

## National park pumps \$3.6 million into local economy

The Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park includes the Wright brothers' bicycle shop and the last home of poet Paul Laurence Dunbar.

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At the turn of the 20th Century, the Wright Cycle Company in Dayton was a cash cow, selling bicycles to an eager public. Today, the company continues to help boost the local economy, albeit a little differently, by attracting tourist dollars to the region.

The Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, which includes the cycle company, welcomed almost 66,000 visitors in 2012 who pumped an estimated \$3.6 million into local communities, according to a recent report.

The park welcomed roughly 55,000 visitors in 2013, a decline that was caused by the government shutdown and sequestration, which led to the elimination of Monday and Tuesday visiting hours during the winter months, said Dean Alexander, the park's superintendent.

National parks are a vital part of the tourism industry and help support many local jobs and attract out-of-state dollars.

"Certainly national park sites are important to the Ohio tourism fabric," said Tamara Brown, spokeswoman for Tourism Ohio. "They share the stories of Ohio and Ohioans and their contributions to the formation and shaping of our country and our way of life as well as preserving its heritage and natural areas."

More than 2.6 million people visited Ohio's national parks in 2012, and they spent an estimated \$156.7 million in communities located within 60 miles of the sites, according to a National Park Service report released this month.

Ohio is home to eight national parks, 72 national historic landmarks, 23 natural landmarks and two heritage areas, officials said.

The Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park features five sites that tell the stories and preserve the legacies of Wilbur and Orville Wright and poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, officials said.

Visitors can tour the Wright brothers' bicycle shop, where the duo developed and sold their own brand of bikes. Visitors can explore the brothers' mansion or stroll the Huffman Prairie Flying Field, where the brothers tested various models of their aircraft.

Visitors can see the brothers' third airplane or wander through Dunbar's last home.

The National Museum of the U.S. Air Force is the primary tourism engine in the region, but people visit the historical park because they are interested in the Wright brothers or the history of aviation, or they want to see all of the local sights, Alexander said.

"We also get a lot of families looking for things to do with the kids or out-of-town guests and family," Alexander said.

Of the nearly 66,000 visitors to the aviation historical park in 2012, two-thirds were not local residents, according to data in the report that is based on visitor surveys. Out-of-town park visitors spent about \$3.3 million in local communities.

Alexander said tourism to national parks is a significant economic driver and provides \$10 in economic benefits for every \$1 invested in the sites and programs.

Hotels, motels and accommodations account for about 30 percent of U.S. visitor spending related to national park tourism.

Restaurants and bars account for about 20 cents of every \$1 visitors spend.

Visitors also shell out money for fuel, souvenirs, admission fees, local transportation and plenty else.

"All of those purchases work their way through the economic stream supporting other industries, suppliers and manufacturers," Brown said.

Ohio's tourism industry has experienced steady growth since 2009, she said.