

Marketing Department Quarterly Report

January, February and March 2024

Visitor Stats

- Visitor counts were mixed for the quarter.
- Welcome Center visits totaled 1,556 for the quarter, which is down 17 percent over the same period last year, when staff greeted 1,872 guests. Spring break dates vary each year which affects quarterly numbers. The numbers generally smooth out over time. However, overall, walk in guests at welcome centers are decreasing as more people use mobile devices to gather information.
- The Holmes Medical Museum had a total of 2,388 guests this quarter, which is an 11 percent decrease from the 2,707 guests greeted in the same period in 2023.
- The Railroad Museum welcomed a total of 5,309 visitors during the quarter, down 1 percent from the 5,394 visitors greeted the prior year.
- The Model Train Exhibit greeted 5,675 guests during the quarter, up 4 percent from the 5,466 greeted during the same period in 2023.
- The number of park train rides given during the first quarter was 720, which is down 42 percent from the 1,255 rides given during the same time in 2023. This reflects bad weather on several Saturdays during the winter, plus the fact that the event train no longer runs on days when there are festivals in the park because of the increased traffic around the park and the number of people on the sidewalks.
- A total of 2,274 Visitor Information Packets were distributed during the quarter, including 763 mailed packets and 1,511 welcome packets. The Welcome Packets are provided to churches, neighborhood HOA's, and organizations who are holding meetings across the city. This also included welcome packets handed out at the Snowbird Coffee.

Events

- Foley's Snowbird Coffee was held on January 19, from 9 – 11. The event was co-hosted by the South Baldwin Chamber of Commerce, Foley Main Street and the city Marketing Department. Approximately 650 attendees enjoyed coffee, donuts and learning about city departments and what to see and do in Foley. Information about our local hospital was included in the welcome packets that were distributed. In addition to the coffee, the event included a scavenger hunt that introduced participants to downtown businesses. Over 170 participated. This continues to be a very successful partnership between key organizations that many winter guests attend year after year.
- Midday Melodies – This series of enjoyable music in the park at lunchtime was held each Wednesday in March. The weather was beautiful and on most days attracted about 250 attendees. The events were held in Heritage Park near the fountain. Food was available in the park from the Foley Masonic Lodge and Anna's Smoothies.

General information

In February, the Marketing Department subscribed to a media monitoring service called Critical Mention. This service allows us to track media coverage for the city. It provides the city with knowledge about what stories are getting the most traction and how far news is traveling. A weekly report with this information is sent to top city officials and department heads.

The Caboose Club continues to be a top tourism draw in Foley. There are currently about 20 volunteers, with a core group of 10 who are there on a regular basis. Bob Irwin and Doc Holiday have completed a scale model of the corner building that is anchored by the Bakery/Cactus Café and the building that wraps around it. This is the fourth in a series of replicas of historic downtown Foley buildings that include the historic depot, the Foley Hotel, and the Crosby building that includes the Holmes Hospital.

We currently have a total of twelve event train drivers. This is the most train drivers that have ever been available. This number of drivers will be needed as we go into the summer months when the train operates three days a week.

Website usage and Facebook engagements showed mixed results for the quarter.

Users on the VisitFoley.com website totaled 20,742 for the quarter, up 30 percent over the previous year. Users for the CityofFoley.org website totaled 61,031 for the quarter, up 45 percent from the previous year.

On Facebook, engagements on Visit Foley totaled 17,755 for the quarter, down 70 percent over the previous year. In 2023, cookbook author Brenda Gantt visited Foley and commented on our post, which wildly skewed our engagement numbers upward. It would have been difficult to match that in 2024.

On the City of Foley Facebook page, engagements were 77,370 for the quarter, up 102 percent over the previous year. We had three big posts that pushed these numbers higher: Best of Baldwin, Arbor Day, and Foley named top retirement city.

The Mayor's Quarterly Newsletter was sent in February and arrived in homes the week prior to Arbor Day. A total of 7,164 e-newsletters were sent during the quarter.

On February 27, Ginifer Swayze joined the department as the Welcome Center aide, covering the welcome desk in the lobby.

In late December of 2023, Foley was recognized by the National Park Service as Alabama's official WWII Heritage City. Guy Busby had filled out the application during the fall of 2023. The Marketing Department began gathering information and materials for an exhibit to celebrate this designation at Foley's Railroad Museum. The project is ongoing, with a goal of opening the exhibit this summer.

In February, Erik London with the Alabama Department of Archives visited with marketing department members to discuss archives, exhibits and potential grants.

