

North of Boston Tourism Conference draws record crowds



Peter Pantuso, president and CEO of the American Bus Association, provides an industry forecast and offered insights into drawing bus group tours to Essex County.

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Swampscott — Nearly 200 tourism and creative-economy business leaders and staff showed up to collaborate and promote visitation to Essex County at the **North of Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau** fourth annual Tourism Conference at the **Peabody Marriott** on Jan. 29. The event kicked off with good news for Essex County despite the challenging economy. State Rep. John Keenan, D-Salem, and **Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism** Executive Director Betsy Wall discussed regional and statewide efforts to support the local tourism industry, including initiatives under way to reopen the Maria Miles Visitor Center on I-95 in Salisbury.

Meri Jenkins from the **Massachusetts Cultural Council** also announced continued grant funding for **Escapes North**, the North of Boston CVB's cultural tourism program. Next, keynote speaker Dr. Michael Paige, assistant dean of **Endicott College**'s Business School, explored innovative ways to strengthen customer service using the Myers-Briggs methodology.

Attendees chose among a variety of seminars led by travel and tourism professionals on such topics as reaching multigenerational and international traveler markets, the latest trends in the group-tours market, large-scale-event development, social media (including real-time "tweeting" during the conference) and leveraging their NBCVB membership.

The conference's luncheon program featured Peter J. Pantuso, president and CEO of the **American Bus Association**, North America's largest motorcoach, tour and travel association, who provided industry forecasts and insights.

With 3,500 bus companies in the U.S. and Canada and 35,000 coaches, the industry moves 750 million passengers annually, more than the airlines. Reaching the lucrative group-tour market is vital because a coach with 40 passengers, staying overnight, leaves \$7,500-\$15,000 in a community, he noted. According to Pantuso, a day trip can generate \$4,000 per visit per motorcoach.

The afternoon reception featured business services and exhibitors along with opportunities for attendees to network. Conference sponsors included the **Boston Peabody Marriott, Discover New England, B2 Marketing Group, Mobilaurus, Ipswich River Media, Dynagraf Printing, Group Tour Media, Encompass, Joe's Playland, Salem Witch Museum, Woodman's of Essex, Yankee Publishing, CTM Media Group, Deschamps Printing Co., Harbor Sweets, David Fox Photography, Madden Media, Sheraton Colonial Boston North Hotel & Conference Center** and the **Schooner Thomas E. Lannon**.

About the North of Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau

The North of Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau is a private, non-profit, membership-based organization dedicated to promoting the 34 cities and towns of Essex County as a travel destination for visitors, meetings and group tours. As one of Massachusetts' 13 regional tourism councils, the North of Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau serves as a central source of information for the more than 2.7 million visitors who come to the region each year and fosters economic development through public and private partnerships.

For more information about NBCVB's members and services, visit **northofboston.org** and **escapesnorth.com**.