

Williamsburg hosts block party downtown



Rhythm Exchange provided the entertainment for the Block Party. | PHOTO BY NIKKI STANLEY

BY NIKKI STANLEY
Correspondent

WILLIAMSBURG — Williamsburg’s downtown area was booming with good energy and great music Friday night, as a band called Rhythm Exchange took the stage at the Green Space on Main.

They’re a party cover band from Knoxville who’s relatively new, having only formed last July, but the individual members have been playing for many years.

In fact, Kate Laciak, the singer with a powerful voice and charming stage

presence, is semi-famous in Gatlinburg where she and her husband perform together in a duo band called “The Reunited.”

Laciak also has a degree in the performing arts from Columbia University and was formerly trained at the Actors and Singers Academy at Carnegie Hall. She’s been a showgirl her entire life, and even owns a dance studio where she teaches dance to kids.

Kenny Strong, keyboardist and manager of the band, said of Laciak,

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Tourism generated over \$114 million in economic impact last year for Whitley County

MACEE SWAFFORD
Staff Writer

WHITLEY COUNTY — Tourism continued to be a powerful economic driver for Whitley County in 2024, according to the latest data released by the Kentucky Department of Tourism.

The annual report revealed that Whitley County generated a staggering \$114.7 million in economic impact last year, helping to fuel local businesses, create jobs, and strengthen the region’s overall economy.

Tourism supported 792 jobs in Whitley County throughout 2024, while contributing \$19.1 million in labor income.

The industry also played a vital role in supporting public services, bringing in \$9.5 million in state and local tax revenue.

Corbin Tourism and

Convention Commission shared the report’s highlights in a Facebook post, noting that tourism continues to support small businesses and position the community as a vibrant, welcoming place for visitors.

“Tourism plays a major role in growing our local economy, supporting small businesses, creating jobs, and making Corbin and all of Whitley County a place people love to visit,” the Commission shared in a post.

Across the state, Kentucky tourism generated an overall economic impact of \$14.3 billion, supporting more than 97,000 jobs and resulting in \$3.596 billion in labor income.

The statewide industry also brought in over \$1 billion in state and local taxes.

Phat Buttz BBQ opens in London, third location for regional restaurant brand



Pictured are Nathan and Maranda Brown at the entry of Phat Buttz in London. | PHOTO BY MADISON NANTZ

BY MADISON NANTZ
Staff Writer

Phat Buttz BBQ, a regional barbecue chain known for its bold flavors and traditional approach, has officially opened a new location in London.

This marks the third Phat Buttz location and the fourth restaurant overall operated by owners Nathan and Maranda Brown, as the couple also owns JonEvan Jacks in Corbin.

With their success in both Corbin and Barbourville, the Browns said they felt confident London was ready for something different as well.

“London’s got a great barbecue place, Durham’s, so we kind of felt like we could do things a little bit different,” one of the owners said. “There’s so many people that live here. I felt like that we could probably do something that wouldn’t infringe on

them, and we could do something good.”

The couple said their newest location stands out by staying true to a simple, traditional style of barbecue — avoiding fried foods and focusing on house-smoked meats and original seasoning blends. One item that’s drawn particular attention is their sliced pork beef, which they say is unusual to find elsewhere.

“The bologna burnt ends are really good,” Mr. Brown added, noting that smoked cream cheese and five-cheese mac and cheese are among their signature menu items. He especially recommended the four-meat sampler, which allows customers to try a variety of options.

“You can choose any four meats,” he said. “They come with two sides of bread, and then we throw in a little twist — we garnish our plates with a piece of pickled okra.”

At this time, the restaurant’s hours are 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Sunday. While Phat Buttz does not offer online delivery, they do provide catering options for both drop-off and

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