

## **Assessment of the Short-Term Impact of the Antietam Watershed Association Placemats**

### **Background**

This report discusses the short-term impact on restaurant patrons of the Antietam Watershed Association (AWA) placemats. These educational placemats were sponsored by The League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania Citizen Education Fund, through a Section 319 Federal Clean Water Act grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. The placemats included a map of the Antietam Creek watershed, factual information about the watershed, the name of the Antietam Watershed Association and other basic information about the organization, and the name of each sponsoring organization as listed above.

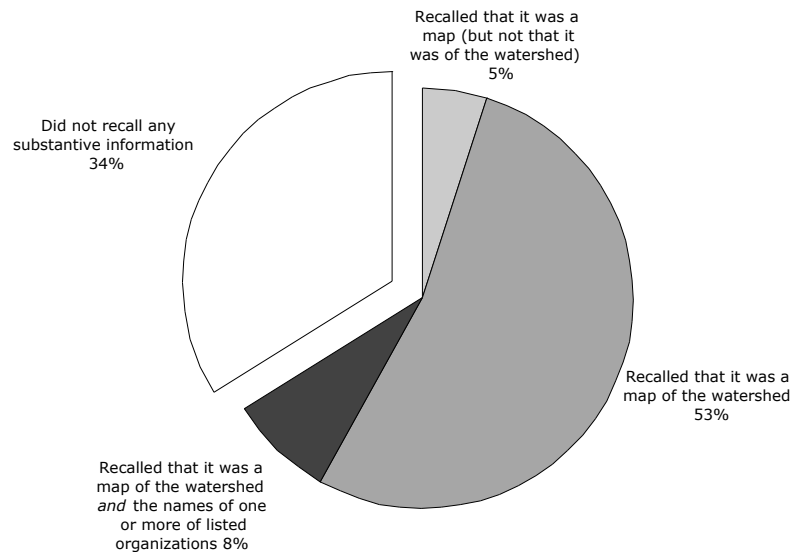
The purpose of the AWA placemats was to increase public awareness of the Antietam Creek Watershed, in support of AWA's mission to "promote conservation of the natural resources of the Antietam Creek Watershed by involving the community in watershed protection through conservation projects, land use planning, and educational projects."

The research summarized in this report was conducted by Bea Boccalandro, President of VeraWorks, Inc., in May 2004. It consisted of interviews of patrons as they exited restaurants using the placemats. Each of the five restaurants using the placemats were contacted to participate in this research by Pat Keefer, a member of the AWA Board of Directors. One restaurant chose not to participate, and two did not respond in time to participate. All respondents were patrons of the Parlor House and Velvet Café. Eighty-seven randomly selected individuals at these two restaurants were invited to participate. Three chose not to participate, resulting in a total of 84 respondents and a response rate of 97 percent. The margin of error of the percentages presented in this report is plus or minus 11 percent.

### **Short Term Impact**

Two-thirds (66%) of survey respondents exiting the restaurants recalled substantive information from the placemat, and 61 percent recalled information about the watershed. It is not possible to calculate the total number of individuals affected by the placemats (even knowing the number of placemats distributed), because the same individual can use multiple placemats if they visit the restaurants distributing the placemats more than once. However, the degree of recall for the AWA placemats is consistent with research on placemat advertisement. According to Newsweek Media Magazine, 76 percent of readers claim to remember advertising on menus or placemats.<sup>i</sup>

**Figure 1. Restaurant Patron Recall About the AWA Placemats**



n=84

## Strengths

Placemat advertising has many intrinsic strengths, including access to a captive audience, multiple exposure for frequent restaurant patrons, and few competing messages. AWA placemats, specifically, appeared to have the following additional strengths:

- **Illustration.** As shown in Figure 1, every respondent who recalled any placemat information recalled the map. The map was clearly a striking and memorable feature of the placemats. This finding is consistent with research. A Starch Communications study for the Newspaper Association of America found that when three-quarters of ad space was devoted to illustrations, recall improved by 50 percent.<sup>ii</sup>
- **Resonance.** With the exception of one respondent who said that parts of the map were inaccurate, no one suggested anything negative about the placemats when asked what they thought of restaurants using them. To the contrary, respondents expressed appreciation for the placemat message. Comments included the following: “I think it’s cool to educate...it’s probably information we should know,” “I think it’s good. People don’t think about where their water comes from,” and “It gives me something

to do while I'm waiting." A couple of respondents commented on the attractiveness of the AWA logo.

- **Factual Information.** Seventeen percent of respondents reported learning something from the placemat, such as the total acreage of the watershed, that Antietam Creek had two branches, or the location of certain features. As one respondent said, "I never paid attention to anything like this [the watershed], so it was all new [knowledge]."
- **Dialogue Facilitation.** Sixteen percent of respondents reported that the placemats sparked conversation at their table. Creating dialogue around the watershed is a mechanism for furthering AWA's mission.

### **Possible Areas for Improvement**

These potential areas for improvement of the AWA placemats emerged from the research:

- **Hook.** The AWA placemats did not present any benefits to readers. Research indicates that ads grab and hold a prospect's attention by immediately communicating an answer to the unspoken question, "What's in it for me?" Philip W. Sawyer, director of Starch Communications, says that features aren't memorable—benefits are: "If you have a headline that states a benefit, people will read it, remember it and clip it out of the magazine or newspaper and hold onto it. And that's the trump card for everything."<sup>iii</sup> It appears that the placemats provided information but did not "hook" readers. Not one respondent asked for more information about AWA.
- **Action.** Under most marketing theories, increased knowledge or awareness is a first step to eliciting a change in behavior. As covered above, the placemats lead to conversation in some readers. A next step might be to advertise in a way that produces further desired action—for example, get readers to come to an AWA meeting, stop dumping trash in the woods, or conserve water. Despite the gains in knowledge and awareness, not a single respondent expressed the intention to take any action prompted by the placemats.
- **Readability.** A number of respondents, especially senior citizens, were not able to capture the information presented on the placemats because they found them difficult to read. One respondent said, "It was a map, but I don't know of what. I didn't bring my glasses." It might be advisable to use larger print and otherwise make the placemats more readable.

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<sup>i</sup> From [http://www.growads.com/placemat\\_advertising.htm](http://www.growads.com/placemat_advertising.htm), May 27, 2004.

<sup>ii</sup> From <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/0,4621,311562,00.html>, May 28, 2004.

<sup>iii</sup> From <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/0,4621,311562,00.html>, May 28, 2004.