

Historic Leiper's Fork Village Where Sustainable Tourism is a Way of Life

The story of Leiper's Fork has been a story of sustainable tourism since a group of concerned locals began restoring its village and preserving its scenic farmland around 1995. Faced with rapidly encroaching suburban development within Williamson County, visionary community leaders identified the threat and created a plan of action to preserve its land, buildings and way of life.

Williamson County is Tennessee's second fastest growing county and has the seventh highest per capita income in the nation. Plans for SR 840, the largest state financed road in Tennessee history were announced and construction began with the intention of opening up farmland to the south of the village. Meanwhile subdivision developers were consuming family farms at a record pace from rapidly encroaching Franklin to the northwest. The moment of truth had come for Leiper's Fork. Would the community define its future or would it be defined by outside forces?

Based on this immediate threat preservation leaders knew they couldn't wait on local government to create a plan and make things happen. Their initial plan included a strategy referred to as "don't zone it, own it". Over a period of 6-12 months many historic homes, retail businesses and thousands of acres of important farmland in and around the village were purchased by a group of conservation minded buyers who believed in the preservation plan.

Immediately historic structures like the Thomas Hart Benton slave cabin circa 1801 were saved and restored to become part of a rich fabric of heritage assets available for the public to enjoy. Historic structures including several original grocery stores, a doctor's office and a building that originally housed the county's first female academy were also restored and retooled to accommodate a high end arts and antiques district. New restaurants opened and the Leiper's Fork Merchants Association began inviting locals and visitors to participate in an ambitious calendar of cultural events.

In 1999 two farms totaling 450 acres located at the gateways to Leiper's Fork were the first farms to be protected from development by conservation easements granted to the newly formed Land Trust For Tennessee. Current Tennessee Governor Phil Bredesen formed the Land Trust For Tennessee in 1999 and it now protects over 32,000 acres in thirty-one Tennessee counties. The Leiper's Fork area has the states largest concentration of Land Trust protected family farms.

Because of its private location, natural environment and laid back way of life many well known celebrities including Tim McGraw, Faith Hill, Keith Urban, Nicole Kidman, Michael McDonald, and Naomi, Wynonna, and Ashley Judd have helped preserve the area by buying farms as private reserves.

The key to sustainable tourism for Leiper's Fork lies in its ability to continue as an authentic working town for farmers, carpenters, painters, songwriters and artists while openly inviting visitors to come enjoy its history, scenery and rich way of life. Leiper's Fork is not a tourist town. It is an authentic living, breathing town full of creative characters that has caught the imagination of visitors from around the world. This spirit and its close proximity to the Natchez Trace Parkway, Historic Carnton Plantation, The Carter House and downtown Franklin have made Leiper's Fork a natural location for long term sustainable heritage tourism.

