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Seeing our capital city as outsiders view it

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There it was, sandwiched between stories on "Castles in Spain" and "Arizona's Indian Country," a feature piece on Providence, Rhode Island. Again, a national magazine, in this case the latest issue of *Travel/Holiday*, has chosen to single out our capital city as a place to visit, to explore and to enjoy.

Referring to the once-dowdy city that "has blossomed into one of the prettiest cities in the Northeast," the *Travel/Holiday* reporter lists the many sights to be viewed, ranging from the Providence City Hall to Benefit Street to a "Little Italy" area where one finds an Angelo's and Providence Cheese Company. The colorful photographs illustrate the buildings, activities, and scenes of the downtown as well as "one of the most beautiful urban campuses in the country at College Hill."

A final fillip to encourage the traveler to visit Providence suggests the human scale of our city: "It's truly a walking city, and a pair of walking shoes will prove more useful than a tankful of gas for discovering the city's particular charms."

The recognition slowly being given to the capital city by several national magazines and newspapers has now reached the trade journals as well, with two recent issues of convention publications highlighting the city and the Director of the Greater Providence Convention and Visitors Bureau. Such publicity among those who direct conventioners and tourists to various cities can only serve to benefit Providence's tourist business.

Capitalizing on this new-found interest in the rebirth of Rhode Island's major city, the Greater Providence Convention and Visitors Bureau has captured the annual meeting of Marketplace East USA to be held in Providence during the latter part of next April. Travel representatives from 11 states in this part of the nation and Washington, D.C., together with approximately 150 foreign representatives, will spend three days here, viewing the city and visiting Newport.

Although the purpose of the meeting is to negotiate tours by foreign visitors to the states represented, the fact that business activities will be centered on

Providence will allow these international tour directors to view our city firsthand. According to the director of the Convention Bureau, "the tourism bookings for our hotels and attractions, as a result of this 2½-day travel-industry event, will run into the millions."

Yet, even with all of this very positive publicity about Providence, it is unfortunate that too many Rhode Islanders still see only the negative aspects of the city. And it is ironic that it is the out-of-staters who speak glowingly of its assets, whether it be historical traditions, beautiful buildings, charming cityscape, or human scale. Especially is this true for those outsiders who have chosen to live in the city and who speak of its theater, arts, culture, entertainment and variety in such glowing terms.

Whether or not one agrees with the views expressed by such outsiders who have opted for residence here, such attitudes cause one to ponder. Too often for those too close to a situation for too long, the negative (which makes the newspapers) tends to take precedence over the good. One is reminded also of the tremendous gains that have been made in Providence over the last several years, so that the very poor image of the city a decade ago, an image shared by resident and visitor alike, is now changing for the better. Outsiders who have a basis for comparison see the good things in the city; in time, it is to be hoped that residents also will have similar views.

When one reads about our attributes in national magazines, one has to reflect on these words that others say about us and our city. These stories should cause us to be proud. Equally important, such stories help the Convention Bureau in its campaign to tell others about Providence and to convince conventioners and tourists to visit and spend their money here. The \$67 per day on a four-day visit that the average convention delegate spends in a city has a marked impact on the local and regional economy, with hotels, restaurants, retail shops, taxis, and entertainment facilities the major beneficiaries. The \$3 million worth of business booked by the bureau this year will grow to \$5 million next year, with potential for greater amounts in the future.

It is important to be reminded of the many outstanding characteristics of Rhode Island's capital city, as *Travel/Holiday* does for us. Periodically, we need this type of stimulation to make us realize that as a city, Providence has come a long way and, as seen through the eyes of others, we stand head and shoulders above most other cities. When city and state residents realize this also, we will then be on our way to becoming a proud and vibrant community.

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