



## Polk moving forward, together

**Mark Jackson** | Polk County Tourism and Sports Marketing

With one of the highest unemployment rates in Central Florida – especially in the tourism sector – what you are about to read might be a little shocking.

Things are starting to look up.

Sure, tourism will most likely not recover until the eventual end of the pandemic. For example, a recent survey by the market research folks at Destination Analysts stated that 44 percent of U.S. travelers either agree or strongly agree with the statement, “I am not traveling until there is a vaccine.”

Ouch.

In Polk County, we’re a victim of our own success. Fiscal 2019 shattered all our previous records set for Polk County tourism, from the number of visitors to the ADR, or Average Daily Rate, that hotels charge for a stay. As a result, we also shattered all records for total revenue generated from the tourism industry, Polk County’s largest industry. Newer and bigger properties were brought into the market. The year 2020 was shaping up to be even better.

Then the pandemic struck.

Yes, we are in a deep hole, but we are starting our climb out, towards recovery.

Let’s take a look at the numbers, shall we? During the week of May 31, 2019, we enjoyed a 65 percent occupancy rate. If you take the 2020 numbers for that same week, however, we’re at 44 percent, or a 21 percent difference.

Now, fast forward 11 weeks and you’ll see that things aren’t nearly so grim. For the week of Aug. 9, 2019 saw a 58 percent occupancy rate – and a 48 percent occupancy rate for the same week a year later. That’s a 10 percent spread from 2019 to 2020.

*Whether it is fighting the Coronavirus, getting the tourism industry back to full speed or creating quality, high-paying jobs for our fellow Polk County residents, together ‘We Can Do It.’*

Similar stats can be found when you look at ADR. The average room in Polk County went for \$98.85 during the week of May 31, 2019. A year later, in 2020, that had fallen to \$70.80 or a 28 percent decrease.

Once again, fast forward 11 weeks. During the week of Aug. 9, 2019, the average was \$84.74, and in 2020 it was \$71.18 – or only a 16 percent difference. In other words, ►

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## Northeast Polk Chamber eyes events, opportunities for members

**Olivia Feliciano** | Northeast Polk Chamber of Commerce

The Northeast Polk Chamber of Commerce is open to the public and fully operational.

We have maintained our mission of work to continue serving our members and our communities.

We recently had a plexiglass divider installed at our lobby counter. The divider provides protection for both our visitors and our staff, as it allows us to continue providing our services to the public in a safe manner. We encourage all visitors to practice social distancing and wear masks when multiple visitors are in the building.

We are happy that we have the opportunity to serve the public and local businesses. We are currently distributing free cloth and disposable masks. We have also been helping local organizations conduct donation drives, by promoting the donation drives and serving as a drop-off location.

Despite the hardships many businesses have faced as a result of the pandemic, we have been

*Despite the hardships many businesses have faced as a result of the pandemic, we have been thrilled to continue welcoming new members to our Chamber family.*

thrilled to continue welcoming new members to our Chamber family. Not only are we grateful for their support, but we are excited to do our part to help them in their business endeavors.

Outside of the work we provide in our Chamber building, we are also transitioning back into hosting our in-person social events.

Since our temporary, partial closure in March, our first in-person events were two back-to-back ribbon cuttings held for the City of Davenport’s Fire Substation No. 2 and the unveiling of the City’s Building and Planning department annex. The ribbon cuttings were well-received by the attendees, and we received positive feedback.

Although we are transitioning back into in-person events, we have not been able to host all our usual events. As a result, we have ventured into virtual events.

In July, we began our Rise & Learn with AdventHealth webinar series. Twice a month, a different AdventHealth healthcare professional gives a brief presentation on a specific health topic. The webinars are broadcast on Zoom and Facebook. Information about past and upcoming webinars can be found on our Rise & Learn with AdventHealth web page, under the events tab on our website.

We are also hosting a monthly Chairman’s Circle Chat webinar. Each month, we will hear from one of our Chairman’s Circle members. The we-

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**NORTH EAST POLK CHAMBER • FROM PG 30**

binars will be broadcast on Zoom and Facebook, and the Zoom recordings will be linked on our website. More information about the series can be found on our Chairman's Circle Chat web page under the events tab on our website.

We are thankful that, even though we have had to cancel many of our in-person events, we will be hosting our 38th Annual Pig Roast & Political Rally on Friday, September 25th, at Balmoral Resort Florida. We have been working closely with Amber Pearce, Balmoral Resort Florida's Event Manager, to ensure that this event is an unforgettable, fun and safe night for everyone. Amber's 15 years of event industry experience has been a tremendous asset in the planning process.

The Pig Roast & Political Rally will be held outside by the pool at the beautiful Balmoral Resort, and the food will be provided by Balmoral Bar & Grill's Executive Chef, Blake Jones.

Also at the event, attendees can mingle with incumbents and candidates campaigning for local, county, state and federal offices, while enjoying live music from the Steel Horse band, entering to win door prizes and much more!

The health and safety of all Pig Roast attendees is our top priority, so the event has a limited capacity. In addition, we are encouraging attendees to practice social distancing and wear masks. We will also provide masks

*"The Northeast Polk Chamber of Commerce has so many great events and opportunities for our members and our communities, and we will continue to offer our services in order to make a positive contribution to Northeast Polk County's quality of life."*

and hand sanitizer. For more information about this year's Pig Roast event, visit the Pig Roast & Political Rally web page under the events tab on our website.

The Northeast Polk Chamber of Commerce has so many great events and opportunities for our members and our communities, and we will continue to offer our services in order to make a positive contribution to Northeast Polk County's quality of life.

We welcome any interested businesses to contact us on becoming a part of our Chamber family, and we welcome the public to visit us or contact us to find out more about Northeast Polk County and the wonderful businesses in our communities.

We are located at 35610 Highway 27 in Haines City. You can call us at 863-422-3751, email us at [info@northeastpolkchamber.com](mailto:info@northeastpolkchamber.com), and visit our website at [www.northeastpolkchamber.com](http://www.northeastpolkchamber.com). ♦

**HAINES CITY • FROM PG 31**

lion production plant on the site. It will become the company's Central Florida base of production and distribution.

Also, Carvana is a \$50 million project with a completion date of October 2020, and the team there has begun the process of their employment hiring with scheduled job fairs being held on

Sept. 29 and Oct. 1., creating of over 100 new, full-time jobs over the next three years.

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