

# City & Region

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## A promotional campaign aims to bill Phila. as a college town

The effort involving tourism and higher education is designed to highlight the region for perspective students and their parents.

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INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Move aside, Boston. Philadelphia plans to tout itself as America's *real* college town.

Stealing a page from Beantown, area colleges are launching a promotional program highlighting the area's assets to college-bound students – and their parents.

"Boston has a national reputation for being a college town, and Philadelphia has every bit as much right to claim that status," said Ray Ricci, director of student enrollment for La Salle University, one of the 15 schools involved in *Campus Visit® Philadelphia*.

Although Philadelphia has dozens of schools, the public does not view the city as a college mecca, said Elizabeth Bressi-Stoppe, vice president for external affairs at the University of the Sciences, another participating school.

The new marriage between tourism and higher education is designed to get potential students and their parents thinking not only about individual campuses, but about the region's overall cultural, academic and social resources.

"Understanding that Philadelphia is a college-age town makes the area more attractive to prospective students," said Jim Van Blunk, Villanova University's director of admissions. "They'll know there

are plenty of other students to interact with, and that there are plenty of cultural and social options besides those on our own campus."

Larry Moneta, associate vice president for campus services at the University of Pennsylvania, agreed. "There's a cachet that comes with a designation 'college town' that suggests vibrancy, contemporary flair and youth appeal," Moneta said.

"Boston has done a better job promoting the entire package. But Philadelphia has more colleges, and an incredibly vibrant array of schools.

"I think historically, Philadelphia has been viewed as the city people pass through on their way to Washington or New York," Moneta said. When looking at colleges in the Northeast corridor, he said, they may visit Philadelphia campuses but devote their extra city-exploration time to New York or D.C. "We're hoping [the program] will prompt families to stay in Philadelphia for a longer period."

Penn also has a vested interest in promoting tourism in the city: The university owns three West Philadelphia hotels.

The \$300,000-per-year campaign, which is to be launched in June, will eventually help parents plan their college-hunting visits through a toll-free number, a travel desk, and a site on the World Wide

Web at <http://www.onebigcampus.com>.

Parents will be able to obtain directions, mileage between schools, advice on hotels close to each campus, and discounts on airfare, hotels and restaurants. The Web site will also feature schedules of upcoming events in the city and on the campuses.

The Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation has put up half the \$300,000 and the schools are contributing the rest to hire Campus Visit Inc., a for-profit company that started a similar campaign for Boston five years ago.

Veronica Wentz, the marketing corporation's project manager, said the campaign would also emphasize to students the internship and job opportunities available in the region.

Central to the plan is a 46-page magazine with articles on the participating schools, as well as information on the region. The schools will distribute the magazines through their admissions offices.

Todd Hoffman, a former hotel marketing director, founded Campus Visit. Many who call the Boston 800 number are mothers, he said. "Mothers are the ones who plan these college-visit trips," he said.

In part, the travel information and the magazine are intended to ensure that parents as well as prospective students gain a positive impression. "If they come away comfortable with a destination, they're far more likely to sign off," Hoffman said. "It's about overcoming that classic city fear."

Michael Kalafatas is director of admissions at Brandeis University in Waltham, Mass. The Campus Visit campaign, he said, helps ease the difficult process of researching colleges. "If the process is easier for families and we can showcase the college and the city, that's a benefit to us," he said.

It is hard to measure Campus Visit's quantitative impact in Boston or to determine whether the campaign is directly responsible for increases in applications to the schools. While Penn, for one, is not seeking to boost application numbers through the initiative, Hoffman said the Boston schools had seen applications rise by 15 percent even though applications were up only 2 percent nationally. He said two Boston-area schools not involved - Boston College and Babson - had seen slight dips in applications.

In addition to Penn, Villanova, University of the Sciences and La Salle, the other Philadelphia-area schools involved in Campus Visit Philadelphia are Drexel University, Chestnut Hill College, Moore College of Art and Design, PA. Academy of the Fine Arts, St. Joseph's University, Swarthmore College, Temple University, Thomas Jefferson University, the University of the Arts, Ursinus College, and Widener University.

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