



WITH RELIABLE BROADBAND NOW IN PLACE DUE TO THE TOWN'S EFFORTS IN THE EARLY 2000S, TRYON HAS SHIFTED ITS FOCUS TO TOURISM AND DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION, SHOWCASING ITS EQUESTRIAN COMMUNITY AND FINE ARTS SCENE.

The original study about Tryon highlighted the town's plan to build a fiber-optic cable network, providing residents and businesses with broadband Internet access. Broadband internet is now accessible throughout the town and although spotty in a few places, works consistently. With dependable wireless in place, the Town has focused on promoting tourism and revitalizing its downtown. Located in the escarpment of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Tryon is known for its equestrian community, outdoor activities, and fine arts. Tryon has a rich history in each of these areas with wine vineyards dating back to pre-prohibition era, numerous equestrian organizations and events, and several notable authors and artists calling the town home. Today, Tryon aims to highlight this rich history to promote tourism as well as attract full-time residents.¹

Network Accessibility

The area's leading non-profit provider of high-speed fiber optic internet service, PANGAEA Internet, has since grown the network to 343 miles in Polk and Rutherford counties, and now serves over 210 customers at more than 260 locations.² In 2015, PANGAEA Public Wi-Fi was installed in downtown Tryon during a successful pilot project; thanks to a grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission, PANGAEA Public Wi-Fi later expanded to other downtown business districts in Polk and surrounding counties, including Columbus, Saluda, Chimney Rock Village, and Lake Lure, as well as Tryon's Harmon Field in 2016.³ Service use continues to grow during the summer tourist season as the free public Wi-Fi network offers tourists "a convenient, reliable, and economical alternative to cellular data services."⁴

1 <https://tryon-nc.com/>

2 "History," PANGAEA, n.d., <http://www.e-polk.org/history/>

3 Todd Vineyard, "Getting the internet to everyone in WNC," July 14, 2016, <https://www.citizen-times.com/story/money/2016/07/14/getting-internet-everyone-wnc/87062346/>

4 Ron Walters, "PANGAEA Internet Free Public Wi-Fi Improving Quality of Life," PANGAEA, August 21, 2015, <https://www.e-polk.org/postings/pangaea-internet-free-public-wi-fi-improving-quality-of-life-2/>

Tourism

One of Tryon's most significant draws to the area is equine related. The Foothills Equestrian Nature Center (FENCE) is a nonprofit which provides programs, events, and volunteer opportunities focused on nature and equestrian activities. FENCE offers 384 acres of forest, wetland, and meadows including five miles of walking trails and an equestrian center which hosts events in all disciplines year round.⁵ Other equestrian events in the area include the Tryon Horse Show, which first started in 1929 and remains one of the oldest horse shows in the country. Numerous other equestrian organizations have also sprung up including Blue Ridge Hunter Jumper Association (BRHJA), the Tryon Hounds, the Foothills Riding Club, the Carolina Carriage Club, and Foothills Equestrian Trails Association (FETA.) According to Paige Henderson, Executive Director of the Tryon Downtown Development Association, these equestrian organizations attract tourists from all over, and have a significant economic impact on the town.⁶

In 2014, the \$100 million Tryon Resort opened in Polk County (around 13 miles from Tryon) which features an equestrian center and hotel. The Tryon International Equestrian Center (TIEC) hosted the 2018 World Equestrian Games to mixed success.⁷ As shown by the proliferation of organizations and facilities, the equestrian community attracts visitors and private investment to Tryon. Overall, according to Jim Edwards, president of PANGEA's board of directors, TIEC has provided "a tremendous opportunity to showcase Polk County as a wonderful place to live, operate a business and raise a family. It has also become one of the largest employers in our county."⁸

In addition to the equestrian community, Tryon has a number of organizations dedicated to the arts and a rich history. The Tryon Fine Arts Center offers music, drama, film and other cultural programs while the Tryon Arts and Craft School offers instruction and education in fiber arts, pottery, jewelry, and metalworking. The Tryon Little Theatre also holds classes, workshops and theatrical performances. Although these organizations primarily serve Polk County residents, they represent a significant cultural asset that could be promoted more widely. Tryon is also known as the birthplace of singer Nina Simone, whose home was designated a "National Treasure" by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 2018. Once the house is rehabilitated, it could become an artist residency program and tourism site, attracting visitors interested in Simone's legacy to Tryon.⁹ Given its cultural assets, Tryon has the potential to attract a "creative class" interested in living and working in a small town.

COVID-19

According to Paige Henderson, while the pandemic did put a damper on tourism, the town has been able to recover for the most part. The equestrian industry still draws significant numbers of visitors as horse shows are coming back. In addition to this, Tryon has other pandemic-safe tourism opportunities such as cycling: the town hosts several bike races throughout the year which bring people from all over the world. In August of 2021, the TIEC held a music festival with over 20,000 people, demonstrating that tourism is coming back strong post pandemic.¹⁰

5 <http://www.fence.org/>

6 Interview with Paige Henderson. November 16, 2021

7 Victor Mather, "Chaos at the World Equestrian Games," The New York Times, Sept, 17, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/17/sports/world-equestrian-games.html>

8 Jim Edwards, "How Tryon International Equestrian Center Puts Polk County in the Spotlight," NC Field and Family, May 25, 2017, <https://www.ncfieldfamily.org/travel/tryon-international-equestrian-center-puts-polk-county-spotlight/>

9 Andrew Chow, "Nina Simone's Home Gets 'National Treasure' Designation," The New York Times, June 18, 2018 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/18/arts/music/nina-simone-childhood-home-national-treasure.html>

10 Interview with Paige Henderson. November 16, 2021

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