

# “The Traveling Apprentice” Works for Calvert County Tourist Information Center

This month’s Traveling apprentice assignment took me to the Calvert County Tourist Information Center nestled at the base of the Thomas Johnson Bridge in Solomons where I would serve as a Tourist Information Specialist. The Solomons Center, as well as its sister center co-located in the same building as the Fairview Library, are owned and operated by the County. The Centers exist to promote tourism, a valuable economic engine for our county.

A Tourist Information Specialist is like a County ambassador to tourists who visit the two centers seeking information about tourist sites, hotels, directions, etc. The Centers maintain nearly 250 pieces of printed information, information that includes Calvert County tourist brochures relating to county tourist attractions, maps, out-of-county material, special event material, etc. Last year the Centers collectively distributed nearly 50,000 pieces of printed material. My assignment- - in between assisting visitors- - was to inventory shipments of brochures, log them in, and restock shelves.

I was determined to live up to the goal of every TIS: to ensure that guests received so much information about our wonderful county that they leave with handfuls of brochures and the knowledge that they couldn’t possibly see and do everything they’d just learned about in one trip, so they’d just have to plan another trip to Calvert!

Specialists annually greet thousands of visitors. The County’s Department of Economic Development heavily promotes Calvert as a destination site within Maryland and to our neighboring states, so nearly 75% of the visitors come from Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C., New York, Florida, and New Jersey. Other visitors come from the rest of the U.S. and foreign countries.

That day, in addition to U.S. visitors who came to the center, we greeted one foreign national who spoke little English. (Little. As in, none.) My cohort listened closely and ultimately decided he must be inquiring about hotel accommodations. Through a series of gesturing, pointing, and pantomiming she gave him directions and then- -with a series of nods and smiles- -we waved him out the door, both of us fervently hoping that my associate had guessed correctly and that the traveler was, indeed, actually even seeking a hotel.

Later, a series of cars pulled into the parking lot and confused drivers spilled out bearing computer generated directions to a conference in the area, directions they’d down-loaded from a popular on-line map-search site. The directions, unfortunately, listed a road which doesn’t exist in Calvert. After helping a number of these frustrated individuals, curiosity got the better of my partner and she asked a driver what company he worked for. Chagrined, he admitted that he and the other drivers all worked for a computer company in Alexandria that wrote directions for the very on-line map-search site from which everyone had obtained their directions.

Surely he jested!

Whether he did or not, I know that the next time I want current, accurate information about an area, I’m heading for a Tourist Information Center where there are real live, knowledgeable, people to answer my questions.

Forget the computer.



*The Traveling Apprentice is a monthly column written by Carolyn McHugh, President/CEO of the Calvert County Chamber of Commerce. Each month Carolyn spends a day working for a Chamber member, then writes a column for a local newspaper about the experience. The article is later inserted into Chamber’s newsletter and posted on the Chamber’s web-site in order to give the maximum exposure to the Chamber member. Her commitment to Chamber members and to the readers is that she’s there for Chamber members and that whatever they do in their daily job, she’ll do, too.*