



OCEAN CITY HOTEL MOTEL RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION
UNITING HOSPITALITY SINCE 1971

50 Years

1971 - 2021 — a timeline

It was late September 1960 when 26 local businesspeople gathered at JR's Drive-In in Ocean City to discuss the need for an organization to represent their mutual interests and to address the challenges they shared in Ocean City's rapidly growing tourism industry.

By Oct. 6, they had laid the foundation for such an association and established its goals, one of which was to gather information on how tourist-based businesses in other resorts handled certain aspects of their operations. To that end, Kathleen Harman was asked to write to Miami, Florida and Atlantic City, New Jersey for their perspective on dealing with health and work permits.

One more meeting, held Oct. 11, 1960, was recorded, and a platform was drawn up, read and accepted by the new group's board of directors. Liquor licenses topped the fledgling organization's agenda and that led to the appointment of a committee headed by Jack Maroriana and Al Herman, who were to evaluate licensing plans and then present them to "proper officials."

This project took precedent over other issues and plans, but not long after the work had begun, "too many diverse interests" resulted in the group disbanding. Still, this savvy group knew that they needed to form an organization so they could exchange ideas and solve legislative problems.

Eleven years later, in 1971, these industry leaders reorganized, bylaws were written and the Ocean City Trade Association Inc. came into existence. Of immediate concern was a new tax that was expected to be imposed on rooms and rentals. In subsequent meetings that year, members discussed underground utilities and, ironically, a housing

project for employees.

Kathleen Harman, secretary of that original group, was unanimously named the association's first chairperson. Thelma Conner agreed to serve as temporary secretary, while the board of directors was comprised of Eleanor Kelly, Francis Hall, Hale Harrison, Chuck Berry, Casher Hickman and Steve Phillips.

Here is the rest of the story:

1971

Membership dues are set at \$25 and goals are re-introduced. On the association's to do list:

Establish a central office where information can be gathered and shared with members.

Cooperate fully with the health department by helping its leadership to understand some of the problems experienced by a summer resort businesses.

Recommend to city, county, and state officials the need to re-study laws that govern a resort town.

Appoint a committee to study the possibility of standardizing room rates to eliminate price cutting of room rents.

Study the need for a year-round publicity program and publicity department and seek the cooperation of the Chamber of Commerce and mayor and City Council in putting such a program into effect.

Seek a more suitable basis of taxation and the delivery of more benefits for the industry's tax dollar.

Impress upon county and state governments the economic value of Ocean City.

1972

The first officially organized dinner is held at the Quarterdeck Restaurant for \$7.50 per person.

1973

The organization reaches 60 active and 40 allied members.

Tish Carter from the Restaurant Association of Maryland works with board member Paul Wall to develop a tradeshow as a revenue source.

1975

The HMRA's first trade expo, "Delmarva will Thrive in '75," is held in April. It generates a profit of \$7,000, which is donated to Ocean City Convention & Visitors Bureau.

The association receives a letter of complaint from Gov. Marvin Mandel regarding the three-night minimum that hotels and motels are requiring.

1976

Dunes Motel owner Thelma Conner suggests hiring an executive secretary. The members agree and a salary of \$150 per week is authorized for Mary Louise Webster. Office space also is rented for \$125 a month at the 18th Street Village Market Plaza.

With promoting Ocean City a dominant issue, an OC Advisory Committee is formed with the participation of 11 different organizations. Its purpose is to channel ad expenditures to ensure there is no duplication of marketing literature:

HMRA members register their formal opposition to the Maryland General Assembly's

proposed 2 percent lodging tax. Although this proposal is dropped, the legislature does approve a 1 percent increase in the sales tax.

1977

Members Susan Cropper and Kate Bunting create Ocean City's first hospitality co-op ad, which runs in 10 newspapers, including the New York Times.

Also developed is the first brochure for members' use: "Make a Date with OCMD."

1979

A cocktail party during the annual trade expo is held for \$5 per person, and a fall tradeshow is planned.

1980

Mary Pat Carozza joins the HMRA as administrative assistant.

1981

The HMRA celebrates its 10-year anniversary, and establishes that its goal and purpose is the "Betterment & Promotion of Ocean City."

The association's spring advertising campaign, which includes the distribution of 60,000 brochures, produces 7,500 responses.

1982

Membership dues are raised from \$25 to \$50 per year, while associate members pay \$35 per year.

Advertising with the theme, "Fall in Love," is placed in 10 Catholic papers, the Washington Post, Philadelphia Daily News, Gannet Westchester, and Wilmington, Delaware papers on a budget of \$28,500.

1985

The trade expo moves to March, and has 208 booths, with 80 companies on the waiting list.

1986

The information center log shows that 49,098 visitors came to the center, an increase of 10,019 of the year before. The log of visitor lodging inquiries shows that 76,967 people asked for information.

1987

The HMRA sends a letter to Gov. William Donald Schaeffer opposing the institution of a room tax to help finance the new Baltimore stadium.

1988

The organization establishes scholarship donations to University of Maryland Eastern Shore for a Hotel Restaurant Management student.

The HMRA helps create the "Festival of Trees," a lineup of 38 trees along the Boardwalk. It's sponsored by local businesses with organizations doing the decorating. The Christmas dinner meeting is held at Phillips Beach Plaza with a "winterized" Boardwalk train ride to view trees.

1989

The HMRA gives financial support to build Maryland's largest sandcastle, at 20 feet tall.

The installation of officers dinner includes a new "Rose" ceremony to celebrate those helping with tradeshow.

Dues are increased to \$100 for active members, \$75 for associate members and \$50 for allied members.

1990

A \$500 donation is given to Junior Achievement for classes on “work ethics and attitudes” in the workplace.

One hundred fifty applications are received for the new administrator position. They are narrowed to six in-person interviews, with Mary Tawney hired as the new administrative director.

The HMRA creates a brochure for golfers. It features 25 hotel/motels, five restaurants and 10 golf courses. One hundred thousand copies are printed and taken to the PGA Convention.

1991

Building permits show that 660 new hotel and motel rooms are coming to Ocean City.

The HMRA office installs the organization’s first computer system on a \$10,000 budget. A fax machine is also purchased.

1992

The per-person price of HMRA dinner meetings increases from \$18 to \$21.

A \$10,000 donation is made to the US Offshore Racing Association for Labor Day weekend competition.

1993

The HMRA opposes the placement of KENO machines in Ocean City.

The 20th Anniversary Trade Expo theme, “The Roaring '20s,” includes a booth decoration contest for exhibitors.

The Christmas dinner meeting at Hobbit Restaurant features a trolley ride tour of the new “Winterfest of Lights.”

1994

Mary (Tawney) Eastman presents the board with letter of resignation. The HMRA plans move into new office space and has three part-time employees.

1995

Active member dues are increased from \$125 to \$150 .

Worcester County native Susan Lynch (Jones) is introduced as the new executive director.

Internet Marketing Strategies (D3 Corp) attends board meeting to share how the internet would benefit the association.

1996

Work on the convention center expansion requires the OC Visitors Center and the HMRA offices to move into trailers.

The association buys a modem to provide the office with internet access and email. Ocean City tourism now has an internet address — www.ocean-city.com.

Susan Cropper suggests forming a committee to chart the HMRA’s direction.

Seminars conducted for resort businesses include “Legal Issues Facing the Rental Community” and “Introduction to the Internet.”

1997

The inaugural Restaurant Guide produced by HMRA includes members and will be

placed in hotel/motel lobbies and welcome centers.

The Town of Ocean City forms a tourism commission and the HMRA is invited to be a part of it.

The Steel Magnolias, six women pioneers of the Ocean City lodging industry, are recognized and honored at a dinner by the HMRA. They are Kathleen Harman, Eleanor Kelly, Thelma Conner, Lois Harrison, Ann Showell and Dorothy Taylor.

The HMRA is invited to travel with Economic Development Committee to Myrtle Beach to learn how it handles tourism. An "Innkeeper Code of Ethics" is developed as a guideline for members and PARTNERS is formed, drawing from the HMRA, the Greater Ocean City Chamber of Commerce, economic development officials, the Boardwalk Association and the Downtown Association.

1998

During the spring Trade Expo, 2,844 pounds of food is donated by exhibitors to the Maryland Food Bank.

Dinner meeting prices are raised to \$25 per person, inclusive.

1999

The annual trade expo celebrates 25 years with a "Hallway to History" exhibit that showcases old brochures and photos.

Atlantic City Local 54 Hotel & Restaurant Employees Union mounts an aggressive attempt to organize workers in Ocean City.

2000

The HMRA creates an independent website, www.ocvisitor.com.

A 1 percent increase in the room tax is endorsed, providing that some of the new revenue would go to tourism. The HMRA board votes 8 to 2 in favor of the move, but unanimously opposes raising the room tax beyond 4 percent.

The HMRA, Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Association host a "Workforce Initiative Conference" to discuss transportation, housing, and employee training.

The HMRA celebrates 30 years with a "Birthday Bash" in conjunction with the 2001 installation dinner.

2001

The HMRA seeks legal advice on renting to minors, following the ACLU's filing of a complaint with the Maryland Human Relations Commission against 22 association members.

Casey Peters of Surf Side 8, suggests the HMRA develop a discount program for military, police and emergency responders. "Salute to the Services" is launched.

"A 94-page cookbook, "Secrets of the Shore ... Ocean City Recipes," is published for fundraising purposes. Restaurant members and chefs contribute recipes.

HMRA Director Susan Jones is named Worcester County Tourism Person of the Year by the Worcester County Commissioners.

2002

HMRA representatives meet with the Town of Ocean City officials to discuss the city's advertising budget and dedicating a percentage of the room tax to promoting tourism.

Condominium associations inquire about membership, but the board believes full-time, on-site management best serves visitors and is therefore a must for membership.

2003

THE HMRA begins taping the “Resort Report” show on Comcast’s local channel.

The “Salute to the Services” includes unfurling the largest American flag on the East Coast. The ceremony requires 500 volunteers to hold the flag on the beach.

Jayne Sawyer hired as a part-time tourism coordinator and as of 2021 is still on staff.

The trade expo cocktail party is cancelled. At the suggestion of Dough Roller’s Diane Lord Kauefer, exhibitors instead are given gift certificates to be used at member restaurants.

2004

A direct mail and newspaper ad campaign is organized to educate resort residents on how they benefit from the tax revenue driven by tourism businesses.

The Ocean City Hotel-Motel-Restaurant Association adopts a new mission statement: “(OCHMRA) is an advocate of the Ocean City hospitality industry and is a tourism activist. A private, non-profit organization, OCHMRA is dedicated to building Ocean City’s economy and positive image through tourism and destination marketing.”

2005

Advanced reservations for accommodations become a thing of the past with the advent of the internet.

The Maryland Tourism Coalition award for Legislative Development Public Awareness goes to the HMRA for its work to create Ocean City PARTNERS.

“Welcome to Ocean City” buttons for employees to wear are distributed to resort businesses.

2006

The trade expo ends the practice of staging a three-day show, drops Saturday from the calendar and is held on Sunday and Monday only.

A strategic planning session produces goals to create a “how-to” hire foreign students summary, to facilitate better data collection, to develop a cohesive look for businesses’ brochures, to push to dedicate room tax to advertising, to assist smaller properties with marketing seminars and to serve as a catalyst to restructure Ocean City tourism.

2007

The city government’s tourism ad budget continues to dominate discussions, with business flat and property assessments increased substantially. The HMRA agrees to an increase in room tax, with a percentage of that dedicated to advertising. The percentage, taken from a formula suggested by G. Hale Harrison, incrementally increases tax and the percentage spent on advertising.

The HMRA creates a SaveTrimpers.com website and campaign that wins the Maryland Tourism Coalition Tourism Advocate Award.

The Restaurant Week promotion is launched.

A second round of Steel Magnolias honors go to Susan Cropper, Rose Brous, Eunice Sorin and, posthumously, to Kate Bunting, Betty Frame and Carol Alfonsi.

2008

The HMRA joins the campaign for starting the Maryland school year after Labor Day. The association is named the Maryland Tourism Coalition Tourism Advocate of the Year for its role in getting a portion of the room tax dedicated to advertising.

The Fall Restaurant Week campaign begins and is planned for October.
The HMRA's offices move to the mezzanine level of the convention center.

2009

HMRA Director Susan Jones is named the Maryland Tourism Coalition Tourism Person of the Year.

As unions continue to target hotel workers, a union avoidance training seminar is held.

The HMRA purchases a database management system.

2010

As the recession slowly retreats, the number of visitors walking into the Visitors Center looking for accommodations declines dramatically. The HMRA develops "Hotel Week," which is slated for last week of August.

The Ocean City Council abolishes all standing commissions, including the Tourism Commission. The HMRA and Chamber of Commerce collaborate to form the Tourism Advisory Board.

The association works with local publisher of "Grand Living" magazine to produce an in-room coffee table book, "Inside Ocean City"

2011

The HMRA turns 40 and celebrates with a dinner at Princess Royale Palmetto Ballroom.

Dock-to-plate and farm-to-table culinary demonstrations are part of the annual trade expo.

Delmarva Bike Week becomes OC Bikefest with the HMRA and other nonprofits invited to manage the beer booths.

The Tourism Advisory Board hires a consultant to review tourism's organizational structure.

HMRA Director Susan Jones is honored with The Maryland Coast Dispatch Shore Star Women's Leader Award.

2012

ToastOurCoast.com, developed as partnership site between the HMRA and Worcester County Tourism, wins a Maryland Tourism Coalition Marketing Partnership Award during the annual state tourism summit.

The HMRA works with the Tourism Advisory Board to bring the movie, "Ping Pong Summer," movie to fruition.

Unionization of the city's general employees is pursued by the Maryland Classified Employees Union. The HMRA plans another educational session, and, with the Chamber of Commerce, develops a print advertising campaign.

Top Chef Season 6 winner Mike Isabella is selected as featured chef for the trade expo.

HMRA Director Susan Jones named "Foodservice Monthly Foodservice Leader of the Year."

2013

The mission statement is changed to reflect the times: "A private, nonprofit organization, the Ocean City Hotel-Motel-Restaurant Association (OCHMRA) exists to connect our industry interests through advocacy, education, and partnerships with the goal

of advancing Ocean City as a leading destination. OCHMRA assists in solving common issues relative to the industry and acts as a clearinghouse for dissemination of information.”

The monthly newsletter, “Hospitality Hotline,” makes its debut.

The HMRA moves offices to 57th Street, as the convention center office becomes part of Performing Arts Center. The tourism hotline, 1-800-OC-OCEAN, lodging extension and the Visitors Center Lodging Help Desk is still handled by the HMRA.

The “Mid-Week Summer Splash” promotion is created to spark weekday business.

2014

The 40th Anniversary of tradeshow is celebrated with the “Red, White & Brew” Culinary Stage, featuring craft beer-infused cooking demos, along with a sugar artist who created a 40th anniversary statue.

The EARN Grant is established for workforce development. A partnership between the HMRA, the Chamber of Commerce and Wor-Wic Community College delivers hospitality boot camp.

The HMRA supports “Let Summer be Summer” campaign to encourage starting schools after Labor Day.

2015

TV Show “Hotel Impossible” star, Anthony Melchorri, is the featured speaker at the trade expo. Also, a mixology competition planned with Ocean 98 radio station sees who can make the best cocktail in 98 seconds.

As Airbnb rentals attracting more visitors, the HMRA asks City Hall to ensure that condo rentals are paying room tax.

The HMRA and Ann Hillyer, CEO of StateVentures (OceanCity.com), receive the Visionary Impact Award at the Maryland State Tourism Summit for their work with Shore Craft Beer.

2016

The HMRA partners with United Way of the Lower Eastern Shore for “Dine United,” a suggestion from member Cole Taustin of Ember’s & BLU restaurants. Member Anemarie Dickerson of the Francis Scott Key suggests “STAY United.”

The 10th Anniversary of Restaurant Week includes working with the Ocean City Art League to launch “Food for the Soul,” a pairing artists and chefs, with paintings displayed at the Center for the Arts.

The HMRA, Ocean City and Worcester County receive the Maryland Tourism Coalition Award for Advocacy for their campaign, “Marylanders for Longer Summer.”

2017

A terrorism awareness and active shooter seminar is planned in cooperation with Maryland State Police.

The Maryland Tourism Coalition presents the HMRA and the Chamber of Commerce with the Visionary Impact Award for the efforts with “Building Employer-Led Alliance for Careers in Hospitality.” The HMRA, also receives the Cooperative Partnership Award with Shore Craft Beer Alliance.

2018

Restaurant Association of Maryland Annual Awards Gala gives HMRA Director Susan

Jones the Phillips Lifetime Achievement Award. This also comes with a Governor's Citation and Maryland General Assembly Citations, with both presented by Delegate Mary Beth Carozza.

The HMRA backs increasing the room tax a half-percent if all the funds go to tourism-related activities. It also helps to resurrect the Hospitality Sales & Marketing Partnership.

The association is asked to organize vendor and artisan sales for the re-established Harbor Day at The Docks.

2019

Hotel Week & Restaurant Weeks run concurrently April 28- May 11.

The HMRA organizes the beer booths to help launch the inaugural Jellyfish Festival.

Ocean City government passes a .5 percent room tax increase with proceeds going to general fund.

The HMRA continues to push City Hall to hire a Director of Economic & Tourism Development and to pursue a sports complex.

The association sponsors a suicide prevention seminar in honor of Past President Travis Wright.

2020

The HMRA suggests that the Tourism Advisory Board members become the OC Recovery Team to help navigate the covid-19 pandemic, along with the health department, Atlantic General Hospital and city officials.

The HMRA's first virtual board meeting is held via Zoom, because of the statewide stay-in-place order instituted because of the pandemic. New officers are installed in a Zoom ceremony as well.

Responding to plummeting restaurant business, the HMRA creates a carryout and gift card sales list — and a "Eat Local OCMD" Facebook group — to help restaurants stay afloat during shut-down.

HMRA Director Susan Jones gathers all local organizations to discuss overlap in member benefits and to work towards streamlining membership dues and duties to alleviate duplication. PARTNERS is resurrected.

The in-person March Expo 2021 is cancelled because of the pandemic. Instead, an online directory is created to feature show specials and new products.

Facebook Live Event features the president of the American Hotel & Lodging Association and the Maryland and Delaware Lodging and Restaurant Associations.

2021

The HMRA helps United Way add "Play United" to the successful "Dine & Stay United" fundraiser.

The association's collaboration with the Maryland Center for Hospitality training to address the employee shortage led to development of Marylanders for Maryland Jobs Pilot Program, which is officially approved by the Department of Labor.

"Work & Play at The Beach" flyers are created and sent to Worcester County high school students.

The HMRA is part of a joint effort to build an outdoor job fair for all high school students and launches the Hospitality Job Board Facebook group.