

10 YEARS OF SUCCESS ON ROUTE 6

Ten years ago, Governor Edward Rendell formally recognized the section of US Route 6 in Pennsylvania for its transportation heritage and history of moving resources and people across the Commonwealth. On January 15, 2005, the PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor became the 12th Pennsylvania Heritage Area.

Long considered a popular driving destination and favorite American road-trip, approximately 3.5 million people travel the 427 miles of US Route 6 and 6N each year to visit the historic sites, national and state parks, artist studios, and quaint towns that resonate that authentic American feel. Those travelers spend over \$91 million as they enjoy the scenic overlooks and breathtaking views.

“Much has been accomplished in the last ten years,” PA Route 6 Alliance Executive Director Terri Dennison said. “Being a scenic driving destination requires efforts to ensure that the roadway, the communities and the landscape all live up to the promise of an enjoyable road-trip while celebrating the local heritage and culture that make this a special highway.”

The PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor is managed by the PA Route 6 Alliance, a 501(c3) organization representing private and public organizations, county and local officials, and interested stakeholders throughout the eleven counties link by the scenic highway: Crawford, Erie, Warren, McKean, Potter, Tioga, Bradford, Wyoming, Lackawanna, Wayne and Pike. The Alliance’s mission is the focused on efforts to preserve, enhance and promote the transportation heritage of one of the nation's first transcontinental highways; to sustain and enhance the small rural communities linked by the highway; and to preserve and enhance the natural, scenic beauty of one of America's favorite "road trips".

One of the requirements of a state designated heritage area is to have a Management Action Plan which looks at the key components of a heritage area and defines a 10-year plan. The plan addresses the 6 areas of concentration for Heritage Areas: tourism promotion, cultural conservation, education and interpretation, open space and recreation, economic development, and partnerships. The original Management Action Plan established the goals and objectives of the PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor. According to Dennison, the plan is currently being revised and updated to include strategies for the next 10 years.

Over the last decade, several programs outlined in the Management Action Plan have been implemented to preserve and enhance the Route 6 corridor.

In 2008, mile markers with the “Do 6” trademark were installed across the route from west to east with the goal of providing travelers with a sense of distance between attractions and businesses. The markers are two-sided and mark all 400 miles of US Route 6 and 27 miles of Route 6N. Even numbers are on the north side of the highway with odd numbers on the south.

This way-finding system encourages businesses and other assets to use the mile markers in their directions and on advertisements.

Since 2000, the PA Route 6 Alliance has supported a corridor-wide initiative to help local artisan and crafters make a living while creating their masterpieces without leaving their homes. An annual guide to studios, galleries, and retail outlets featuring local art is produced and promoted. The PA Route 6 Artisan Trail is a network for local artisans to share ideas and best practices. It was the first coordinated artisan trail in the Commonwealth and is now joined by seven other recognized trails. This year's program includes a regional Buyer's Market to bring artisans together with potential retailers and galleries.

Recognizing that one of the strengths of Route 6 is the many diverse and interesting small towns along the corridor, the PA Route 6 Alliance has helped 20 communities achieve the distinction of a Route 6 Heritage Community. The program encourages the towns along Route 6 to become better host communities for the traveling public, which also makes them better communities in which to live for year-round residents. Local stakeholders are lead through a planning effort that include elements of conventional community planning, visioning, the analysis of how land is used or planned to be used, community facilities, transportation, demographics, housing and the economy, but also addresses issues of sustainable heritage tourism and sense of place.

A GIS/ GPS database as well as study on Visitor Tourism and Infrastructure Study and Business Opportunity Plan were developed in 2008. These include a profile of tourism business, a review of visitor-oriented resources, an analysis of scenic overlooks and pull-offs, identification of hospitality hubs, a gaps analysis and visitor readiness assessments for the major PA Route 6 hubs.

To help guide promotional efforts, a Branding and Marketing Study was completed for the PA Route 6 Corridor. The final plan outlines strategies and creative concepts, which have been implemented in all print and interactive marketing including an annual map/guide and website. The "Do 6" brand and slogans "Take the High Road" and "The American Dream is Just Down the Road" have been appeared in *American Road*, *Road Runner*, *AAA World*, and other travel magazines as well as on popular travel website like TripAdvisor.com. Working with the convention and visitor bureaus across the PA Route 6, the Alliance has developed successful ad campaigns and public relations efforts. The PA Route 6 Website (www.paroute6.com) is designed to help travelers plan a trip across Route 6 and features suggested itineraries and recommended week-long and short weekend trips.

The Alliance has also offered several series of workshops, webinars and podcasts have to help educate businesses and organizations in the area of marketing, branding, preservation and grant funding.

BACKGROUND

Throughout history, there have been efforts to regionally market Route 6 but it wasn't until the late 1990's that the effort took on a more holistic approach by focusing on preservation, enhancement and promotion. The goals of the PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor are to interpret the transportation heritage of one of the nation's first transcontinental highways; to sustain and

enhance the small rural communities linked by the highway; and to preserve and enhance the natural, scenic beauty of one of America's favorite "road trips".

In 1996, the nine convention and visitor bureaus serving the 11 Route 6 counties came together to do something unprecedented at that time – promote themselves as a regional entity. They incorporated as the PA Route 6 Tourist Association. With the support of then Governor Tom Ridge and a new grant program within the PA Tourism Office in the Department of Community and Economic Development, called Regional Marketing Initiatives (RMI), the Association produced their first map and launched a website – www.paroute6.com.

While the PA Route 6 Tourist Association continued to promote the scenic highway over the next couple years with publications, advertisements in regional and national magazines, public relation efforts, and other marketing programs; it also spearheaded a local grassroots effort to investigate ways to maintain the quality of life and unique sense of place that made Route 6 a great place to visit. As a writer from the United Kingdom wrote – “Route 6 is not Disneyfied” and all involved wanted it to stay that way it is.

A steering committee representing private businesses, state and federal agencies, county representatives, non-profit organizations and other interested parties was formed. Meetings were held in several Route 6 communities. The common response in all workshops and meetings was the call for Route 6 to be recognized as a special place in the history and landscape of Pennsylvania. The recommendation was for Route 6 to pursue a Pennsylvania Heritage Area status and to be eventually nominated as a National Scenic Byway. The Steering Committee developed a Management Action Plan for the Route 6 Corridor as part of the requirement to be designated a Pennsylvania Heritage Area.

On January 15, 2005, Governor Edward Rendell named Route 6 in Pennsylvania as a State Heritage Corridor under the PA Heritage Areas Program of the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Route 6 joined 11 other state heritage areas in celebrating the industries and transportation corridor that helped build this great nation. The PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor is managed by the PA Route 6 Alliance, which is responsible for implementing the Management Action Plan. All activities are governed by two Advisory Councils: the Asset Development Advisory Council and the Tourism Promotion Advisory Council.

The success of PA Route 6 is just not about promotion but about planning, preserving and partnerships. For more information on the PA Route 6 Alliance and the promotion, programs and initiatives along the PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor, call 814-435-7706, go to paroute6.com or follow them on FaceBook – US Route 6 in Pennsylvania.

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