

19 bus-tour promoters get close-up look at Pioneer Valley attractions

By **Jim Kinney, The Republican** June 08, 2010, 6:30PM



Photo by Michael S. Gordon / The Republican.

Kris Hoff, director of product for Badger Tour and Travel, LLC, in Milwaukee, Wisc., left, and Euran Daniels, president of Daniels Tours, LLC, in Wilmington, N.C., tour the Museum of Springfield History Tuesday along with other bus tour promoters scouting the area's attractions.

SPRINGFIELD – Nineteen bus-tour promoters visiting Springfield for three days of business meetings also got an eyeful of the Pioneer Valley's attractions with help from the Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"I see a lot of things I can promote," said A. Timothy Patrick, director of product development for Mayflower Tours, of Downers Grove, Ill., during a Tuesday afternoon tour of the Museum of Springfield History.

"We already send tour groups to Historic Deerfield and it's very popular," he said. "But this week we keep seeing these other gems, like this museum and the Basketball Hall of Fame."

Members of the Top 100 Site Selection Committee of the American Bus Association, a Washington-based industry group, arrived Monday and wrap up their trip Wednesday morning.

Their main task is to come up with the American Bus Association's list of "Top 100 Events in North America," a catalogue of bus-friendly destinations that usually includes the Eastern States Exposition in West Springfield and Bright Nights in Springfield.

Springfield-based Peter Pan Bus Lines is an American Bus Association member.

Then following business meetings Monday and Tuesday morning, the Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau hosted the 19 committee members on tours of area attractions.

"You show the area to the tour operators, then they can sell it to their customers," said Melanie J. Smith, travel and tour representative at Six Flags New England in Agawam and chairwoman of the Bureau's Tour Committee.

On Monday, the tour operators went to Franklin County and saw Yankee Candle, Historic Deerfield and Magic Wings Butterfly Conservatory before sailing on the Lady Bea at Brunelle's Marina in South Hadley.

Tuesday, they went to the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame and the Springfield Museums before visiting the Springfield Armory National Historic Site, Table & Vine in West Springfield for a tasting and the Big E grounds also in West Springfield.

"I think this area would be perfect for a mystery tour," said Sharon S. Miller, owner of Sunshine Express Tours of Pensacola, Fla. "That's when the destination is the mystery. I don't think most of our people know these attractions are here."

A tour bus can hold as many as 55 tourists and can account for \$11,000 a day in spending on tickets, food and lodging, according to the American Bus Association.

Group bus tours is one of the few segments of the travel industry that is growing. Nationally bus tours are a \$40 billion-a-year business and a \$750 million-a-year business in Massachusetts.