Scenic America launches ViewFinders

Scenic America is proud to announce the launch of ViewFinders, the first and only educational program aimed at teaching youth how to critically examine the visual environment.

First developed by the Dunn Foundation, ViewFinders is designed to help us look at the streetscape around us and ask questions like: Do I like the way this looks? What do I like? What don’t I like? Is there anything I would change?

Scenic America worked with the Dunn Foundation to redevelop the ViewFinders curriculum for the digital age, resulting in a website that is fun, interactive and visually appealing. While aimed at youth in grades 5 – 8, the program can be enjoyed by people of all ages.

Among the features of ViewFinders is the chance to be mayor of “Youville” and decide how you want your town to look! By choosing from a series of different options you can watch the town change right before your eyes. Want to change the view? Just click “reset” and choose different options!

You can find ViewFinders online at www.view-finders.org. We welcome your feedback about the program at viewfinders@scenic.org or call 202.463.1294.

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for byway organizations to implement projects and programs that improve traveler experiences. Congress is expected to consider a new transportation bill in 2015 and Scenic America is leading the effort to ensure that scenic byways are able to compete on a level playing field for funding to continue locally driven economic development efforts.

While it is unlikely Congress will reinstate funding for NSBP grants in this bill, we need your support to clarify byway projects’ eligibility for Transportation Alternative (TA) funds. Projects eligible for TA funds include many with relevance to scenic byways such as: corridor planning, safety improvements, construction of interpretive facilities, resource protection, development of byway traveler kiosks and byway marketing.

To send a message to Congress in support of funding for Scenic Byways please go to: www.scenic.org/byways2014.

The economic benefits of Scenic Byways have been well established. A 2013 study of Scenic Byway 12 in Utah found that the roadway provided a direct impact of $12.7 million to the communities it traverses. A 2010 study of the Paul Bunyan Scenic Byway in Minnesota found that byway travelers spent $21.6 million while in the region. For additional information about the impacts of Scenic Byways go to: www.scenic.org/issues/scenic-byways.
The October 2014 edition of Best’s Review investigates concerns in the insurance industry about the traffic safety risks presented by roadside digital billboards. Best’s Review is a publication of A.M. Best, a rating agency that focuses on the insurance industry.

Scenic America President Mary Tracy was interviewed for the article and said the insurance industry has a role to play in promoting driver safety. “Carriers care about safety and property values, things that are definitely impacted by the proliferation of digital billboards, so they can become an important voice for reasonable policy making in this area,” Tracy said.

“Certainly any distraction that takes a driver’s eyes off the road is dangerous and can lead to increased crash risk,” said Bill Windsor, vice president of safety for Nationwide Insurance. “And there is, through research, evidence that digital billboards do get drivers’ attention.”

The insurance industry would be “well-thought to conduct studies of its own on whether digital signs are causing accidents, not just for the protection of consumers but also to protect carriers’ own pocketbooks, because they are ultimately the ones paying for this,” added James Ballidis, president of the law firm Allen, Flatt, Ballidis and Leslie. To download the Best’s Review article go to: www.scenic.org/bestsreview.

On June 20 a federal judge dismissed Scenic America’s lawsuit challenging the 2007 Federal Highway Administration decision to allow digital billboards along roadways governed by the Highway Beautification Act. In August Scenic America filed an appeal to the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals.

“Scenic America’s mission compels us to fight for the public’s interest in America’s roadways and landscapes rather than stand idly by while our own government hands them to the outdoor advertising industry,” said Mary Tracy, president of Scenic America.

For an overview of the case to date go to: www.scenic.org/lawsuit_summary.

Martha Fuller Clark re-elected in New Hampshire

National Public Radio reporter John Burnett reached out to Scenic America as he assembled a story about the ongoing abuse of America’s roadways by the billboard industry and the public’s growing resistance to it. Our Vice-Chair Margaret Lloyd was featured in the piece, which aired recently on NPR’s Weekend Edition and was heard by more than 2 million listeners, bringing significant attention to these issues. If you missed the story on NPR you can listen to it online at www.scenic.org/npr.

Scenic America appealing dismissal of digital billboard lawsuit
Awards were given to two Rhode Island-based organizations in recognition of their efforts to beautify area landscapes during a recent meeting of Scenic America’s Board and Affiliates at Bellevue House in Newport, home of the group’s Chairman Ronald Lee Fleming.

The first award recognized the Scenic Aquidneck Coalition for securing more than $800,000 in federal funding to put power and utility lines underground at Second Beach in Middletown. The effort to underground the utilities has been a long-term partnership led by the Coalition, which is comprised of the Aquidneck Land Trust, Preserve Rhode Island, The Preservation Society of Newport County, The Townscape Institute, and the van Beuren Charitable Foundation.

The second award was given to the Daffodil Project for its Daffodillion Campaign, an effort to plant one million daffodils across Newport. Nearly a quarter-million flowers have already been planted. “Each Spring these daffodils will create a kind of golden necklace all across the city,” said Fleming.

Governor Lincoln Chafee recently announced the creation of the Rhode Island Highway Beautification Advisory Committee, which will help further guide the highway beautification efforts initiated by Gov. Chafee several years ago and for which he received Scenic America’s Stafford Award in 2013.