

BR Horse Show Impact: \$7.7 Million

Written by Steve Frank

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The High Country specializes in events, from the Highland Games to the Woolly Worm Festival, each brings an audience and an influx of money to the area. But how much? A new economic impact study done as part of an ASU honors thesis takes a close look at one event; The annual Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show, and says it pumped just over \$7.7 million into Blowing Rock and the surrounding area in just a three-week period this summer. The findings come from the economic impact study conducted by Nicole Jelley of Raleigh, who majored in economics and marketing at Appalachian State University. Jelley, who graduated Dec. 16th, did the study as the basis for her honors thesis in the Walker College of Business and was conducted at the request of the Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show Foundation Board of Directors. The horse show's total economic impact of \$7,745,681.34 was derived by a formula that combines expenditures related directly to the horse show of almost \$5.2 million with indirect expenditures that occur as funds associated with the horse show circulate through the local economy, almost \$2.6 million. The horse show runs each year from late July to mid-August—the height of the High Country summer tourist season and the busiest of the year. Maurice Ewing, a member of the Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show Foundation Board of Directors said, "We are not aware of another tourist attraction in the area that can produce that much revenue in 22 days." For her study, Jelley collected information about expenditures and participant characteristics from exhibitors, spectators, vendors and employees related to on-site show expenses, lodging, restaurants and entertainment expenditures. Nearly 2,750 exhibitors, spectators, vendors and others attended this summer's horse shows. The maximum per person expenditure for both lodging and restaurants was \$3,000. Out-of-state residents spent an average of \$947.64 on total horse show expenses while N.C. residents spent an average of \$485.40. Out-of-state residents spent an average of \$1,230.36 on other expenses while N.C. residents had an average spending of \$555.16.

On average, \$1,873 was spent by individuals staying in Blowing Rock and who attended or participated in the horse show. That figure is based on information provided by those who attended the horse show for one day to two weeks. A rider since age 7, Jelley has competed in the horse show and worked at the stables as an employee of the Blowing Rock Equestrian Preserve. "I think my experience at the 2010 BRCHS helped me to design and implement the project, especially with the survey, since it is such a unique show. I think the main reason it's different from other horse shows is because of the historic show grounds and facility," she said. "Something I found particularly interesting was the statistical difference between what N.C. residents spent on both horse show and other expenses and what out-of-state residents spent. People who reside in a state other than N.C. spent significantly more on both expenditure categories. This result is logical and to be expected, but I was pleased that I could support it statistically," she said.

According to the report, horse show expenses represented almost 38 percent of the total expenditures. Spending on lodging represented nearly 17 percent and restaurant spending accounted for about 12 percent of the total. Lesser amounts were spent on retail shopping (about 9 percent) and on vehicle expenses (7 percent). About 300 horses and riders competed in each of the horse show's competition classes – American Saddlebred and hunter/jumper. Competitors came from 19 states including Texas, New York and Florida. The last economic impact study conducted by the Appalachian Regional Development Institute in 2000 indicated a \$6.7 million economic impact on the local economy during the three weeks of the horse show.

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The Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show (BRCHS) has been in continuous operation since 1923. It was begun by Lloyd M. Tate, a horseman from Pinehurst and a seasonal livery stable operator. The first horse show was held off Green Hill Road behind the Green Park Hotel. The horse show moved a few years later to its current location at the L.M. Tate Horse Show Grounds off Laurel Lane. Recognized as the oldest, continuous, outdoor horse show in the United States, the three-week series of competitions draws riders from across the U.S. who compete in the American Saddlebred or hunter/jumper portion of the horse show. Proceeds from the event help support area charities.