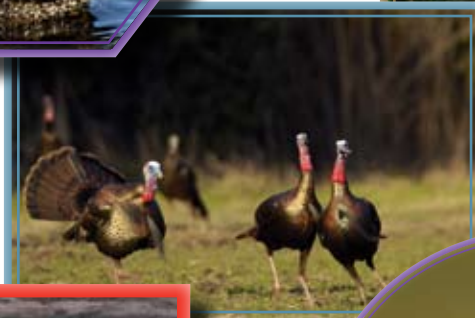


# Thoroughbred Country

Way More than Horses!



Western South Carolina



Annual Report  
July 2008 - June 2009

Thoroughbred Country is one of South Carolina's Regional Tourism Organizations. The mission of Thoroughbred Country is to market the four-county region of Aiken, Allendale, Bamberg and Barnwell as a tourist destination and to support and encourage the development of local tourism attractions, services and programs, thereby providing economic benefits to the area. To achieve this mission, Thoroughbred Country executes a fully integrated marketing campaign that seeks to position the region and South Carolina through the consistent theme "Way More than Horses" as well as the state's brand. Our campaign utilizes the marketing disciplines of advertising, collateral, inquiry/fulfillment, special promotions, research and public relations.

## The Year 2008-2009 in Review

Thoroughbred Country is always busy promoting tourism and creating opportunities for growth in the region. Highlights of our accomplishments are listed below:

◆ Represented Thoroughbred Country during the January 2009 Distinctive Destinations Heritage Development Summit. Further, Thoroughbred Country, the City of Aiken and the County of Aiken tourism departments partnered a sponsorship exhibit.

◆ Participated in the following conferences: the 2009 SC Governor's Conference on Tourism & Travel, the SC Parks, Recreation & Tourism Park Manager Conference and the South Carolina Nature Based Tourism Association (SCNBTA).

◆ Serves on the Scenic Savannah River Region Product Development Area steering committee, working with the Tourism Development International (TDI) consultants to develop a regional tourism development concept plan. Attended stakeholder and public meetings as well as site visits. Further, Thoroughbred Country hosted the TDI Consultants in January 2009.

◆ Thoroughbred Country assisted the SC Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism with staffing at the travel information booth April 11-19 at the Family Circle Cup, Charleston.

◆ Thoroughbred Country, the South Carolina Association of Tourism Regions, and the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism partnered during the May 2009 media mission, SC Summer Getaway Promotion in Atlanta. The Thoroughbred Country Facebook group was launched during the mission, while meeting with travel writers.

◆ Supported the travel industry by participation in the Hospitality Day at the Statehouse "A Taste of South Carolina" and National Tourism Week at the I-20 Welcome Center in North Augusta.

◆ Thoroughbred Country partnered with Lowcountry & Resort Islands Tourism Commission to staff travel information booths at the Charlotte, NC RV & Camping Show in February 2009. This marketing effort has already resulted in hotel bookings for 2009.

◆ Partnered with South Carolina Association of Tourism Regions (SCATR) and WACH Fox 57 television station on a year-long project to promote SC's 11 tourism regions. Thoroughbred Country hosted travel expert Katie Toole from WACH in March during the Aiken Spring Steeplechase. As a result Thoroughbred Country is the featured region for the "One Tank Trips" page under the WACH-TV Good Day Getaways section.

◆ Presented the Hospitality Employee of 2008 award to Rose Loadholt a dedicated employee of the Salkehatchie Arts Center in Allendale.

◆ Fulfilled 18,697 qualified leads as a direct result of print media advertisements and Internet marketing. Plus an additional 8,400 guides were distributed in bulk to State Welcome Centers, national Travel Agencies, realtors and the business community within the region.

◆ Presented a regional marketing strategy to the Bamberg Leadership class in March.

◆ Thoroughbred Country utilizes the social marketing mediums of Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

## Print & Electronic Media

- Fall Travel Planner Newspaper Insert – September 12, 14, 17, 21, 24, 28 & October 1
- WRDW-TV – July & August 2008 StayCations Button Ad
- Vacations2Discover.com – July 2008 – June 2009 Web-Based Micro site
- TripInfo.com – July 2008 – June 2009 Web-Based Button Ad
- AAA Go Magazine – September/October 2008 issue
- Tripinfo Southeast USA Road Map – Color Ad plus maps, 2009 Edition
- Southern Living – January 2009 issue
- Preservation Magazine – January/February 2009 issue
- Reader's Digest – February 2009 issue
- Explore the Southeast Newspaper Insert – March 29, 2009
- South Carolina Business Magazine – 2009 edition



## Marketing

The Thoroughbred Country visitors guide is our main fulfillment piece. This 64-page guide is mailed in response to all print and Internet requests for information. The guide is also stocked at all South Carolina Welcome Centers as well as local and regional visitor centers.

Thoroughbred Country updated the visitors guide in April with a printing of 15,000 delivered in May 2009.

Requests for the visitors guide were received from all 50 States, US Territories and several foreign countries. The top ten states requesting the Thoroughbred Country guides were: 1. Florida 2. Ohio 3. North Carolina 4. New York 5. Pennsylvania 6. Texas 7. Georgia 8. South Carolina 9. Tennessee 10. New Jersey.

A brochure highlighting attractions in the region and a brochure of historic sites along highway 278 and highway 78 were produced and distributed in June. Both brochures were placed in Aiken lodging properties and attractions to encourage visitors to explore the region.

## Internet

Thoroughbred Country actively promotes the region via the Internet. Our website address [www.tbredcountry.org](http://www.tbredcountry.org) is included in all marketing materials including media, business cards and envelopes. The calendar of events and monthly feature on the front page of the web site are updated regularly to provide the most current information and to encourage repeat visits.

Thoroughbred Country further promotes the region utilizing the Internet with button ads on WRDW.com, Trip-Info.com and a branding micro site Vacations2Discover.com. Over 40,000 unique visitors have been logged from these three mediums. Links placed on other web sites include Escape to the Southeast, Atlanta Magazine, Southern Living, Preservation, Reader's Digest and AAA.

Thoroughbred Country has launched a Facebook Group to promote the region and to network with the media, travel professionals and the public via social media. Weekly updates are sent to members of the Thoroughbred Country Facebook Group highlighting various events and happenings in and around the region.

## Memberships

To promote the region locally, nationally and internationally, Thoroughbred Country maintains memberships in the following organizations:

- South Carolina Association of Tourism Regions (SCATR)
- South Carolina Nature Based Tourism Association (SCNBTA)
- Southeast Tourism Society (STS).

Further, Thoroughbred Country works in partnership with organizations or individuals throughout the region to promote tourism and economic development.

## Regional Highlights

◆ Representative Bakari Sellers presented the “Order of the Palmetto” one of the highest civilian awards for the State of South Carolina to Jim Harrison at the Jim Harrison Gallery in Denmark.

◆ The Allendale County Archaeological Topper Site was the subject of an hour-long episode on PBS’s new series “Time Team America”.

◆ Aiken's Carriage House Inn was named one of the "129 Hotels We Love" by National Geographic Traveler.

◆ Aiken County Parks, Recreation and Tourism opened a Visitors Center in downtown Aiken.

◆ "Displaced, The Unexpected Fallout from the Cold War" a documentary detailing the relocation of the citizens of Ellenton, Dunbarton and Meyers Mill to make room for the Savannah River Site, premiered at the Etherredge Center.

◆ The Downtown Farmer’s Market, a seasonal “Certified S.C. grown” vending station in Blackville has opened.

◆ Thoroughbred Country was recognized by “Best of America by Horseback” on the return visit to Lakeview Plantation that was aired on RFD-TV.



## Advisory Committee

July 2008 - June 2009

Thoroughbred Country is aided by the knowledge of a 16-person Tourism Advisory Committee that meets four times a year. The Committee is composed of (4) members from each of the counties served by the program. The Committee has ex-officio members who serve as additional advisors.

### **Aiken County**

Robbie Bellamy      Neel Shah  
Barbara Gassman      Lynn Thompson

### **Bamberg County**

Trampas Alderman      Nancy Foster  
Jewel Davis      Earline D. Williams

### **Allendale County**

Hazel Loadholt      Hayward Simmons  
Catherine Tharin      Kathleen Myrick

### **Barnwell County**

Lynn Cox      Sondra Knight  
Brenda Holman      Elizabeth Ringus



Link: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=102740719592>

[www.tbredcountry.org](http://www.tbredcountry.org)

### Visitation Statistics

July 2008 - June 2009

Agricultural Heritage Museum	432
Aiken County Historical Museum	20,875
Aiken County Visitors Center*	1,900
Barnwell State Park	63,174
Beech Island Visitors Center & Museum	428
DuPont Planetarium	13,631
The Little Red Barn	2,012
No. Augusta Living History Park	27,000
Redcliffe Plantation State Historic Site	3,378
Region 3 Discovery Center	3,744
Rivers Bridge State Historic Site	2,800
Salkehatchie Arts Center	1,431
Thoroughbred Racing Hall of Fame	8,000
I-20 Welcome Center No. Augusta	105,289

### **Thoroughbred Country Staff**

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\*Opened January 2009