

# visitnc newslink

A publication of the North Carolina Department of Commerce  
Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development



*The N.C. Legislative Building in Raleigh*

## Budget provides additional marketing funds, extends film tax incentive through 2014

Revisions to the [state budget](#) approved by the General Assembly this week include several items that directly affect the Division and its programs. The budget provides an additional, non-recurring \$250,000 for the Division to market North Carolina as a premier travel destination. For 2012-13, the Division's marketing budget is just over \$8.1 million.

The bill extends the [state's film incentive](#) through Dec. 31, 2014. North Carolina's film incentives package is credited with luring a number of movies to the state in recent months, including "Iron Man 3," which is currently filming across the state. Previously, the General Assembly increased the state's incentive program to allow film companies to claim a 25 percent tax credit - up to \$20 million - on productions spending



*The TV Land statue of Andy & Opie is a popular attraction for visitors to Mount Airy*

### N.C. and nation mourn Andy Griffith

He was a native son who left early and made it big. But the Blue Ridge community of Mount Airy never forgot Andy Griffith. When the actor died Tuesday at 86, the alter ego for his beloved TV sitcom town, Mayberry, mourned the passing of a man whose show had transformed a down-at-its-heels tobacco and manufacturing burg into a [shrine for down-home values](#). "We're the quintessential small town that lost all those things. Tourism has really saved us," said Tanya Jones, the executive director of the Surry Arts Council. "Andy is the hook. He is the reason people

more than \$250,000 in qualifying expenses. The legislature had also expanded the type of expenses that qualify for the credits and eliminated the corporate income tax on the incentive itself.

The budget revisions also move the Wine and Grape Growers Council from the Dept. of Commerce to the Dept. of Agriculture & Consumer Services, providing \$500,000 in non-recurring operating funds and shifting one position from Tourism to Agriculture.



## GSA considers changes to per diem calculation

The General Services Administration is considering several revisions to its methodology for [calculating its annual lodging per diem rate](#), which would directly affect the travel industry. One proposal under serious consideration would reduce per diem rates in major travel markets by upwards of 30 percent. The U.S. Travel Association says this could have significant and long-lasting economic impacts on government and private sector business travel, and harm the nation's tentative economic recovery.

Each year, GSA adjusts the lodging per diem rates in 400 separate markets in the U.S. by using Smith Travel Research (STR) data for mid-price hotels. GSA calculates the lodging per diem for each market by using the average daily rates of independent, midscale, upscale and upper upscale properties over a one year period (from April to March of the previous two years). By eliminating "upper upscale hotel rates" from the data used to calculate the lodging per diem, the government would reduce the maximum amount it is willing to reimburse federal employees for lodging.

This could have wide-ranging impacts on business travel across the nation. While responses to the GSA scandal focused on federal meetings and conferences, lowering the lodging per diem rate would impact both government group

come to Mount Airy." Visitors can get a trim at Floyd's City Barber Shop from a dead ringer to his TV counterpart, order a fried pork chop sandwich at Snappy Lunch (a real-life diner that was mentioned, but never visited, in the show), or take a tour in a vintage Ford Galaxie 500 squad car (the same make that Andy and his deputy Barney Fife used). They can admire the town drunk Otis' stained seersucker jacket and Barney's salt-and-pepper suit at the Andy Griffith Museum, and even cuddle under chenille covers in Griffith's two-bedroom, one-bath childhood home, now owned by the local Hampton Inn and offered as a vacation rental.

Griffith starred in "Matlock," which ran 1986-1995. Although initially filmed in Los Angeles, the successful crime drama - which switched from NBC to ABC in 1993 - shot its last three seasons in Wilmington. In 1992, the "Matlock" star told his producers, "That's it - I'm going to North Carolina," said Johnny Griffin, director of the Wilmington Regional Film Office. Griffith "was the [main reason television came to Wilmington](#)," said Bill Vassar, head of the EUE/Screen Gems studio complex in Wilmington. "Matlock," Vassar added, helped pave the way for other series, notably "Dawson's Creek" and "One Tree Hill," to pick Southeastern North Carolina as a location. "That's what kept the film industry going here," he said.

The news of Griffith's death was covered by media across the state and country, including the [Associated Press](#) (picked up by, among others, the Washington Post), [USA Today](#), the [Los Angeles Times](#), [The New York Times](#), and [CNN](#) plus all of the major broadcast and cable news networks.



## U.S. Travel Outlook: Slow recovery continues

and transient travel. Because private sector companies and government contractors routinely base their reimbursement rates on the government per diem, revenue from private sector business travel could also be impacted over the next year.

The U.S. Travel Association has asked supporters to contact their local GSA administrator and urge that the current per diem methodology remain unchanged; is meeting with the GSA and other government officials, including White House officials, to ask that they keep any harmful proposals from moving forward; is building a coalition of defense contractors and government vendors, which are also affected by a change to GSA per diem rates; developing an aggressive communications strategy with research to present this issue to the media; and working with members of Congress to make sure they are aware of these potential changes.



*Henry River Mill Village is drawing tourists for its setting in "The Hunger Games"*

## 'Hunger Games' makes N.C. mill village a star

The hot new tourist spot in Burke County these days is just off Henry River Road. Abandoned for nearly a half century, the Henry River Mill Village consists of about 20 empty buildings in eastern Burke County. But last year, [filmmakers used the site](#) to portray District 12 in "The Hunger Games." Since the hit movie's March premiere, countless fans have trekked to the once-forgotten village to see Katniss Everdeen's hometown with their own eyes. "We have had families travel here from all over the country," says Ed Phillips, Burke County's tourism director. "I expected it to be popular, you just never know how popular." Burke County tourism is up 300 percent from last June, an increase Phillips attributes partially to "The Hunger

While certain sectors of the U.S. economy are seeing improvement, the movement is slow and often appears stalled, reports the most recent [U.S. Travel Outlook](#). The May Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that since early 2010, the U.S. has added 3.7 million jobs, but still have 5 million fewer jobs than it did when the recession began. According to Oxford Economics, there are still high levels of uncertainty in the job market and, while employment is expected to continue to rise slowly, income growth will be constrained.

First quarter GDP estimates were adjusted down to 1.9 percent last month, but personal consumer expenditures showed record highs in April according to the BEA. Declining gas prices are thought to have helped consumer spending.

Consumer confidence continues to be a mixed bag of results. The Conference Board's consumer confidence index decreased in May to 64.9 from 68.7 in April, its lowest since January, however the Thomson Reuters/University of Michigan index of sentiment for May climbed to its highest level since October 2007. Gallup also reports that U.S. economic confidence holds steady with a three month high.

Leisure travel garners continued positive projections. According to the April 2012 Travelhorizons survey, 64 percent of U.S. adults plan to take at least one leisure trip between May and October 2012. The study also showed a difference in the way Americans view the impact of rising gasoline prices on their travel behavior. Forty-four percent of U.S. adults planning to take a leisure trip in April 2012 reported that the high price of gasoline would likely cause them to alter their "drive" leisure travel plans, down from 57 percent in April 2011. Fewer respondents also indicated that they would also "cut back on spending for entertainment, dining out and shopping" to accommodate the increased price of fuel.

The most recent American Express Spending

Games" craze.



*Chimney Rock, viewed from the Opera Box (photo courtesy Steven McBride)*

### **Chimney Rock State Park dedicates improved elevator, trail**

This past Saturday, Chimney Rock in Lake Lure officially dedicated its brand-new, [completely renovated elevator](#) built straight through the granite rock wall. Closed for renovations for the past year, it re-opened earlier in June. The formal dedication of the elevator also included the dedication of the renovated Outcroppings Trail with its 491 stairs and which initially opened in April, and numerous other safety and visitor facility improvements.

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& Saving Tracker reports that summer travel will remain strong, but that the consumer is thinking differently about travel. Almost half say they are seeking a more meaningful experience and more travelers are seeking to incorporate their hobbies into their travel experience.

Business travel reports continue to be optimistic as well. According to the American Express and CFO Research Services Global Business and Spending Monitor, nearly 30 percent of respondents say their companies are likely to spend more on travel in 2012 than in 2011. In addition, the April edition of Travelhorizons reports that for the first time since April 2007, the percentage of U.S. adults reporting traveling for business purposes increased.

The U.S. lodging industry continues to improve. In April 2012, increases were posted in all key metrics according to Smith Travel Research. As well, PKF Hospitality Research forecasts RevPAR increasing nearly six percent in 2012 and ADR increasing four percent. For the most recent North Carolina lodging data, click [here](#).

Travel-related policy is an ongoing hot topic as the economy continues to grow slowly. During the annual National Travel and Tourism Week in May, the Obama Administration announced its National Travel and Tourism Strategy, a long-term plan for increasing both domestic and international tourism. The goal of the strategy is to attract 100 million international visitors, who will bring an estimated \$250 billion, annually by the end of 2021 to the U.S. economy. According to Roger Dow, CEO of the U.S. Travel Association, "This important step officially elevates the travel industry to what it should be: a national priority. It also recognizes the industry for its fundamental contribution to our economy, national security and public diplomacy." Dow also warned that cuts on government travel continue to pose a threat to the industry. (Such as the preceding GSA story, which can be read [here](#).)



The waterfall in the Grand Rotunda at Harrah's Cherokee Casino & Hotel (photo courtesy Jennifer Saylor/Ashvegas.com)

## Harrah's Cherokee grand rotunda opens

The [showpiece of the expansion](#) at Harrah's Cherokee Casino, the Grand Rotunda, opened last Friday. The Rotunda features LED lit trees that are 75-ft. tall, a 140-ft. long LED screen, twin waterfalls that are 68-ft. each, two escalators and a spiraled staircase. Synchronized video, audio, and lighting shows, with 15 different programs, will be featured at the Rotunda. On the first level of the Rotunda, guests can access the casino floor; from the second level, guests will be able to access the River Shops.



Vollis Simpson whirligig in Lucama

## Whirligigs getting makeover for park

The eccentric vision of a self-taught North Carolina artist famed for his whimsical, wind-powered whirligigs is getting an overhaul that's as much about engineering as it is about art. Just as more traditional conservators might study an artist's canvas and paints, the 16-member team working in a former downtown auto parts warehouse pores over pieces of reflector and debates whether to use more modern bearings to replace old-fashioned grease fittings on Vollis Simpson's spinning sculptures. [They're restoring about 30 whirligigs](#) - wind-driven creations constructed from motor fans, cotton spindles and other recycled parts - that stand as high as 50 feet. With the help of approximately \$2 million in grants and donations, a few organizations in nearby Wilson are building the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Park. It's scheduled to open in November 2013. Between now and then, the team is sprucing up whirligigs that have spent decades in the elements, including more than a few hurricanes.

## Cherokee tribe goes solar at visitors centers

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians has installed a series of metal trees bearing solar panels on the branches near the three visitors areas on the Qualla Boundary in Cherokee.



## National Geographic: Wrightsville Beach among 'World's 20 Best Surf Towns'

National Geographic magazine has named Wrightsville Beach among the "[World's 20 Best Surf Towns](#)," noting a great surf town is the nearly magical sum of consistent waves, inviting accommodations, friendly locals, fun nightlife, delicious food, and plenty of activities should the ocean go flat. For [Wrightsville Beach](#), the magazine notes it's best for "The whole family can enjoy Wrightsville's trademark mix of sleepy southern beach town and growing metropolis. Think catfish with caviar or barbecue with Beaujolais."

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## Vote for Asheville as 'Best Outdoor Town'

What does Richmond, Va., have that Asheville doesn't? That's what Asheville outdoors enthusiasts are trying to figure out. Especially since Richmond is leading Asheville in Outside magazine's Best Outdoors Town contest, which launched last month on Facebook and continues through Tuesday. Asheville and Richmond were among the Top 10 "Best River Towns in America," named by the largest outdoors lifestyle magazine, which runs the contest each year to determine the cities that offer a balance of great culture, perfect scenery, stress-free and reasonable cost of living, and easy access to the outdoors. This year, for its 35th anniversary issue in October, Outside teamed up with the nonprofit American Rivers to identify the top 10 river towns in the U.S. The winning town will receive the official honor of Outside's "Best Town in America" and will be featured on the October 2012 magazine cover, Outside Online, and an exclusive segment on Outside TV. Vote for Asheville in Outside magazine's Best Outdoors Town contest through

The artistic solar arrays fashioned in the form of a tree were installed at the Welcome Center on Tsali Boulevard, the visitors center on U.S. 19 and a public rest area and information kiosk near the Great Smoky Mountain National Park entrance. The tribe hopes the unique look will draw attention from visitors to the reservation. The end goal is to make the Welcome Center LEED certified and the downtown building achieve net zero energy status, meaning it does not use any non-renewable energy. The addition of the solar panels is [part of a larger Energy Efficiency & Environmental Showcase](#), which includes solar hot water, more efficient lighting and improved insulation, and a small wind turbine. The total project is being funded through a \$500,000 from the Cherokee Preservation Foundation, a nonprofit focused on preserving native culture, protecting the natural environment and creating diverse economic opportunities.

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## SmarterTravel.com: Great Smokies among best free attractions

SmarterTravel.com, in a report also picked up by USA Today, included the Great Smoky Mountains National Park about the nation's "[Best Free Attractions](#)," noting it's one of the few major American national parks that doesn't charge admission (and there's actually a deed restriction on the land saying that no toll or fee will ever be imposed). The multitude of wildlife, cultural history and variety of activities allows the park to offer something for everyone.

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## Businesses: Do social media right



## Google helps N.C. businesses grow online for free

Google is helping N.C. businesses not currently online to [increase revenues](#) by helping them get an online presence with their own websites. More than \$480 billion is spent on products that were researched online before being purchased. According to Susan Molinari, vice president of government relations at Google, "If a business has a website, it gets twice the amount of people hired and twice the amount of revenue." However, 69 percent of businesses in N.C. are not online. [North Carolina: Get Your Business Online](#) is making it easy to get your business online. For businesses that aren't currently online, Google, along with Intuit, is offering a year of free Web service to businesses who want to go online to increase their economic growth. Small businesses receive free, easy-to-build Intuit website, free customized domain name, free Web hosting for one year and free online tools and training.

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## N.C. Airport & Airline News

### CLT opens new terminal wing

Charlotte Douglas International Airport has opened its [expanded international arrivals area](#), plus five additional security lanes at a new checkpoint, and what's likely to be a more energy-efficient model for the rest of the terminal. The new 60,000-square-foot, \$23 million wing of the terminal, funded with airport revenue bonds, will reduce congestion at existing checkpoints, especially at peak times and for international passengers who have to catch domestic connections. The new terminal wing is the latest phase of the airport's \$1 billion expansion.

While it's in a company's best interest to have a social media presence, business owners need to evaluate what platform is best for them. And they need to be well versed in the nuances of each. What works on Facebook may not be the best approach with Twitter or on Pinterest. Nor should they assume that just because the sites are free, no cost is involved. Having an employee post, update, tweet or otherwise manage social media accounts has a cost. Companies should constantly monitoring their reputation, checking online review sites such as Yelp, Kudzu, City Search and Google Places to make sure customers are happy and to help the restaurants fine-tune their operations. For instance, Aimee Bridges, director of corporate relations for Rocky Top Hospitality, is on Facebook daily, posting the upcoming events of all seven of her company's restaurants, including some in Raleigh. She uses social media platforms to post specials, highlight events and solicit community support to local charities. Last week, in advance of a fundraiser at one restaurant in Raleigh, she tweeted about the event and a raffle for a bike. As customers came in to buy tickets, they did more than buy the restaurant's food and beer; they used Foursquare to announce where they were, sent their own tweets, and took pictures to post on Facebook. Such activity is an [affordable way for businesses to use social media to build their brand](#), says William Blackmon with Apogee Social Media Group in Raleigh.

Inc. magazine notes the average small business owner does not get a sufficient return on social media efforts. Most put in too much time and resources for too little return. Analysts note that you gauge return by increased leads, online and offline traffic, share of online voice, and ultimately, sales. The lack of ROI has been tied back to spending time doing the wrong things - like trying to sell before listening. If small businesses thought about social media as a cocktail part - listening, telling great stories, asking questions and being interested - rather than as a sales and marketing channel, then ironically, they could [turn social media into an](#)

## AVL installing new passenger boarding bridges

Passengers traveling through Asheville Regional Airport will soon experience an [upgrade in the boarding process](#). The airport is in the process of installing three passenger boarding bridges, which will accommodate larger aircraft at those gates and shelter passengers from the weather. The first of the three bridges will be operational early this month, and work will continue on the remaining two, with all three in operation by the end of the year. The \$1.7 million project was paid for primarily by Federal Aviation Administration grant funds.



## NC GreenTravel: The future of energy efficiency has arrived

Last month, shoppers looking for a new thermostat at a number of retail outlets were given an option of the [Nest Learning Thermostat](#), which learns what temperature to set to maximize both comfort and energy efficiency. Earlier this year, the [first \\$5 LED light bulb](#) was announced. Smartphone users can now download [any number of apps](#) designed to help users save energy. And consumers have many more options of [Energy Star-qualified products](#) than ever before. With all of these options, conserving energy has gotten much easier than even a few years ago. However, despite all these advances in energy efficiency technology, the best ways to reduce energy consumption are the same energy efficiency strategies that have been implemented for decades, many of which can be implemented with little to no cost to building owners. Practices such as seasonal inspections of heating and cooling units, annual inspections for air leaks in the building and ensuring proper settings of thermostats can all have significant effects on reducing energy consumption. Modifying procedures, such as only turning on kitchen equipment when needed and developing a no-idling policy for automobiles can significantly reduce energy consumption without adding any costs. For more information on energy efficiency in the tourism industry, visit [Renewable Energy in Tourism Initiative](#). For technical assistance on the greening of the tourism industry, contact [Tom Rhodes](#) at [NC GreenTravel Initiative](#) at (919) 707-8140, or [Alex Naar](#) at (252) 737-1346.

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[efficient marketing channel](#).

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The logo for tourism research, featuring the text "tourism research" in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font. The letters "t" and "r" are each enclosed in a white square. The logo is set against a dark orange background.

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In 2011, overnight visitors to North Carolina spent an average of 3.5 nights in the state, up from 3.3 nights in 2010. Out-of-state visitors stay longer than N.C. resident travelers (4.0 nights versus 2.5 nights on average). For more visitor profile information, click [here](#). For more information, contact [Marlise Taylor](#) at (919) 733-7278.

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## 'North Carolina Weekend'

For the week of July 5 on UNC-TV's "[North Carolina Weekend](#)," get your toes a-tapping at the Stompin' Grounds in Maggie Valley. Take in the great outdoors at Lake Norman State Park in Troutman. Go paddling with Inner Banks Outfitters in Washington. Enjoy the "*The Vanderbilts at Home and Abroad*" exhibition at Biltmore Estate in Asheville. And check out the culinary experience at Babylon in Raleigh. (Please note: listings are subject to change.) "North Carolina Weekend" is exclusively underwritten by the N.C. Division of Tourism. In addition, UNC-TV has made recent editions of "North Carolina Weekend" available online.

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## Upcoming industry

# The Washington Post

## Washington Post: Charlotte face of the New South

In its Travel section, the Washington Post features a Travel gallery of Charlotte, touting it as the [face of the New South](#). The gallery and [accompanying story](#) were the products of the writer scoping out the Democratic National Party's choice for its upcoming convention. Nowadays, North Carolina's largest city proudly presents itself as the avatar of the New South. It's all buttoned-up business (a banking center, an airline and retail hub), a multicultural melting pot and a farm-to-table haven. However, the writer adds, any conventioners who want to sneak a few moments away from the official proceedings should have a fine time. Highlighted Uptown visits included the Levine Museum of the New South, the Fourth Ward, the NASCAR Hall of Fame and the Bechtler Museum of Modern Art.

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## Media leads from Small Market Meetings

**Food Trends** - What will be hot for the holidays this year, in terms of food, drink, décor and entertainment at holiday parties and events? Editor Vickie Mitchell seeks information from event planners and food and beverage directors for an upcoming feature in Small Market Meetings. Send ideas as well as contact information.

**Golf** - Searching for the tried and true, as well as new ways to include golf in a meeting or convention itinerary. Meeting and golf professionals who can share their tips should contact Editor Vickie Mitchell. Take a case study approach and describe an actual outing that you helped organize or plan. Include contact information for interviews.

**CVB Housing Assistance** - Having a convention and visitors bureau assist with housing for meeting attendees can be a huge help to meeting planners. Seeking information from CVBs in second-tier and smaller cities about how they are aiding meeting planners with this task through housing

## meetings & events

**July 12-13** - MPI-CC Meeting, Charlotte

**July 16-18** - DMAI Annual Convention, Seattle, Wash.

**July 19** - N.C. Coast Host Meeting, Swansboro

**July 23** - N.C. Civil War Tourism Council, Durham

**July 28-31** - MPI World Education Congress, St. Louis, Mo.

**Aug. 11-14** - ASAE Annual Meeting and Expo, Dallas, Texas

**Aug. 14** - N.C. Travel & Tourism Board Meeting, Raleigh

**Aug. 24-27** - 2012 SYTA Annual Conference, Nashville, Tenn.

**Aug. 26-28** - ESTO, Boston, Mass.

bureaus, new technology, etc.

Ideas and responses by e-mail only to  
[vmitchell@smallmarketmeetings.com](mailto:vmitchell@smallmarketmeetings.com). *Deadline for all is July 6.*



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