

OCEAN COUNTY'S TOURISM INDUSTRY CONTINUES TO GROW

OCEAN COUNTY'S tourism industry continues to thrive, but according to Freeholder Joseph H. Vicari, the best is yet to come.

"Tourism is a \$4.3 billion industry in Ocean County, but by the end of this year I'm predicting it will be at \$4.4 billion," Vicari said.

Speaking at the September 2 meeting of the Board of Chosen Freeholders, Vicari said tourism remains the county's leading and most important industry.

"Every dollar that tourism brings into the county circulates seven times, providing jobs, paying taxes and strengthening our local economy," Vicari said.

Initial reports show the summer of 2015 was a good one, with crowds flocking to local beaches and businesses, he said.

"Our number one draw is still our 44 miles of coastline and beaches," Vicari said. "But people also come for the museums, the farmlands, Six Flags and the Lakewood Blue Claws."

Those visitors are a boom for local businesses, the vast majority of which are small Mom and Pop stores, restaurants and other establishments.

Vicari, who serves as Chairman of the Department of Business Development and Tourism, said he's worked closely with local businesses, and chambers of commerce to entice more visitors to the county.

And the effort doesn't end with Labor Day.

"Our season lasts all year," Vicari said. "There is always something to do in Ocean County.

The fall brings with it such popular events as Chowderfest in Beach Haven, the Decoy and Gunning Show in Tuckerton, pumpkin picking in Plumsted and the Seaside Heights Columbus Day Parade and Italian Festival.

Vicari said more than 30 different festivals are scheduled for the weekend after Labor Day alone.

For the latest calendar of events, visit www.oceancountytourism.com.

Freeholder Director John C. Bartlett Jr. said tourism also helps county government provide services while keeping taxes under control and maintaining a AAA bond rating – the highest available.

"We wouldn't be in such strong financial shape if not for the hard work you are doing to maintain our local economy," Bartlett told Vicari.