



SUNDAY BUSINESS

SECTION B

Tourists look to gas cards

CANDICE CHOI
ASSOCIATED PRESS

FUEL PRICES TAKING bite out of budgets, and an imminent price decrease may be considering a gasoline rewards

cards typically let cardholders accumulate points in exchange for a gift card or receive discounts on purchases. The programs typically run from 3 to 5 percent of your gas-

oil. On any credit card, you'll see considerable differences, so be sure to read the fine print. It's time to go beyond the basics and check out savings, interest rates and rewards.

Before you sign up, investigate whether a general rewards card, which you already have, offers any benefits for fuel purchases. It's also a good idea to find at least one gas station that participates in a general rewards program.

Don't like toting around cards, sticking with a general rewards card may be the best bet. But the savings with a general rewards card may not be as high.

The advantage of gas-based cards is that you lock in a savings rate, said Doug Miller, analyst at Corporate Intelligence Market research and consulting firm.

Even if you rely on a general rewards card, the issuer may have the terms for fuel purchases in place other limitations when you can save. Gas.com offers a useful online tool for gasoline rewards and other types of credit

cards on the road a lot, a general rewards card is definitely worth considering. One benefit is that these cards are usually automatically added to your account, and a card is sent, Miller said. The frequent-flyer programs are where the trouble you might accumulate points, only to lose them before you can redeem them before they expire.

Be aware of potential traps to avoid, however. For example, make sure that you're not enticed by an introductory offer where the terms change after a set period. Some programs may give double the savings for the first few months.

Keep in mind that gas rewards programs typically don't offer a rebate on nongasoline purchases, often around 1 percent. These cards may not save as much with other

options is the universal rewards card. Universal Rewards cards let consumers reap



Many business owners who depend on tourist dollars said they have had experiences like that of David Powitz (above), owner of the Skipper Dipper (below), an ice cream shop in Long Beach Township, who said his summer was about as good as the one before it. (STAFF PHOTO: TIM MCCARTHY)

Sand dollars

Here is a look at the economic impact of tourism:

County	Tourism expenditure	'06-'07 growth
Atlantic	\$13.0 billion	5.7 percent
Cape May	\$5.1 billion	6.7 percent
Ocean	\$3.3 billion	3.6 percent
Essex	\$2.5 billion	6.1 percent
Monmouth	\$1.9 billion	2 percent

Source: Global Insight Inc.

STOCK OUTLOOK

Wall Street has new worries

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

THE STOCK MARKET HAS lurched back near its July lows — but Wall Street's woes are a bit different now.

In July, investors were vexed about record-high oil prices; since that time, crude has fallen nearly 28 percent. Back then, financial services companies were dragging down the broader market; over the past two months, the financial sector has outperformed the major stock indexes.

But with the employment picture deteriorating and uncertainty running high over the health of some key financial players, the market remains on shaky ground — as evidenced by the Dow Jones industrial average's 344-point drop last Thursday.

With data on retail sales, pending home sales, the trade deficit and wholesale inflation on tap this week, investors appear to be hoping for the best but bracing for the worst.

"Right now, the momentum seems to be more negative than positive," said Michael Materasso, senior vice president and co-chair of Franklin Templeton fixed-income policy committee.

The Dow finished last week 2.79 percent lower, even after rising modestly Friday despite a big jump in the unemployment rate. The Standard & Poor's 500 index ended the week down 3.16 percent, while the Nasdaq composite index dropped 4.72 percent.

Wall Street has been hesitant to make any long-term bets on stocks, not only because of the weak U.S. economy, but also because of the teetering global economy. On the surface, it's a positive that oil has fallen and that the dollar has rebounded. But investors know the reason for the shift is that other countries are following the United States into an economic slowdown.

"You're seeing a big shift in forecasts for global economic growth, and that's definitely having its impact on the markets," Materasso said.

If the United States beats other developing nations in rebounding from what many economists are calling a consumer recession, the U.S. stock market should benefit.

"The U.S. is first in; it's probably first out. That's what the dollar is reflecting," said Richard E. Cripps, chief market strategist for Stifel Nicolaus. "But the light at the end of that tunnel isn't here yet."

Good fortune

The Shore's tourism industry leaned on nearly perfect weather to salvage what could have been a disastrous season.



By **MICHAEL L. DIAMOND**
BUSINESS WRITER

Like most Shore-area merchants heading into the summer, Patty Whalen, the owner of Lucky Lady, a women's clothing and accessories store on the Seaside Heights boardwalk, scrambled to avoid a potential nightmare.

Gasoline prices were soaring and home values were plummeting, so Whalen aggressively offered discounts to her loyal customers. And she crossed her fingers, hoping the weather would cooperate.

In the end? "I was really happy with the summer," she said last week. "I know a lot of people thought it was going to be a horrible season with the gas prices and all, but when everything is said and done, I really didn't see a difference."

The Shore's tourism industry this year appears to have survived the economic storm. Business owners said they rebounded from a rough start, mainly because gasoline prices eased off their record highs and the weather offered nothing but sunny skies and mild temperatures.

It also provided a snapshot for the overall economy. Business owners said consumers held on more tightly to their wallets, but still managed to spend money on

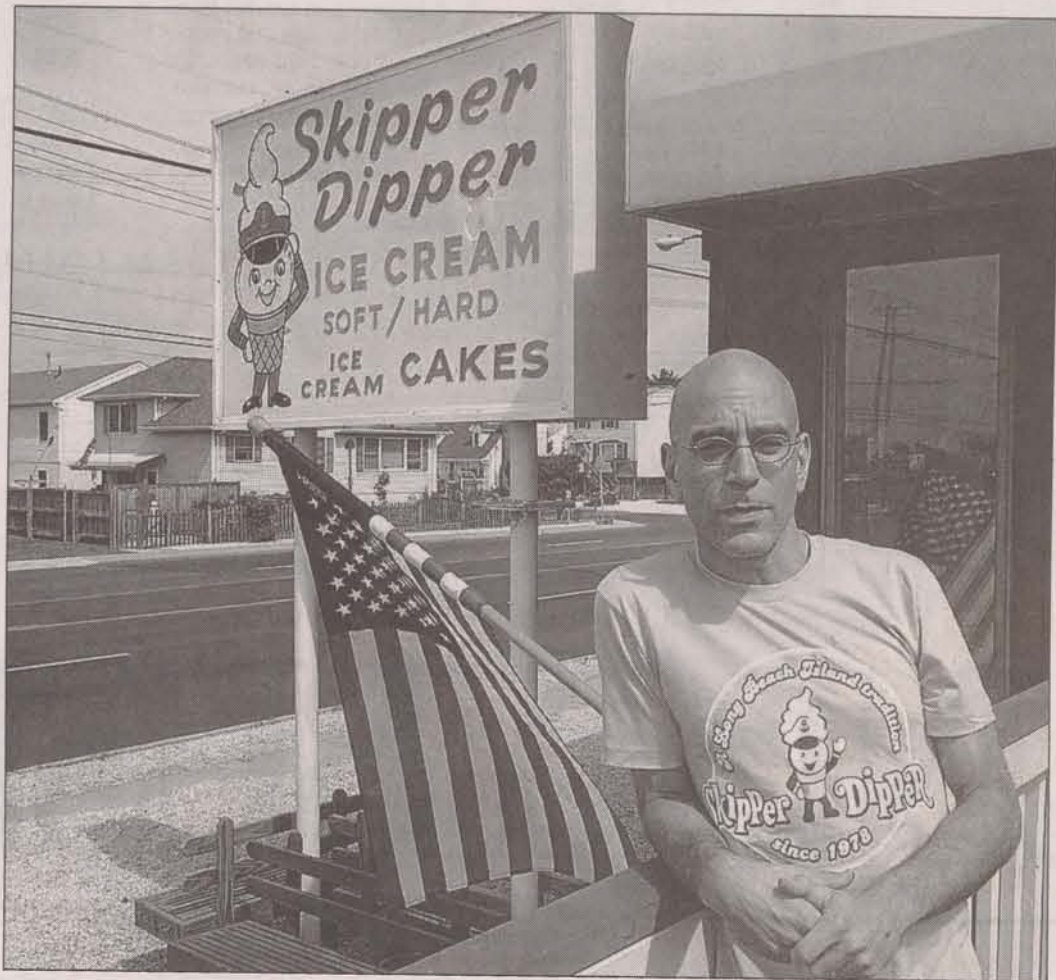
CARE TO COMMENT? Visit our web site at www.app.com/business and click on this story to discuss the summer tourism season.

See **Fortune**, Page B2

See **Worries**, Page B2

Tourists, Page B2

Nothing Like Having **>More Choices!**



David Powitz of Skipper Dipper said he was helped by tourists splurging on small purchases, such as the ice cream he sells in Long Beach Township. (STAFF PHOTO: TIM MCCARTHY)

Fortune

FROM PAGE B1

summertime staples, such as ice cream and fast food. It left business owners relieved, knowing they emerged relatively unscathed.

"The situation we were dealing with was a case where we had opposite forces at work when it came to the Jersey Shore," said Joel Naroff, an economist with Commerce Bancorp in Cherry Hill.

"In one sense, the high cost of gasoline probably caused a lot of people to think twice about just taking a quick run down to the Shore. On the other side, the high cost of gasoline and airline tickets probably caused an awful lot of people to decide that taking a trip somewhere (farther away) was way too expensive. So they vacationed closer by."

Early worries

Tourism generated \$5.2 billion in Monmouth and Ocean counties last year, according to Global Insight, an economic consulting firm. But experts worried that the faltering economy would make the Shore hard-pressed to match last year.

The biggest hurdle: Gasoline prices climbed sharply beginning April 1 and didn't stop until the average price in New Jersey reached \$4 a gallon on July 8, according to AAA's fuel gauge report.

Consumers were left with less money to spend on entertainment. They were reminded of the tough times every time they drove past a gasoline station advertising the escalating price. And they carefully watched the weather reports in search of a hint of rain that would cause them to reconsider.

"You kind of think twice about just taking a ride down," said Ken Bertosen, 48, of Staten Island, who was walking along the Belmar boardwalk on the Friday before Labor Day with his wife, Elaine, and their two sons, Ken, 13, and Chris, 11.

They said gasoline prices forced them to sharply cut back on their visits to the Shore this

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— Patty Whalen, owner of the Lucky Lady, Seaside Heights

summer. "With the price of gas, you really stop and think, do we need to drive down?" Elaine Bertosen, 44, said.

The summer could have been lost, but merchants caught a couple of breaks. Gasoline prices started to decline and now are down 13 percent from their peak. And the weather throughout the summer was picture perfect.

New Jersey's average temperature — an average of all the highs and lows — was 73.9 degrees this summer, 3 degrees above average. And the state received 9.49 inches of precipitation this summer, 3.35 inches below average, said David Robinson, the state climatologist at Rutgers University.

"What would the tourism folks want? They'd want warm and dry," Robinson said. "They got it this year."

Good results

It helped them at least come close to matching last year's figures. Jenkinson's Boardwalk in Point Pleasant Beach made up for a miserable June and July with a strong August, and it finished slightly behind last year, spokeswoman Marilou Halvorsen said.

Avon Manor Inn, a bed-and-breakfast in Avon, managed to stay near capacity, even though the total number of inquiries seemed to decline, owner Greg Dietrich said.

Skipper Dipper, an ice cream shop in Long Beach Township, matched last year's totals, owner David Powitz said.

"Gossip around (Long Beach Island) was that it was an off summer for a lot of people," Powitz said. "But people were splurging on little things. We held pretty steady to last year,

and last year was a good summer."

Beach badges

Other measures of tourism activity told a similarly uneven story: In Belmar, daily beach badge revenue declined from \$2.2 million in 2007 to \$2.1 million in 2008, or about 5 percent. In Seaside Heights, daily beach badge revenue rose from \$1.06 million to \$1.08 million, or 2.5 percent.

"June was up, July was down and August saved us," Seaside Heights Municipal Clerk Diane Stabley said. "It was beautiful every day."

Still, the summer showed that consumers have a limit. Visitors, for example, seemed to cut back on playing games of chance on the boardwalk, said Steve Whalen, owner of Lucky Leo's Arcade in Seaside Heights.

More expensive outings also might have suffered. Tenacious Sport Fishing, a charter fishing boat in Brick, saw its \$3,200 overnight trips to catch tuna remain steady. But its \$830 day trips to catch bluefish declined, owner Martin Bernard Roth said.

"Tuna fishermen are hardcore fishermen," Roth said. "They'll spend the extra few dollars to do it every year. Some of my customers I take bluefishing, a lot of those people have never done it before. They're going out for the first time."

"Now when it comes time for a guy and his family to spend \$830 to go out fishing, they'd probably rather pay for groceries or the heating bill."

When visitors did make it to the Shore, they seemed to stick to the summertime basics — ice cream, hamburgers, an amusement park ride or two.

Which was just fine with the owners of the Beach Cafe in Point Pleasant Beach, whose breakfast and lunch items typically cost less than \$10. It had one of its best summers in the eight years it's been in business, co-owner Kerrilee Hank said.

"We were a little nervous, but it worked out," she said.

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