

MARYLAND TOURISM COUNCIL

Maryland Tourism Council Members Spruce Up Patapsco Valley State Park



Annapolis, MD—In recognition of See America Week (formerly known as National Tourism Week), members of the Maryland Tourism Council together with members of the Maryland Park Service, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, and employees and volunteers of Patapsco Valley State Park got down and dirty on Tourism Day, May 13th to work on entrance gardens in the Avalon area of the park.

Patapsco Valley State Park is one of the state's oldest parks with 300 years of history, 14,000 acres of land, and 170 miles of trails. Five years ago, the Avalon entrance to the park had a cement parking lot welcoming guests to the park. Since then, the Civic Justice Core and other volunteers have put in hundreds of hours to remove the concrete from the original parking lot, dig out the area, and fill it with fresh, fertile dirt. For Tourism Day, the MTC chose to give back by having members volunteer to plant over 200 plants and shrubs in the new entrance interpretive gardens as well as work with park staff to mulch and water the new plants. Flowers, plants, and shrubs for the entrance were generously donated by Tourism Day sponsors Chase Suites Hotels, Buttonwood Beach, and McCulloch and Associates, along with annual sponsors KRR Photographers, the Maryland Bed and Breakfast Association, Toby's Dinner Theatre, AAA Mid-Atlantic/AAA World Magazine, and Broadway Across America/Hippodrome Theatre.

The Avalon entrance now has four complete gardens that are not only filled with native plants but also are designed to enable visitors to recreate the same type of garden in their own homes. MTC volunteers worked with park staff to complete a rain garden, butterfly garden, hedgerow, and home prototype each complete with signage explaining the types of plants in each garden, the types of insects or wildlife they attract, and their benefit to being in the garden. Joe Fernandez of *AAA World Magazine*, an MTC member and annual sponsor, said that “it was awesome—spending the day with other volunteers with a common goal, fun conversations, and spectacular weather made for a really memorable day. Knowing that as a team, we helped make a great place a bit nicer made it all the better.” The first impression the Avalon entrance will now make is one that is inviting and educational for visitors

Ten years ago the Maryland Park Service, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, and the Maryland Tourism Council began what has become a successful and rewarding joint partnership to work together to promote Maryland's 65 parks as premier tourist attractions in Maryland. Together, the State and MTC have promoted nature tourism to Maryland's travelers to showcase the diversity within the state's parks. Nita Settina, superintendent of the Maryland Park Service talked to the MTC group about the importance of nature tourism as well as changes the parks are making to go green in their maintenance, facility, and transportation efforts to reduce their carbon footprint on the environment.

As Patapsco Valley State Park spans both Baltimore and Howard County, the Tourism Day agenda included introductions to the many activities, resources, history, and attractions in each county from Jill Feinberg, Director of Conferences and Tourism for Baltimore County and Rachelina Bonacci, Executive Director of Tourism and Promotion for Howard County.

Mary Jo McCulloch, MTC president said "Tourism Day at Patapsco Valley State Park served to strengthen the partnership between the MTC and the Park Service and also provided a valuable volunteer service toward the completion of the Avalon entrance gardens. The MTC sees this year's celebration of giving back as something we hope to expand for next year's Tourism Day."