

Tourism a key driver of Lee
County economy: Tammy Hall

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As our nation commemorates National Travel and Tourism Week, May 8-16, I'm reminded of tourism's staggering economic impact on our local economy. Looking at last year alone, total expenditures for tourism in Lee County equaled \$2.6 billion. That equates to nearly \$7 million per day, \$297,934 per hour, \$4,966 per minute, and \$83 per second!

Tourism accounts for nearly one of every four jobs in Lee county. The 38,159 residents directly employed by the tourism industry account for 22 percent of total employment in the county or, to put it into perspective, nearly the population of Bonita Springs. In addition to the 38,159 direct industry jobs in 2009, the industry supported another 15,178 indirect and induced jobs, for a total of 53,337 jobs in Lee County.

If you look at this employment in terms of payroll, household income generated through direct industry jobs was more than \$800 million, while household income generated through indirect and induced employment added another \$507 million, for a total tourism household income generated of \$1.31 billion.

Given these facts, you can just imagine what our community would face without tourism's contributions. For instance, let's say the money spent by all visitors to Lee County dropped by 50 percent. That would mean that the average Lee County household would see an increase of more than \$260 in taxes to maintain government services at current levels. Not to mention that the unemployment rate would rise from a December 2009 level of nearly 14 percent to about 23 percent.

Conversely, a 10 percent increase in visitors to Lee County would generate an additional \$260 million a year. That's more than \$8 per second!

So you can see why the Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau urges county residents to support tourism in any way possible. This could mean offering assistance by taking a photo for a group of visitors when you see them posing at local attractions or assisting them with directions whenever appropriate. Kindly answer questions from visitors about our area's offerings. Make recommendations to your friends and relatives who are planning vacations to consider Lee County. And, perhaps most importantly, help protect, support and promote the infrastructure that sustains tourism, especially our local beaches.

These simple practices can help make the visitor experience the best it can be and thereby protect our economy. By being hospitable to everyone you meet every day, you inadvertently help drive visitor satisfaction and repeat visitation; because you never know when the person with whom you're interacting is a visitor.

—Tammy Hall is chairwoman of the Lee County Board of County Commissioners and of the Tourist Development Council.