

## Marketing Vancouver USA's renewed waterfront identity

*Crucial component to success of Waterfront Vancouver's project is dependent on travelers and their pocketbooks*

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You can feel the breeze hovering over the Columbia River as it pushes along bobbing sailboats, carrying with it the wafting scents of sweet and savory dishes from the restaurants overlooking Grant Street Pier. Nearby, cyclists pedal along the riverside trail as a jogger rests on a park bench and takes a moment to appreciate the sunset.

Undoubtedly, it's a picture-perfect scene – one that has been gestating in Vancouver USA for nearly a decade guided by the visionary brushstrokes of the City of Vancouver and Gramor Development. Known as The Waterfront Vancouver, this much-anticipated revitalization project needs little introduction to the local business community. However, a crucial component of this \$1.5 billion project's success is dependent on those from outside the area: travelers and their pocketbooks.

In our role as the primary destination marketing organization (DMO) for Vancouver and Clark County, Visit Vancouver USA is tasked with increasing visitor spending by promoting the region as a meetings and leisure destination. The campaigns we create tout everything from Vancouver's lively brewery scene and downtown events to the city's historic assets and proximity to outdoor recreation.

Visitors agree with us that "the Couve" has much to enjoy. In 2017 alone, travelers to Vancouver and the surrounding area spent \$509 million on services and goods ranging from lodging and restaurants to shopping and entertainment. These figures from Dean Runyan Associates represent an increase of 8.5 percent over the previous year, outpacing the state average and similar-sized counties such as Spokane, Pierce and King.

The new waterfront will have a significant impact on those numbers. Although the 138-room Hotel Indigo and its overnight guests will not debut until 2020, the restaurants, waterfront

park, cable-stay pier and overall quality of the surrounding development will lure new visitors to the area.

According to a recent urban waterfront regeneration study by Helsinki University, such projects often shape the image of a destination, which can be a major factor in attracting visitors. For Vancouver, more than 200,000 visitors are projected to be drawn in by the new development, resulting in an initial economic impact of \$8.5 million. That number is expected to grow significantly once the Hotel Indigo and the AC Marriott at the Port of Vancouver's neighboring Terminal One open their doors.

Spreading the word to potential visitors around the Pacific Northwest will help turn those projections into reality. Just this month, our office rolled out billboards, buses and targeted digital campaigns in Portland to help seed initial buzz, and encourage our neighbors to the south to explore Vancouver's emerging new attractions. Later this summer once the waterfront has opened (select restaurants will fire up their kitchens in mid-August and a grand opening date for the park is set for Sept. 29), the marketing message will evolve with in-depth stories focused on the waterfront via sponsored content, radio ads and feature editorials.

These messages are an important part of reclaiming Vancouver USA's identity as a waterfront destination.

Although Vancouver shares the Columbia River with many other communities in the state, it will be the only one with a mixed-use urban development of this scale on the river's shores. This will complement both downtown Vancouver's revitalization efforts and east Vancouver's rapid business growth, helping fuel our identity as one of the Northwest's most livable cities and attractive destinations for no-fuss weekend getaways.

When travelers visit the new waterfront later this summer and stand on Grant Street Pier, hovering 90 feet out over the river, we're confident that they'll see what we see: the horizon holds an exciting new view for Vancouver.

Kim Bennett has served since 1999 as the president & CEO of Visit Vancouver USA, the primary destination marketing organization for Vancouver and Clark County. She is the current Board president of DMA West (Destination Marketing Associations of the West) and serves by gubernatorial appointment on the Washington Film Commission, representing destination marketing organizations throughout the state.