

# Virginia Highlands Festival Demographic Survey 2004

Founded in 1778, Abingdon is located in the Appalachian Mountains of SW Virginia, adjacent to Interstate 81 at Exits, 14, 17, and 19. It is home to the world-famed Barter Theatre, the State Theatre of Virginia, which is situated in the Abingdon Historic District. Also located in Abingdon are the William King Regional Arts Center, the Arts Depot and a host of shops and galleries. Outdoor enthusiasts enjoy the Virginia Creeper National Recreation Trail, nearby Mount Rogers National Recreation Area and South Holston Lake. Abingdon has accommodations in every price range including over 20 historic bed & breakfasts in the area, superb dining, shopping, arts, history, and more.

The Virginia Highlands Festival (VHF) is a nationally recognized two-week celebration of the cultural arts held in mid-summer each year. The event was begun in 1949 by a small group of volunteers including Robert Porterfield, founder of the Barter Theatre, as a means to showcase the region's arts, to educate and entertain its citizens, and to attract tourists to the area. Now in its 57th year, the festival has always been organized and run by an independent board of volunteers. VHF conducted a demographic survey during the 2004 event from July 31-August 15. The survey was designed

by Keith Robinson, publisher of event newspapers and member of the VHF Board of Directors and was based on similar demographic and economic impact surveys done by other events. The survey questionnaire was reviewed for usability and effectiveness with a team of researchers from the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. We are deeply grateful for their help. The team also reviewed and verified as accepted procedure other aspects of the survey including sampling methodology and attendance counting.

The survey was conducted at the same locations each day of the 15-day event by members of Boy Scout Troop 222, Abingdon, under the leadership of Clay Miller who supervised this aspect of the survey as an Eagle Scout Project. A total of 300 individuals were selected at random and filled out the survey [It is important to note that although 300 individuals filled out the survey, they did not all answer every question]. Where feasible, this survey will compare information gathered in this survey with that gathered by the Abingdon Convention & Visitors Bureau in the 2001 Tourist Intercept Questionnaire [TIF] which surveyed 100 individuals.

## Results of 2004 Survey

Total attendance was approximately 225,000 over the 15 day period (three weekends)  
Over 60,000 of these visited the Antiques Market

Exactly two thirds were women [150,000]

87% of visitors came with someone else, 90% by car.

60% of the attendees were between the ages of 35-64,

72% of all visitors came from out of town (26% stayed overnight in Abingdon)

51% of those staying overnight paid to stay (over 21,000)

The average person attended VHF 2.2 days [2.78 in TIF] and stayed at the event for an average of 3.6 hours each day.

The average distance traveled by a visitor was 158 miles.

75% of attendees had visited VHF in previous years, ten and a half years was the average number of previous visits.

24% of visitors were here for the first time [24% = 54,000] [TIS First Visit, 25%].

VHF was an important factor to their Abingdon visit to 89% of visitors [TIF = 86%]. For 29% of visitors [65,000], VHF was only reason to visit Abingdon.

36% of visitors [81,000] stated that their visit to the festival spurred them to visit local places and sites they might not have – ie, Barter Theatre, Whites Mill, Virginia Creeper Trail, downtown shops, etc.

The occupation of visitors included 28% retired, 33% professional, 7% business owners [over 15,000] and 6% Management [13,000].

85% of those who attended were or are married.

90% of VHF visitors have some college credits  
63% were college graduates  
31% with a post graduate degree [over 69,000]

68% of attendees had annual incomes in excess of \$50,000  
23% in excess of \$100,000 [over 50,000].

The average \$ spent in town (away from the event) was \$235 [TIF avg=\$202]. Economic Impact to Abingdon and area: \$75,000,000.00

The average amount of money spent at the event was \$197 [TIF avg = \$168]. Total \$ Spent at VHF = \$44,000,000