

EDITORIAL & COMMENTARY



Fort Hancock Sunset

IT'S YOUR TURN

Commentary

Recap of the Tourism Season of 2014

By Thomas A. Arnone

Fresh off the Labor Day weekend, our summer visitors have headed home and our children are heading back to school. It's been a great summer for Monmouth County's beachfront communities.

The beach season started off extremely well with great weather and very little rain. You may remember that July 4th was the first rainy weekend day of the summer. You may also remember that the weather cleared by 4 p.m. and gave most beaches, attractions and events a wonderful weekend to kick off the season.

Most beach towns have provided initial reports that beach badge sales are up over last year and some are reporting very strong seasonal badge sales. This means that repeat visitors are back! While final tallies won't be in for another month, this indicates that we continue to make Monmouth County a great summer vacation location.

Record crowds were reported at Riverfest in Red Bank, Belmar Seafood Festival, Lobster Fest in Bradley Beach, Ocean Fest in Long Branch (after 4 p.m.), the Haskell at Monmouth Park Racetrack, Monmouth County Fair and the BBQ and Craft Brew Festival at Monmouth Park this past Labor Day weekend.

Here are a couple of notable items: Bradley Beach reported that attendance at their weekly Reilly Park concerts were up and that local restaurants and businesses saw an uptick in midweek business and visitation. Monmouth Park hosted a successful new event this year-U.S. Pro Mini Golf Tournament in mid-August. It was a great success. Keansburg Amusements celebrated its 110th Anniversary on Aug. 28 with throwback prices of \$1.10 for some rides, food and games. New and old traditions keep people coming back to the New Jersey Shore every year.

All of this is important because visitors to Monmouth County spend \$2.2 billion annually on food, accommodations, transportation, entertainment and retail sales. Visitors to Monmouth County also pay \$281 million in state and local taxes. More than 30,000 people are employed in tourism related jobs in the county.

We expect the tourism season to continue on this upward trend through the remainder of the year. Some events to look for as we move into fall:

- Feast of San Gennaro in Belmar**, Sept. 20-21
- Red Bank Guinness Oyster Festival**, Sept. 28
- Allaire Village's Fall Harvest Festival**, Sept. 27
- Red Bank Guinness Oyster Festival**, Sept. 28
- Highlands Oktoberfest**, Oct. 4

Thomas A. Arnone is a freeholder on the Monmouth County Board of Chosen Freeholders.



COURTESY DORN'S CLASSIC IMAGES

Two River Moment

It was a definite sign of the times in 1952 when this photo was taken at the Safeway supermarket on Broad Street, Red Bank, which is now the Foodtown. Smoking and cigarettes seemed a part of everyday life and the surgeon general's warning of the dangers of smoking was a dozen years from being issued. Johnny, the Philip Morris Cigarettes TV spokesman appeared at the store for a sale promotion and to sign autographs where he attracted a group of children.

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A Gilded Age Estate Goes Green

By Michele S. Byers

It was an unprecedented challenge: Take a sumptuous estate of a famous heiress and reinvent it as a model of environmental stewardship, with lots of public access and painstakingly preserved history.

That's just what happened at Duke Farms in Hillsborough. The 2,740-acre estate belonged to tobacco heiress Doris Duke, and after her 1993 death it was transferred to the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

The foundation envisioned a total transformation – from private to public, from manicured to agricultural, from wasteful to energy-efficient. It took years, but the happy result is the new Duke Farms, which just completed its second year as one of New Jersey's most unique destinations.

On one hand, Duke Farms still embraces its history as gentleman's estate with manmade lakes and waterfalls, barns that look like mansions, fountains and sculptures and a greenhouse just for orchids and tropical plants.

But it also hosts an "incubator farm" for aspiring organic farmers, protected habitat for grassland birds and classes to promote sustainability and environmental stewardship. Eighteen miles of hiking and biking trails, a bicycle sharing program and a tram for visitors with limited mobility have been established. Buildings and facilities have been upgraded for maximum energy efficiency.

"I don't think there's any other place like Duke Farms in New Jersey with the mix we've got," said Nora Wagner, director of strategic planning and programs for Duke Farms. "We're smack in the middle of 20 million people, and we're free and accessible to everyone."

Duke Farms was started by J.B. "Buck" Duke, founder of the American Tobacco Company, who began acquiring farmland nestled within a bend in the Raritan River in 1893. In short order, he bought more than 40 farms and assembled an international showplace. He planted more than 2 million trees, built five lakes and a reservoir, constructed three stately barns and started – and abandoned – work on a palace-like mansion.

His only child, Doris Duke, was born in 1912. Buck Duke died in 1925, leaving much of his fortune to his daughter. Doris Duke became a philanthropist, preservationist, foreign correspondent and surfing champion, among other things.

After her passing, the trustees of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation researched and evaluated the estate's future before deciding to convert it into a place of education, research and recreational enjoyment.

Duke Farms reopened in May 2012 after a \$45 million facelift. It was an instant hit.

"Since we reopened to the public, more than a million people have visited Duke Farms, and we are working hard to insure that every visitor leaves with not just an appreciation of a unique place, but also with some small and large ideas about how they apply the ideas they see here on the own homes and yards," said Michael Catania, executive director.

Duke Farms hosts the nation's largest community garden, with 462 plots ... and a waiting list. The New Jersey chapter of the Northeast Organic Farming Association moved in and launched an incubator program to help new farmers. A farmers market opened on the grounds. Lakeshores are being restored, and formerly manicured lawns are being turned into wildflower meadows.

So what would Buck and Doris Duke think of this new direction?

"Given their varied interests and grand vision for Duke Farms, I think that both Buck Duke and his daughter, Doris, would be very pleased with what is happening at Duke Farms, and simply delighted to see families and so many people of all ages enjoying the property," Catania said.

Future plans include transitioning lakes to a closed-loop recirculating system to save water and energy, and expanding farming operations to become a model of how sustainable farming can be compatible with wildlife habitat enhancement, Catania added.

Duke Farms is a great destination for a visit in any season – so get out and enjoy it soon.

To learn more about Duke Farms and its programs or plan a visit, go to www.dukefarms.org.

And for more information about preserving New Jersey's land and natural resources, visit the New Jersey Conservation Foundation website at www.njconservation.org or contact me at info@njconservation.org.

Michele S. Byers is the executive director of the New Jersey Conservation Foundation.

Get ready
for Fall
next week
Sept. 22



SCOTT LONGFIELD