

7,657 visitors from 86 countries were served. Since IVIS channels international visitors to its 66 member organizations and serves as an information and referral center for them, the international visitors who benefit through services of member organizations would number many additional thousands throughout the year. A list of member organizations is attached. It should be pointed out that the thousands of Americans who make up the membership of these service organizations come from nearly every segment of our society and can provide broad community support for an outstanding project like the National Visitor Center.

While requests received by the IVIS office for information and home hospitality are numerous, more than half of them during the past year were for services involving language assistance. Bilingual staff members and a corps of volunteers offered assistance in thirty languages. Uses of the IVIS Language Bank vary from providing a non-English speaking visitor with an escort guide to furnishing language aid for international meetings. Because of its broad experience in working with foreign visitors as well as its Language Bank facilities, IVIS was called upon during the past year to assist on five major conferences on horticulture, social work, nephrology, electricity, and "Water for Peace."

The Foundation is convinced that this kind of citizen diplomacy can make an important difference in the impression our visitors from abroad take home with them of the United States, its citizens, and our way of life.

The fact should also be kept in mind that the millions of dollars spent here in the United States by our visitors from abroad have an important impact on this country's international trade balance. The U.S. Travel Service reports that during the past year more than a million visitors came to the United States from abroad—not including visitors from Canada and Mexico. Of these visitors from abroad, it is estimated that about one-quarter of them came to Washington. It should be pointed out, also, that foreign travel is on the upgrade, and each year shows a striking increase over the preceding one. Tourism has now become the third largest industry in the United States, and the U.S. Travel Service predicts that within the next 18 months, revenues from international tourism will pass the \$2 billion mark. These figures, of course, simply confirm the urgent necessity for a National Visitor Center in the Nation's Capital if we are to serve our visitors from abroad, as well as our own citizens, effectively.

We, therefore, heartily endorse the establishment of a National Visitor Center since we believe:

(1) There is a need for a central source of information about our Capital and our Nation. There is currently much information of this type, but it is scattered and often unavailable.

(2) There is a need for a reception center where the visitor can be welcomed. It is important that the visitor and his needs be recognized by the host city and Nation—whether it is American parents trying to give their children an educational opportunity, a family on holiday, or foreign businessman trying to promote trade, or a visitor interested in a place to stay.

(3) There is a need for introducing a visitor to our Nation's Capital and helping him to gain an appreciation of the Nation's heritage. It is our understanding that the National Visitor Center will have films and exhibits, lectures and displays about the history, the growth, and the development of the Nation's Capital, and the organization and operation of the Federal Government. This is extremely important since it will provide the visitor with the opportunity for a pleasant and informed tour, as well as an educational experience. This would complement the information offered by Congressmen to their constituents and would assist in giving visitors an understanding of our Governmental processes.

(4) There is a need for improved facilities for national and international conventions. A referral and information center staffed by experienced, multi-lingual assistants, which the National Visitor Center could provide, would attract more conferences.

As an expression of its support for the establishment of a National Visitor Center, the Board of Trustees of the Meridian House Foundation passed the following resolution:

Whereas, the Meridian House Foundation is a non-profit organization active in and dedicated to effective provision of services to sponsored and non-sponsored foreign visitors to the Greater Washington area; and

Whereas, the Meridian House Foundation has read with interest the proposal of the National Visitor Center Commission Site Selection Committee for the creation of a National Visitor Center at Union Station; and