



Carter County, Tennessee
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

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**Carter County Launches Partnership
to Promote Tourism, Expand Air Connections**

ELIZABETHTON, Tenn. — Carter County has formalized a new three-year strategic partnership with the Northeast Tennessee Tourism Association, the Elizabethton–Carter County Chamber of Commerce and BRIDGE Regional, Inc., aligning tourism marketing and air service development efforts to strengthen the county’s economy.

The agreement follows months of collaboration between Mayor Patty Woodby and regional partners to create a coordinated, data-driven approach to destination marketing and regional connectivity. The initiative is designed to position Carter County as a premier nature and heritage destination in Northeast Tennessee while maximizing return on investment for taxpayer dollars.

Visitors currently spend approximately \$53 million annually in Carter County, supporting local businesses and contributing to overall quality of life. Through integrated marketing campaigns and expanded air service at the Tri-Cities Airport, the partnership aims to generate a 20-to-1 return on investment for every dollar the county invests.

Key objectives include:

- Increasing overnight stays
- Growing visitor spending to strengthen the local tax base
- Improving marketing performance and ROI
- Establishing Carter County as a regional hub for outdoor adventure and history
- Expanding inbound air service to enhance connectivity and economic opportunity

The partnership builds on existing tourism efforts and introduces fully integrated campaigns to create a clear, cohesive voice for Carter County. Marketing will focus on attracting travelers seeking authentic outdoor experiences and heritage tourism.

“We are excited to elevate our partnership alongside Carter County, the Chamber and BRIDGE through a comprehensive destination marketing strategy that reflects the county’s status as a pillar in Northeast Tennessee’s tourism economy,” said Alicia Phelps, executive director of the Northeast Tennessee Tourism Association. “Carter County is home to nationally recognized treasures like Roan Mountain, the Appalachian Trail, Watauga Lake and Sycamore Shoals, as well as cultural events and local flavor.

“This collaboration is about more than just visibility — it is about the tangible economic impact visitor spending brings to local businesses and the enhanced quality of life these natural and cultural assets provide to residents. From experience-based outdoor adventures to unique hometown businesses, Carter County is such a special community with a powerful story to tell. We are excited to join this effort, knowing that when one community in our region succeeds, we all do.”

The Elizabethton–Carter County Chamber of Commerce will continue operating the Visitor Center and maintaining its “boots on the ground” presence by assisting tourists, promoting local businesses and sponsoring community events.

“At the Elizabethton–Carter County Chamber of Commerce, we are incredibly excited about what this partnership allows us to bring to the table,” said Frankie Bailey, board president of the Chamber. “Tourism is about people, place and connection — and this collaboration strengthens all three. By working alongside the Northeast Tennessee Tourism Association and BRIDGE, each bringing unique strengths, we’re able to enhance our efforts by focusing on what we each do best. We’re proud to support local businesses, welcome visitors and celebrate what makes Carter County special. We’re inspired by what lies ahead and grateful for the chance to work together to grow tourism for our county.”

The Northeast Tennessee Tourism Association will lead targeted digital and print campaigns in key markets. Tri-Cities Airport’s marketing team and the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development will support promotion of new air service routes.

A central component of the partnership is collaboration with BRIDGE Regional, Inc., a privately funded economic development organization focused on expanding regional air service.

“Strategic air service development is one of the most impactful investments we can make in our region,” said John Rose, executive director of BRIDGE. “With the support of Carter County and our other public and private partners, we were able to secure new direct service to Washington, D.C., and Orlando, which quickly attracted additional airline expansion. By increasing air service, we’re not only supporting tourism — we’re enhancing business recruitment and retention, lowering average fares over time and improving quality of life for our residents. BRIDGE is 100% privately funded, ensuring every dollar dedicated to air service goes directly toward strengthening our region’s competitive position and expanding opportunity for Northeast Tennessee.”

BRIDGE provided a \$2 million minimum revenue guarantee to Breeze Airways to incentivize new direct flights for Tri-Cities Airport. Shortly thereafter, American Airlines and United Airlines announced new service to Chicago from the region, increasing competition and contributing to lower fares.

Woodby said the partnership reflects a shared commitment to long-term economic growth.

“I want to thank the Carter County Commission for supporting this investment and our Chamber board and regional partners for working alongside us to make this possible,” Woodby said. “This partnership between Northeast Tennessee Tourism, the Chamber, BRIDGE and Carter County is an exciting step forward. It will help our local businesses grow, bring more visitors to the region, and expand access through new air service, all of which will create lasting benefits for our community.”

Occupancy tax revenues will be allocated evenly between the Chamber and the Northeast Tennessee Tourism Association to support destination marketing and visitor services. Quarterly performance and ROI updates will be provided to the Carter County Commission.

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