

Marketing Department Quarterly Report

2018 Year in Review, plus July, August and September 2018 statistics and activities

Overview: Foley's downtown experienced a strong year for tourism as indicated by increased visitor counts at all four city tourism venues that include The Depot Museum, Holmes Medical Museum, Model Train Exhibit and the Welcome Center. The strategy of offering free venues in the heart of Foley to encourage visitors to frequent downtown restaurants and businesses is proving successful. This is indicated by increased sales tax receipts for the year and by the number of new business choosing to locate here.

The welcome center and museum staffs are trained to assist visitors with recommendations and maps for area restaurants and businesses. Especially downtown businesses. A walking map for Foley's downtown area, and a restaurant guide that includes all city restaurants are available for visitors both as a handout and on VisitFoley.com, the city tourism website.

Visitor counts at the Welcome Center for fiscal year 2018 were up 7.7 percent over the previous year, with a total of 6,287 visitors, for an average of 524 guests a month.

The number of visitors at the Holmes Medical Museum for 2018 was up 16.8 percent over the previous year, with a total of 7,233 guests. This is an average of over 602 guests per month.

The number of visitors at the Depot Museum was 11,265, which indicates an increase of 180 percent over the previous year. However, management changed in January of 2018, and numbers may be gathered differently. We do know that from January through August, an average of 1,300 visitors came through the doors. The depot building was closed for three weeks in September for painting, organizing and repairs, which affected the total.

The Model Train Exhibit is hands down the most popular venue in Foley, with a total of 27,469 visitors during the 12 month period, as collected via a scanner attached to the door. This is an average of 2,289 visitors per month. This indicates a 205% increase over 2017. We plan to test of the accuracy of the scanner in 2019. However, frequent visual checks confirm that attendance there is greater than the attendance at the depot. We know the Caboose Club has local fans who visit almost weekly, and usually bypass the depot museum.

Quarterly Welcome Center and Museum counts – Report attached

- Visitor counts at the Welcome Center are up 12 percent for the quarter. In 2017, July - September visitor totals were 1,289 versus 1,152 during the same period last year, an increase of 137.
- The number of visitors at the Holmes Medical Museum was up by 16.8 percent in 2018. In 2018, the number of visitors was 7,233, versus 6,191 in 2017, a total of 1042 more visitors.
- Requests for mailed information about Foley decreased in 2018, down 19 percent over 2017. In 2017, 1,516 packets were mailed. In 2018, we mailed 1,385 packets. Packets are mailed when requests are received – either through the VisitFoley.org website or in response to advertising we placed. Most activity can be traced to Foley's ad in the Alabama Vacation Guide.

- Welcome Center staff also saw a decline in requests for Welcome Packets. This went from 9,030 packets requested in 2017 to 7,275 packets in 2018, a 9 percent decline. All of the information is available on the VisitFoley.org website, so we suspect that more people are gathering information online. Packets are often requested for weddings, family reunions and conferences.
- The number of website hits for the year was down 11 percent for 2018. During 2017, website hits totaled 77,951. In 2018, that number had dropped to 69,420.
- Foley has reached an important milestone this year. In 2018, 56 percent of visitors accessed the website by mobile phone, and 26 percent accessed the website by desktop. We predict that mobile use will continue to move ahead of desktop use and keep going up in 2019. Tablet access has remained steady at about 8 percent.

Activities and Events

July 2018

- Painting and repairs for outside of Depot Museum completed.
- The rollout for the updated city website, cityoffoley.org, went smoothly. The site transferred seamlessly and there was no downtime with the changeover. Thanks to department heads who worked with the marketing department for changes to their section, the city website has a new look and improved functionality.
- Foley was highlighted in a six-page section in Mobile Bay Monthly that promoted the city, stating that new developments and initiatives have transformed the drive-through town into a destination all its own. This free advertising is very valuable to the city.
- Continued working to get Foley Main Street off the ground.

August 2018

- Summer edition of mayor's newsletter arrived in homes.
- Attended the Alabama Governor's Conference on Tourism in Montgomery.
- Attended a Main Street training conference in Eufaula, Alabama.
- Assisted with a meet and greet for newly appointed Main Street Board members.

September 2018

- The Depot Museum was closed for 12 days for painting of the lobby and offices on the south end of the building, and organization of the exhibit hall.
- An exhibit display highlighting the history of potato farming and potato sheds in Foley was completed in the depot exhibit hall.
- Applied for a grant to fund a new roof for the Depot Museum with the Alabama Historical Commission.
- Landscaping work outside the depot was completed in preparation for a new fountain.