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December 2006

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2006 Annual Tourism Report Highlights

Well the numbers are in! We had a very good year! Our 2006 fiscal year ran from October 1, 2005 through Sept 30, 2006. Our average bed tax collections are about \$350,000. 2006 was \$374,375. The year before (2005) was our highest year ever with \$383,814, which included Jacksonville Super Bowl XXXIX. Our 2006 estimated economic impact of tourism for Clay County was \$21,649,225. Our average room rate was \$55.57 and our hotel occupancy ran 63.2%. This was the first entire year we have had access to average rates and occupancy. We sent out 22 group travel leads, (31 in 2005, but not as large) and booked 14 definites (11 in 2005). We had 531,115 website hits (378,610 in 2005). The events with the highest economic impact are: the North Florida Hunter Jumper Winter Series, the Clay County Agricultural Fair, the North Florida Scottish Highland Games, and the First Coast Ham Jam.

First Coast Winter Lights Are Here All Month



First Coast Winter Lights light up the Night at Reynolds Park & Yacht Center.

You can see them from Green Cove Springs! You can see them from the St. Johns River! You can see them along Highway 16 just east of Green Cove Springs. They are not the Northern Lights or the Aurora Borealis! They are the **First Coast Winter Lights** from Midwest Displays! 117 huge lighted displays, just like they have in Hershey, Pennsylvania! They will open at dusk every night from December 14 through January 1. Drive through about 2 miles of holiday fantasy and then go ice skating! Rental skates are available at a rental fee. It's only \$18 per car of up to 5 passengers, then \$3 per additional person admission. There's an outdoor movie theatre, photos with Santa, concessions and more! Go to www.firstcoastwinterlights.com or www.news4jax.com and check out Holidays or call **904-284-4667** for more information.

Thrasher Horne Center for the Arts Christmas

The *Man In Black* will be coming to the Thrasher Horne Center for the Arts in the **Johnny Cash Holiday Tribute** on December 16. Of course we mean Rusty Evans as the legendary Johnny Cash and his band, Ring of Fire. Hear hits like *I Walk the Line*, *Folsom Prison Blues*, *Blue Christmas* and *Silent Night*. Call 904-276-6750 or go to www.THcenter.org for more information.



North Florida Hunter Jumper Winter Series



Miss Independence
Winner of the 2005
Grand Prix!

Have you ever been watching a major sporting event on television and thought it would be cool to have something like that right here at home? Well there are things on the horizon that are going to happen here in Clay County that will be on national television. One of them is the **Florida Hunter Jumper Winter Series**. It is one of only 12 events in Continental United States. It is televised on ESPN. It starts on January 10 at the Clay County Equestrian Center at the fairgrounds. It lasts for 5 weeks through February 11. These are pre-Olympians and World Class Jumpers competing for prizes and points in order to attend the World Cup Competition next April in Las Vegas. These are the high jumpers right out of an English Fox Hunting movie. Come on out. If you like horses, you're going to love this. There's a Grand Prix worth thousands of dollars every weekend. There are teen riders and seasoned professionals. It's World Class, and it's right here in Classy Clay County! Imagine that! Go to <http://nfhja.com> or our own www.claytourism.com

North Florida Scottish Highland Games & Festival

Our Scottish friends with the Jacksonville Scottish Highland Games have been very busy this past year expanding this event! The first event is the **Kilted Golf Tournament** at the King & Bear at World Golf Village. Their slogan is "Kilts desired, but not required". You can pretend you are at the St. Andrews course back in the early 1900's playing golf with Tom Morris! Call 904-509-8621 or email gordy06@bellsouth.net. to register. Save \$30 and by registering before December 29. **The Kirkin', (Blessing) of the Tartans** will be at St. Giles Presbyterian Church on Blanding on Sunday, February 18. Call to confirm the date. **The Whiskey Tasting and Sponsors Reception** will be at the Hilltop Club on February 23. You can check www.claytourism.com or www.neflgames.com for times and cost of admission. Byron Cassell is a local expert with a capital "E" on the business, history and lore of single-malt scotch, and they bring in several imported blends during the tasting. **The Games** are on February 24 at the Clay County Fairgrounds. What a day! It's everything Scottish. The unbelievable moving sounds of the bagpipes and drums from the bands! The clans and genealogy literally take you back to your roots. At least it does, for many people. Those Scots really got around. One of the reasons the Scottish Games are so popular is because so many people have just a wee bit of Scottish blood in their heritage. Come out, bring your grandparents, aunts and uncles names and see. There are all kinds of experts in family crests, tartans, and name information. It's fun, informative and if you have never had a real treat. After 3 years of attending the games, I could fill up an entire newsletter. But you need to hear, taste, touch and see for yourself!



Scotland The Brave enters the arena!

New Clay County Hotel Update

We haven't had a totally new hotel in many, many years. The new **Sleep Inn and Suites Fleming Island** will be opening in January! Go to www.sleepflemingisland.com for a look at their rooms and amenities. They will have 90 rooms, a board room, pool, etc and most of the comforts of home! Welcome Sleep Inn & Suites! In the April time frame, we will see the new **Hilton Garden Inn Orange Park** open. How exciting to welcome the Hilton family to Orange Park! It will bring 99 rooms and is located just behind the EconoLodge. Our long time friend, the **Holiday Inn Orange Park** will become a new franchise this spring also. We'll have additional banquet space and a new look inside and out. It will be a new look, but familiar friends at the same location. Just behind it on Wells road, will be the new Holiday Inn opening in 2007. It will have 130 rooms and be a full service hotel. And last, but not least, will be a new **Marriott Courtyard** on the old Sav-A-Stop corner on Wells Road, just kitty-corner from the Fairfield Inn. 102 rooms and another Marriott property will be welcome also. That means we will add 421 new rooms to our Clay County inventory, which is a 39% increase! So invite friends and family to help us fill up those new rooms and make all of our hotels thrive and prosper! Our visitors bring us additional funds to improve the quality of life for all residents of Clay County. They have contributed heavily to the Clay County Fairgrounds and the Thrasher-Horne Center for the Arts.



Using the Tourism Website



Are you familiar with the Clay Tourism Website? It is designed for visitors, meeting planners, media and group tour leaders. But it is also local information. Do you need a trail map for hiking or biking? Do you want to know where the Middleburg BMX park is? (We also have bike maps in the office.) Did you catch the Doctor's Lake Lighted Boat Parade on December 9? The calendar of events for Clay County can tell you what's happening and is available 24/7. If you can't find something, let me know. We'll try to get you the information or make it easier to find. Are you a history buff? You can tap into local historic information. Check out Things To Do. Check out Partner Links. Go to www.claytourism.com or www.claychamber.com. We will continue suggesting **you** put in your event information on the calendar. Click on the calendar itself and then "Submit an Event". There is a place for the basic event information. The blank box is for different prices, different times of separate items or a short description why or who should come. Don't forget your contact information. Then press submit. It will be posted within a day or two by chamber personnel. If you have any questions, or glitches, please call or email **904-394-7401** or eszymanski@claychamber.com.

December-January Calendar of Events:

12/8-Jan 1	First Coast Winter Lights	RPYC (Reynolds Park and Yacht Center)
12/16	A Johnny Cash Holiday Tribute	THCA (Thrasher Horne Center for the Arts)
1/1	Toyota Gator Bowl	Alltel Stadium
1/8	Visions of Florida: Clyde Bucher	THCA
1/8	An Evening of Musical Theatre Song and Dance	THCA
1/10-14	North Florida Hunter Jumper Winter Series Kick Off	CCFG (Clay County Fairgrounds)
1/12	Gail Fulton Ross: Fresh Paint	THCA
1/12	An Evening of Musical Theatre Song and Dance	THCA
1/17-21	North Florida Hunter Jumper Winter Series Intl Week	CCFG
1/24-28	North Florida Hunter Jumper Winter Series Natl Week	CCFG
1/27	Yesterday's	Gold Head State Park/ Keystone Heights
1/27	Clay County All County Elementary Chorus	THCA
1/30	Scottish Games Kilted Golf Tournament	King & Bear World Golf Village
1/31-2/4	North Florida Hunter Jumper Winter Series A to Z	CCFG

www.claytourism.com (Calendar of Events) for more!

Happy Holidays from your Tourism Director!

