

Project Category

NSBF Byway Community Award: Hospitality

Project Name

National Scenic Byway First Anniversary Celebration

Byway Name

California Historic Route 66 Needles to Barstow National Scenic Byway

Distance: 178 miles

Designation:2021

Overview

The California Historic Route 66 Needles to Barstow National Scenic Byway was designated on February 16, 2021. This was exciting news as the process to achieve National Scenic Byway status began in 2013 with work on a Corridor Management Plan. We recognized that a celebration could not take place in 2021 because of COVID concerns. In Fall of 2021 planning meetings began for a one-year anniversary celebration on Saturday, February 12, 2022 in Needles, the eastern gateway to the Byway. The date coincided with the 6th anniversary of the Mojave Trails National Monument which surrounds the Byway.

Monthly Zoom meetings were held to organize the event and recruit organizations related to Route 66, the town of Needles, the Mojave Desert and local history. A total of 18 organizations participated - a combination of public and private partners. Partners included the California Historic Route 66 Association (CHR66A), Bureau of Land Management, Needles Chamber of Commerce, Mojave Trails National Monument, Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, Needles Tourism and Visitors, Friends of El Garces Harvey House and other organizations. (See Supporting Materials #1.)

The event took place in the historic El Garces Harvey House, a National Register landmark located on the Byway. There was a brief opening ceremony that included remarks by the CHR66A President and reading of a resolution from the Needles Mayor and City Council. The event took place from 10-2 with organizations staffing tables inside. Outside was a BBQ hosted by the local VFW chapter. Music added to the festive atmosphere. Tours of the Harvey House were conducted by a local historian who worked 40 years as a railroad engineer. His grandmother was a Harvey Girl from 1921-1925. The event was a huge success with more than 300 attendees. A decision was made to make this an annual event.

Now that the Ohio byway has been extended and initially marketed, Extension plans a series of Lunch & Learns on the Value of Tourism for local and regional leaders. They also need to enhance electric car charging stations along the 102+ mile byway as none currently exists. Additional Byway expansion research is also planned to enable visitors to make a full "loop" from the Appalachian Byway to the Ohio River Scenic Byway.

Intrinsic Qualities

The historic intrinsic value was reinforced because the event took place in the historic El Garces Harvey House and Depot – a landmark listed on the National Register of Historic Places. El Garces was known as the "Queen Jewel of the Harvey Chain" established by Fred Harvey in partnership with the Santa Fe Railroad.

Harvey House tours by the grandson of a former Harvey Girl were a big event attraction. The Fort Mojave Indian Tribe had an information table and beading demonstrations, reinforcing both the historic and cultural intrinsic values. Members of the tribe were the laborers who built the El Garces and tribal members sold their wares along trackside during the Harvey era. The Needles Regional Museum/ Anul Cuwal Santa Isabel Needles Museum had an information table and the Museum (located across the street) was open for visitors to learn more the history and culture of the area.

El Garces is located on the actual Byway - one of the original alignments of Route 66 through the town of Needles. The history of Route 66 and the attractions along the Byway were shared by the California Historic Route 66 Association. The history of the Mother Road was also detailed in the Needles City Council resolution that was read during the opening ceremony.

This area was part of the wild west and mining days. The Mojave Desert Cultural and Heritage Association and the Victor Valley Legacy Museum shared that history and cultural impacts. The Byway cuts through the beautiful Mojave Desert and there are many recreational opportunities on public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the Mojave Trails National Monument. Information on hiking, star gazing, rock hounding, ATC riding and other activities were shared. The Mojave Desert Land Trust informed visitors about stewardship of these lands.

Byway Best Practice

The following Best Practices will be shared with others and followed for future events:

- Assemble a planning team early in the process. This allowed sufficient time to plan the event.
- Check with the local community calendar to avoid date conflicts. We learned of a conflict with another major event and those leaders generously changed the date of their event to accommodate our request to stage our event as close as possible to our first anniversary of the Byway.
- Reach out to wide group of potential partners but make sure that all participating organizations are related to the event theme. We had requests to participate from other organizations and businesses but their mission or services were not aligned with the theme of our event.
- Use technology to encourage participation of partnering organizations and keep open communication. Meetings were held using Zoom which enabled participation from people outside of the town of Needles. Meeting notes were emailed to all planning team members after each meeting.
- Take advantage of the “multiplier effect” of each organization to advertise the event. Each partner has their own method of outreach and their own constituency. A promotional flyer was created. Organizations used email blasts, Facebook posts, created newsletter and newspaper articles, and mentioned the event at their meetings.
- Have a de-brief session after the event. Evaluate what worked, what did not work, what could be improved in future events and solicit other suggestions.

Materials and information shared with attendees included displays, photos, maps, area attractions, driving routes, word search puzzles, area history, recreational opportunities, interesting side trips, etc. Because of this, visitors to our Byway will have a richer experience beyond just traveling the Byway itself. Visitors may extend their stay resulting in a positive economic impact for the Byway.

Keys to Success

In addition to implementing the best practices listed above, this was an opportunity to reconnect with partners that we have worked with in the past on successful events so relationships were already established. We strengthened our support and awareness of Route 66 and the Byway by bringing in new partners and representatives from two other Route 66 states (Arizona and Illinois). Our 18 partnering organizations were listed on the promotional pieces and represented “something for everyone”. Our partners have diverse interests (Native American tribes, cowboys, outdoor recreation, motorcycles, preservation, etc.) but all with the common interest in Needles, Route 66 and the Mojave Desert. COVID has had a disastrous effect on life in so many ways. Pre-COVID, 70-80% of travelers on Route 66 were international visitors. With international travel halted, organizations were looking for ways to promote their activities to a regional audience. An outdoor vintage car display and BBQ with enticing aromas attracted people who were not previously aware of the event taking place indoors. Lastly, we think that people just wanted to get out of the house after two years of COVID restrictions. Our Byway celebration gave them a safe, no-cost opportunity to do this.

Additional Information

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Photographs

