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Tweet It: Meryl Levitz, pioneering @visitphilly founder, president & CEO, to depart in 2018:
<http://vstphl.ly/2DvinZi>

**VISIT PHILADELPHIA® BOARD OF DIRECTORS ANNOUNCES LEADERSHIP
TRANSITION**
Founding President & CEO Meryl Levitz Plans Departure In 2018

PHILADELPHIA, January 19, 2018 – Today, the Board of Directors of VISIT PHILADELPHIA® announced Meryl Levitz, the organization’s founding president and CEO, plans to leave her leadership post by the end of 2018. The board has established a search committee to oversee the process of identifying the organization’s new chief executive and has engaged Diversified Search to undertake a national effort to recruit and secure a highly qualified, passionate candidate. Until the transition to a new leader is complete, Ms. Levitz will continue in her current role as president and CEO of VISIT PHILADELPHIA to ensure a seamless transition and help drive continued success throughout 2018.

“Meryl Levitz is one of Philadelphia’s original tourism pioneers,” said Manuel N. Stamatakis, Chair of the Board of Directors, VISIT PHILADELPHIA. “Today, VISIT PHILADELPHIA is a recognized industry leader in tourism marketing. The organization has made an immense, transformational impact on the region by changing the world’s perception of Philadelphia and by serving as an economic engine. Meryl has developed an outstanding staff, positioning the organization well for continued success and future growth. On behalf of the Board of Directors, we salute Meryl for her 22 years of commitment and the legacy of organizational excellence she will leave.”

That legacy is rooted in creative, consistent, first-of-its-kind marketing that has delivered both dramatic growth in leisure tourism and economic impact. The results of VISIT PHILADELPHIA’s efforts are clear. The five-county region is now a sought-after tourist destination, not only for major events, but also day in and day out, year after year. Since VISIT PHILADELPHIA’s inception in 1996:

- **Overnight leisure visitation to the five counties has grown 101%, from 7.3 million in 1997 to 14.7 million in 2016.¹**
- **Since 1997, when VISIT PHILADELPHIA began its advertising campaigns promoting the city, Center City, Philadelphia has seen a 296% increase in leisure hotel demand.²**
- **In 1996, leisure tourism accounted for 14% (250,000) annually of Center City hotel room nights. Today, leisure tourism represents 32% (more than 1 million) of those room nights.³**

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- **While leisure visitors arrive all year and every night, Saturday has become the busiest night for Center City hotels—and has remained so for 14 years. In 2017, Saturday night hotel occupancy hit an average of 90% for the first time ever.⁴**
- **In 2016 alone, Greater Philadelphia welcomed a record 42 million domestic visitors, 37 million of whom were leisure travelers (88%).⁵**

Further, in the past 21 years, tourism and hospitality efforts, of which VISIT PHILADELPHIA is a critical contributor, have created 100,000 jobs for Greater Philadelphia residents, resulting in \$50 billion in wages.⁶ In just two decades, the Philadelphia tourism and hospitality industry has **generated \$10 billion in state and local taxes**, funding priority programs such as education, transportation and safety.⁷

VISIT PHILADELPHIA attributes its success to sophisticated, strategic marketing efforts—especially as digital innovator. Its websites, visitphilly.com and [uwishunu](http://uwishunu.com), **have more than 29 million page views annually, putting them among the top 10 destination marketing websites in the United States.⁸** Its social media channels on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and more, engage 1.5 million fans and followers, delivering total reach of 83 million people in 2017.

Memorable and effective tourism slogans have defined VISIT PHILADELPHIA's marketing efforts. Some of the most resonant campaigns have been: *The Place that Loves You Back*; *Philly's More Fun When You Sleep Over* and *With Love, Philadelphia XOXO*, which has been rated one of the best tourism slogans in the world.⁹ In 2003, VISIT PHILADELPHIA launched its *Get Your History Straight and Your Nightlife Gay*, a campaign grounded in deep research and strategic community relationships. It featured the first-ever proudly LGBT television commercial aired by a destination. In 2017, VISIT PHILADELPHIA continued to be forward-looking in its marketing efforts with its *We Got You* campaign, an innovative, authentic approach to welcoming African-American visitors to the region.

VISIT PHILADELPHIA's efforts placed Philadelphia at the top of lists of the world's best destinations. Major media outlets that have lauded the city in recent years include *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, *Reader's Digest*, *Travel + Leisure*, *Smarter Travel*, *U.S. News & World Report*, *USA Today*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Lonely Planet* and BuzzFeed. VISIT PHILADELPHIA has also been instrumental in helping the City of Philadelphia execute and capitalize on several top-tier national events such as the Republican National Convention (2000), the World Meeting of Families and Pope Francis' visit to Philadelphia (2015), the Democratic National Convention (2016) and the annual Welcome America festivities.

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“My decision to step away from VISIT PHILADELPHIA has not been easy, but I am confident that now is the right time,” said Ms. Levitz. “I have spent four decades putting Philadelphia on the map. In 1996, VISIT PHILADELPHIA set out to prove the naysayers wrong. The words ‘Philadelphia’ and ‘fun’ do belong in the same sentence, and people do want to come here. I am proud of the work that my staff and I have done, and I am happy to have made a difference for a city I love. Knowing how strong and dynamic VISIT PHILADELPHIA is today, I feel it is time to begin a new chapter for my family and me.”

The Board and search committee will work diligently over the coming months to hire an experienced executive to lead VISIT PHILADELPHIA into its next chapter of success. Ms. Levitz has expressed her commitment to the Board to onboard her successor to ensure VISIT PHILADELPHIA’s critical work continues unabated during this transition.

FOOTNOTES:

1. *Source:* Econsult Solutions, Inc./Longwoods International
2. *Source:* CBRE Hotels
3. *Source:* Econsult Solutions, Inc./Longwoods International
4. *Source:* Smith Travel Research
5. *Source:* Econsult Solutions, Inc./Longwoods International
6. *Source:* Econsult Solutions, Inc.
7. *Source:* Econsult Solutions, Inc.
8. *Source:* Google Analytics
9. *Source:* AirfareWatchdog.com

VISIT PHILADELPHIA® is our name and our mission. As the region’s official tourism marketing agency, we build Greater Philadelphia’s image, drive visitation and boost the economy.

On Greater Philadelphia’s official visitor website and blog, visitphilly.com and uwishunu.com, visitors can explore things to do, upcoming events, themed itineraries and hotel packages. Compelling photography and videos, interactive maps and detailed visitor information make the sites effective trip-planning tools. Along with Visit Philly social media channels, the online platforms communicate directly with consumers. Travelers can also call and stop into the Independence Visitor Center for additional information and tickets.

Note to Editors: For high-resolution photos of Greater Philadelphia, visit the photo gallery of visitphilly.com/pressroom.