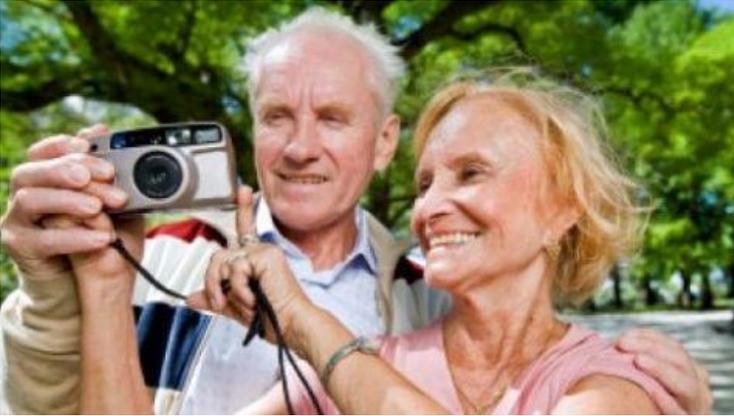


TOURISM TAX REVENUE INCREASES IN FORT SMITH



Hospitality tax fees in the two biggest cities in the Fort Smith area have increased upwards of 6 percent in 2012, however, tourism higher-ups are uncertain how the economy will shape them come next year, according to The City Wire. Food and lodging taxes in Van Buren and Fort Smith have bumped to 6.35 percent and 5.8 percent, respectively. However, work in the area's tourism division has stayed low. Van Buren was tagged with \$32,987 in tax collections for hospitality in September, a number up 3.7 percent from a year ago. Just a month prior in August, collections increased 6.5 percent. From January through September of this year, Van Buren racked up \$357,389 in tax fees which is 6.1 percent more in comparison to the \$336,733 that were charged last year. Van Buren logs a percent tax on lodging and the same rate for prepared food. "Even though revenue was up year over year, we saw a slight slowdown in spending for the month of September. Some of this slowdown can be attributed to back to school and fewer special events in the area. September is traditionally a slower revenue month for the hospitality industry," said explained Maryll Koeth, executive director of the Van Buren Advertising & Promotion Commission. Fort Smith logged \$63,914 in hospitality collections back in September, a 5.4 percent bump from last September. In August, their numbers fell 1.1 percent in comparison to their numbers from last July. Fort Smith amasses a 3 percent duty for lodging. From January through June, Fort Smith hospitality tariffs reached \$557,124, a 6.3 percent jump to the \$542,806 from January through June of 2011. "We're pleased to see this kind of performance in a national election year. We typically see much more conservative spending including travel in an election year but that has not been the case. As most everyone, we're cautious to see what may happen with the economy after the first of the year," said Claude Legris, executive director of the Fort Smith Convention & Visitors Bureau. Overall collections in Fort Smith peaked at \$708,141 last year, a 4.3 percent rise from 2010. 8,600 jobs were in the area's tourism industry in September. That figure was slightly above the 8,500 positions last September, said data courtesy of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The division peaked at 9,800 roles in September four years ago. In Arkansas, they garnered \$1.105 million thanks to collections in August, a mark far underneath the \$1.145 million they grabbed last September. This past August was the third straight month of down trending. Collections were actually on the rise from January through May.