotels.
- The Town of Chapel Hill provides both Interstate and Orange County wayfinding signs to the Visitors Center.



Operation and Staffing

- The Visitors Center is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- The Visitors Center is often open during holidays when UNC and local government offices are not.
- A full time Orange County staff member works exclusively in the Visitor Center Monday through Friday.
- A permanent part-time employee operates the Visitor Center on Saturday's and as needed for back-up.



Professionally Trained Staff

- The full-time Visitors Bureau staff is trained to work in the Visitors Center.
- Training includes:
 - Monthly visits to area attractions and new assets in Orange County.
 - Daily input of content into website to stay relevant and updated on area happenings.
 - Monthly meetings with key stakeholders to learn what is going on in Orange County.



Professionally Trained Staff (...cont.)

- Trained travel professionals are on-hand to help visitors via phone call, walk-in, websites.
- Distribute the Visitors Bureau's official Visitor Guide, maps, and other marketing publications about Orange County.
- Offer detailed travel information in well-maintained facilities.
- Book room reservations at no charge.



Free Brochure Distribution

- Any Orange County visitor attraction or tourism-related business is permitted to place its brochures, signs and posters in the Visitors Center at no charge with prior approval.
- Priority for official Orange County travel publications; accommodations; attractions; events; regional, area maps.
- For many small businesses, the Visitors Center is the primary method of marketing.
- Each year visitors take more than 100,000 printed pieces to help them explore the Orange County communities.

Welcoming Facility Often Provides First Impression



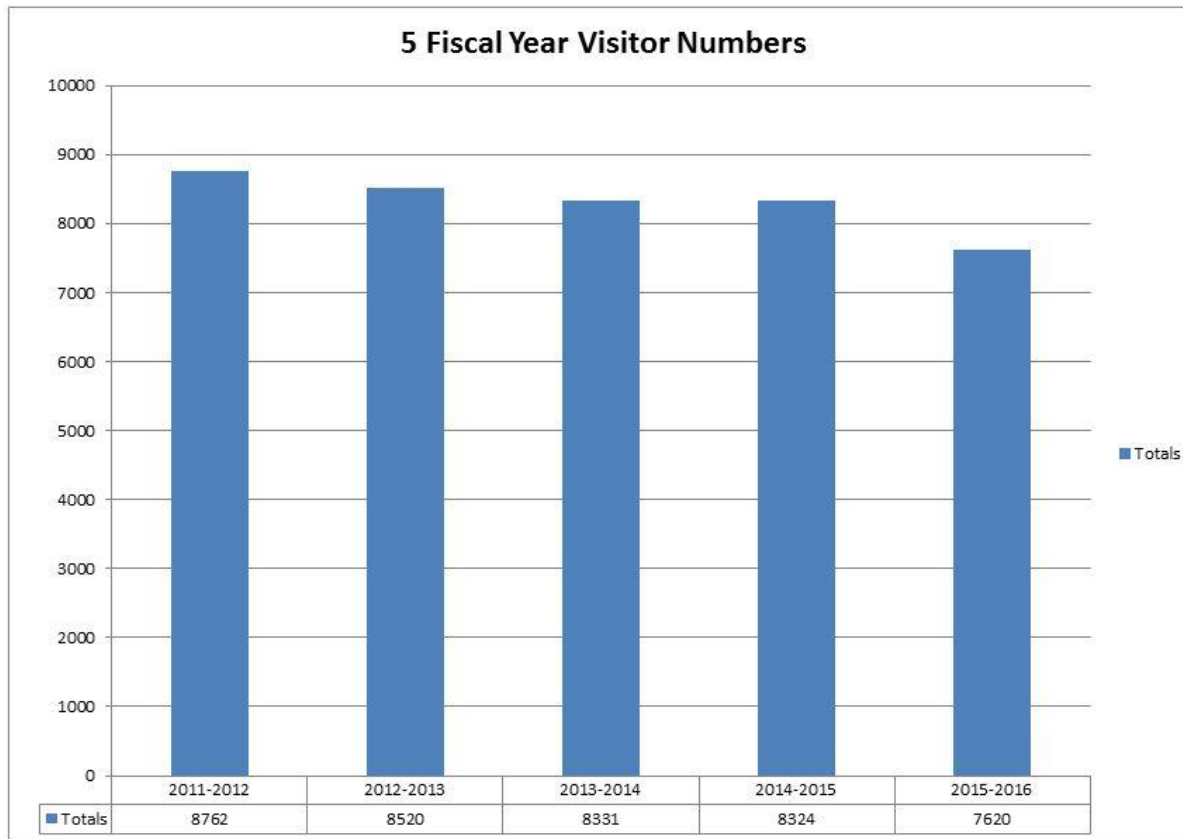
Conference Room Used by Civic Groups



Storage

- A storage room is located near the Visitors Center, in back of main offices.
- At any time, the storage unit is filled with:
 - 50,000 visitor guides
 - 30,000 maps
 - 100 state visitor guides (10,000 would mean 3500 boxes)
 - 5,000 brochures from area venues
 - Bags and giveaways
 - Flags, pots, mulch, shovels and light equipment
 - Boxes of books, specialty publications, giveaways

Visitation : 5 Year Period



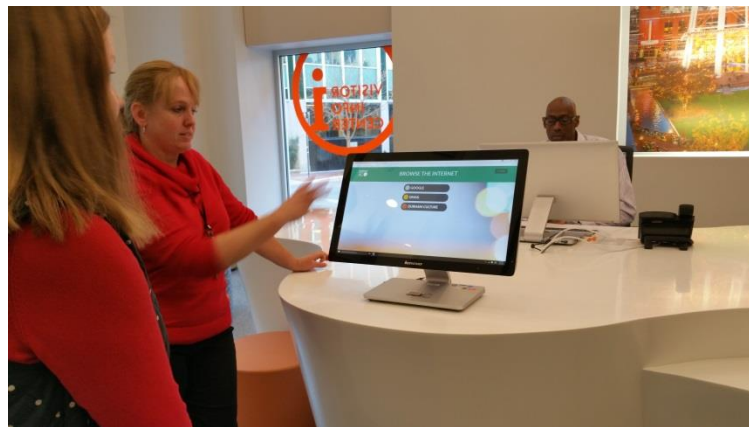
Visitors Center Partnerships

- Orange County: materials distributed on Orange County history and services.
- Chapel Hill: greenways, bus schedules, events, cultural happenings, public art.
- Carrboro: maps, brochures, parks & recreation guide, music festival, ArtsCenter.
- Hillsborough: history brochures, restaurant guides, hotels, events, holiday info.
- UNC Chapel Hill: Brochure, events, CPA events, Morehead Planetarium.
- Agricultural Partners: App, maps, farmer's markets, pick your own stands.
- Cultural institutions, Comedy, Music, Science Expos
- Visit NC Travel Guide
- Hotel information
- RDU Airport Authority
- Rental Cars and Uber
- Trolley services for events
- Towing company for parking challenges



Other Regional Visitor Centers

- Durham Visitors Center:
- “Rising numbers here. Our visitors more than doubled since the move to the new location. We average in the neighborhood of 1000+ per month that actually walk into the Visitor Info Center (more in the spring/summer months) and about 5,000 a month when we add in all of the satellite VIC services (where we provide info tables for festivals, events.”
Shelly Green, CEO.



Other Regional Visitor Centers

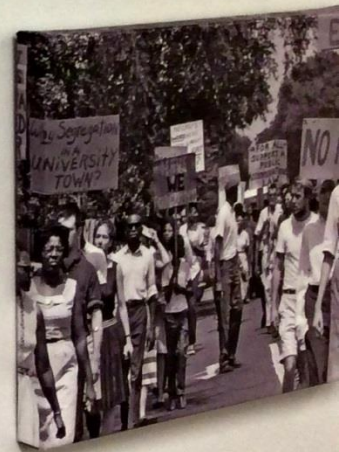
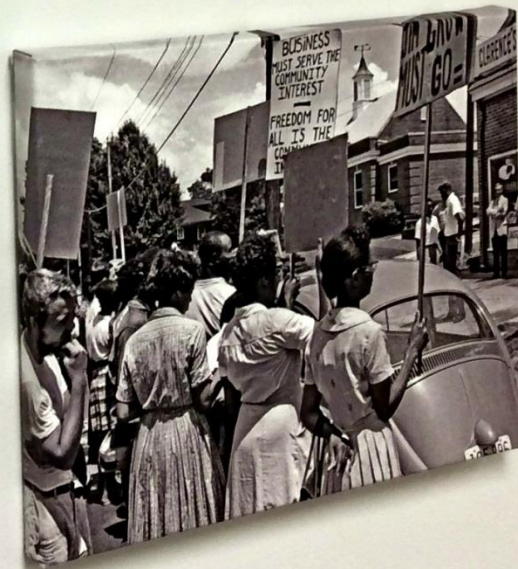
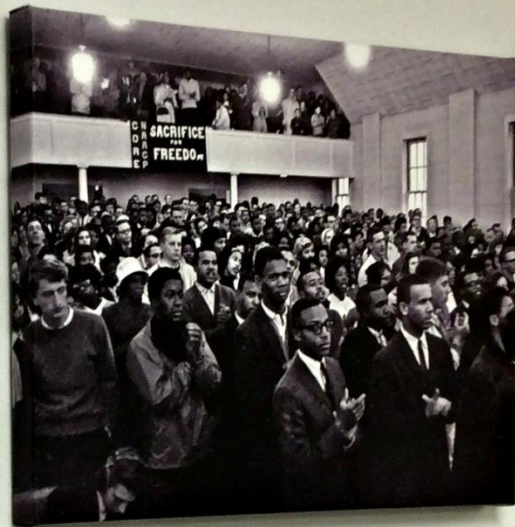
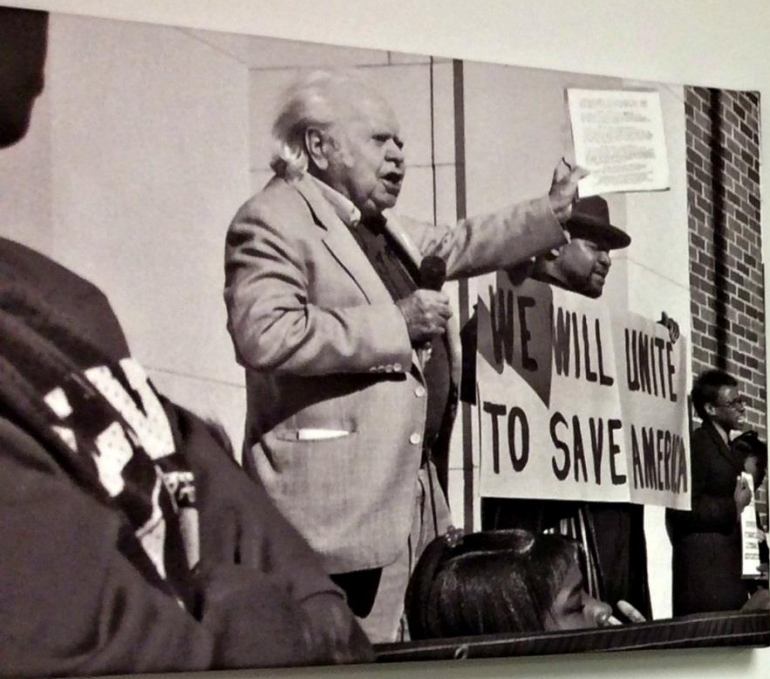
- Raleigh Visitors Center:
- “We average in the neighborhood of 600+ per month with the Visitors Guide rising in demand by 21% last year. Printed materials and a live-body remain the top requests. Digital maps have not replaced Southern Hospitality.” Denny Edwards, Raleigh CEO.



Special Promotions

- The Orange County Visitors Center stays open during local festivals and events and contributes resources for milestone events in Orange County. Visits during FestiFall surpass 200 guests. Football game day we fly the other team's flag!
 - 2nd Friday ArtWalk
 - FestiFall
 - Public Art events





Other Southern States

Improving Visitor Services

- South Carolina--\$2.9 million renovation project for all 9 SC Welcome Centers; adding technology, adjustable brochure racks, removing service desk
- Florida—Research shows \$2.88 return on investment; 7 out of 10 visitors gain enhanced perception of state; 4 of 10 modified their current trips based on information from Welcome Center

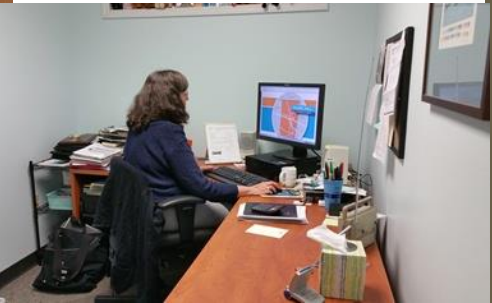
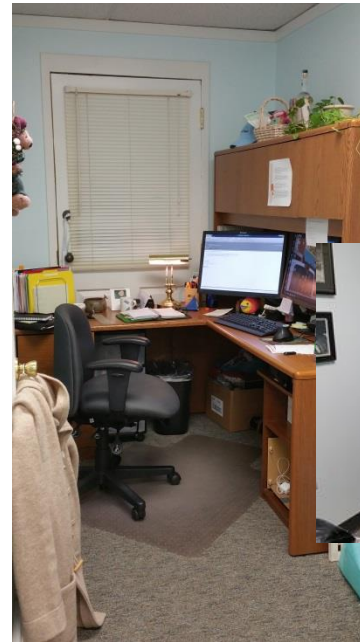


National Trends

- Visitors bring their technology (phones, tablet, GPS, laptops) with them and are often seeking Internet access or charging stations.
- Map 21 allowed limited advertising, sponsorships and sales. Very little success.
- Texas—No response to “Don’t Mess With Texas” merchandising RFP, sponsorships
- Nevada—One response RFP for company to *find* sponsors. None found yet.
- Welcome Centers share information, best practices at U.S. Travel Association conference, attended by Orange County.

Visitors Center Staff Offices

- Five separate offices, behind the main Visitor Center, house:
- Executive Director, Communications Director, Sales Director, Website manager, administrative assistant.



Summary

- Tourism is important to Orange County. For every dollar invested, this industry returns \$185.
- Welcoming guests and assisting guests with information is important to our economy and future.
- UNC Chapel Hill operates a Visitor Center which might be able to assist the general visitor.
- This Visitor Center has several interdependent parts: Staff advertises the Visitor Center, coordinates game day promotions, stays open Saturdays, works evening events, provides information on Hillsborough, Carrboro and even Durham and Raleigh (if asked). A Visitor Center should not be opened independently of trained tourism staff.