

## **TDC MEETING MINUTES, APRIL 4, 2008**

Commissioner Judah called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

Council Members in attendance were: Commissioner Judah, Fran Myers, Dolores Bertolini, Pamela Cronin, Martha Simons, Colleen DePasquale, Roxie Smith, René Affourtit, and Tony Lapi. Robert Wells III asked to be excused.

- ➔ Dolores Bertolini made a motion, seconded by René Affourtit to approve TDC Meeting Minutes of March 14, 2008. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Davenport recognized past VCB staff member, Diane Short who is retiring from the Bureau after 15 years of service. Suya stated that Ms. Short is a very special person; no matter how many trade partners moved in or out of our destination, Diane always kept in touch with them. Suya Davenport invited Pamela Johnson to say a few words; Ms. Johnson advised that Ms. Short is a valued member of the Visitor & Convention Bureau and presented her with a book that told of Diane's professional life at the Bureau through photographs of her with numerous tourism partners from all over the world. Diane received a standing ovation as she stated that her career at the Bureau had been an amazing journey and that she was happy to have been able to promote this destination all over the world.

Commissioner Judah thanked staff for its conservation efforts by not using plastic water bottles any longer.

### **Public to be Heard**

- ➔ Betsy Clayton provided a brief update concerning the Great Calusa Blueway; she advised that promotion has already started although the event is not scheduled until October 2008.
- ➔ Dominick Soricelli, Director of the Hampton Inn and Suites, informed Council that another hotel will open within 15 to 20 months along the Pine Island Corridor. Mr. Soricelli stated that he would like to firm up his relationship with the Tourist Development Council and participate in TDC promotional activities.
- ➔ Chris Pendleton, Edison & Ford Winter Estates reported that the Black Maria Film Festival will start next weekend; she circulated some flyers and invited all to attend the event.
- ➔ Ric Base, Sanibel Chamber of Commerce advised that visitation at the Chamber's information center has increased by 25% over last year; he added that such high numbers have not been recorded since 1999 or 2000. Mr. Base also informed Council that TDC Member René Affourtit was presented with the Sanibel Chamber 'Businessman of the year' Award.
- ➔ John Albion, Fort Myers Beach President reported that the Chamber's front lobby's work is completed and that staff has moved in; he invited all to visit the Chamber. An invite to the Grand Opening is forthcoming.
- ➔ Scott Janke introduced himself to Council as the new Fort Myers Beach Town Manager.

### **Municipalities to be Heard**

➔ Judie Zimomra, Sanibel City manager advised that she would like to endorse the concept of a strategy for changing the marketing plan. She also discussed the fact that TDC will soon review Beach & Shoreline funding requests that are worth more than available funding; Ms. Zimomra stated that she is not questioning the validity of the State of Florida's request, but she wonders about the wisdom of funding non-local requests when there is not sufficient fund for local requests. Commissioner Judah recognized the issue at hand; however, he stated that the situation has always been so.

Ms. Davenport advised that a workshop for TDC members will be held during May to discuss DPA and STR reports; the workshop will address the nuts and bolts of the research surveys and the STR reports. In addition, a similar workshop will be held the same afternoon for industry partners.

Ms. Zimomra urged Council to include Airport statistical information in the presentation, to gather information regarding the number of new hotels coming on line and how these new hotels will be promoted.

Ms. Davenport stated that instead of the regular first Wednesday of the month VCB marketing meeting, staff will conduct a U.K. Forum in April. Jo Piani, the Bureau's U.K, Ireland & Scandinavia representative and Gary Orr, Atlantic Holidays will provide an update of the British market. Suya advised that Airport staff has been invited to be part of the panel and will participate in the discussions.

Judie also stated that realtors are adjusting their plan as the area is seeing an interest from Eastern European countries. René Affourtit inquired if BVK will participate in the workshop to which Suya responded by the affirmative.

➔ Scott Janke, Town of Fort Myers Beach invited Theresa Schober to say a few words about Mound House activities. Ms. Schober reported that Mound House has been restored and will open as a museum next March. The pool project may be delayed due to a lack of fund.

➔ Martha Simons reported that the Inn at the Springs in Bonita Springs has received its 'Green' denomination. Ms. Simons invited all to attend tomorrow's 'Celebrate Bonita Springs' event where there will be concerts, foods and fund raised will go towards charity.

### **Director's Report**

⇒ Suya Davenport reported that bed tax collections for the month of February 2008 was up by 3%, from \$2,940,762 in February 2007 to \$3,096,914 this year.

⇒ The February STR report shows occupancy in Lee County down by 5.2%, the average daily rate at \$167.44 this year versus \$165.22 last year, a 1.3% increase and RevPAR declined by 3.8%. Year to date occupancy was down by 4.9%, ADR was stable at a 0.9% increase and RevPAR was down by 4.1%.

Ms. Davenport advised that despite the downward trend, Lee County did better than Florida's overall figures. Suya advised that the luxury segment continues to do well and that international travelers can afford the luxury hotels due to a low dollar; she stated that mid level properties seem to be vanishing. Sales staff will develop a strategy to focus on business travel.

Ms. DePasquale advised that 75% of the Hilton Inn & Garden business used to be during midweek and that now the property is struggling during midweek too. She observed that there may be an opportunity during the upcoming TDC workshop to discuss a plan to generate business and she added that she would not be surprised if other hoteliers request the same thing.

- ⇒ During the month of February 846,000 passengers traveled through the airport, a 0.5% increase compared to last February.
- ⇒ The Administration Activity Report is included for Council's review.

Suya Davenport shared recent information that 10% of the people surveyed stated that they will spend their tax rebate on travel; as airlines are raising airfares and adding additional fees to offset fuel costs, staff is monitoring these factors and is focusing on international travel to offset sluggish domestic travel.

### **Sales Report**

Pamela Johnson summarized the March Sales activity report; she reported that staff attended consumer shows in Indiana, Arizona, New-York, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Missouri, Ohio and Milwaukee. Ms. Johnson advised that consumers stated that they expect to travel this summer, but will stay closer to home. In the meeting professionals' area, some associations are experiencing cut backs and plan to reduce the number of meetings. Requests for green lodgings continue to rise. 1,884 room nights might be generated in 2008 and 2009 through staff sales activities; in addition, staff assisted with the booking of 800 room nights for Sanibel Harbour.

### **Communications Report**

Lee Rose presented the March Communications Report. Mr. Rose highlighted the recent partnership with the Boston CVB, the Boston Red Sox and a joint promotional travel to Japan; he stated that this promotion has created a lot of interest in the media. Lee presented a WINK program video that reported that staff went to Japan to promote the destination with the ultimate goal of fueling tourism from Japan to Southwest Florida. Mr. Rose reported that as an immediate result, two journalists booked a trip to our area: The Kyoto News, which is equivalent to the Associated Press in the U.S. and a free lance journalist interested in fishing and the environment. Lee thanked all the partners who assisted with their visit: Colleen DePasquale, Hilton Garden Inn, Chris Pendleton, Edison & Ford Winter Estates and Betsy Clayton, Parks & Recreation. Ms. Clayton provided an update of her kayak outing with the journalists and Ms. Davenport reported that we partnered with the Boston CVB to hold two receptions for journalists and tour operators in Tokyo.

The delegation, Commissioner Hall, Jeff Mielke and Suya Davenport also conducted appointments during their visit to Japan; Suya advised that as Jeff Mielke described the history of sports in our area, one tour operator has shown interest to bring a team to our region to play in the Roy Hobbs series. Also, a commitment was received from an airline for eight to ten complimentary seats to bring trade professionals to our area this fall, in order to educate them about our destination. Finally, Suya Davenport advised that we are currently well represented in several travel guides; she concluded by stating that the excitement about baseball in Japan is incredible.

Fran Myers praised Commissioner Judah for his foresight to send representatives on this promotional trip as the return on our investment will be positive. Ms. Simons inquired if there is a pool of translators or interpreters in the area to assist with the Japanese effort to which Ms. Davenport responded by the affirmative.

### **Visitor Services**

Judi Durant presented the March Visitor Services report. Ms. Durant advised that inquiries at the airport continue to be high and that currently the volunteers have working shifts from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.; Judi reminded Council of the Annual Appreciation Luncheon to be held on April 9 at Harborside. Mike Fischer informed Council about the E-Award program.

### **Beach & Shoreline**

Tamara Pigott presented the March Beach & Shoreline report. Ms. Pigott reported that she attended a green lodging ceremony in Bonita Springs and that she hoped that this is a trend of properties applying for the green lodging certification. Tam advised that she will attend a documentary "Guardian of the Gulf" next week at the Sarasota Film Festival. She reminded Council that the Beach & Shoreline Workshop is scheduled for April 23 in the afternoon; Tam advised that she will forward a draft of the Coastal Advisory Council's Minutes and miscellaneous documents to TDC Members via Email. Finally, she informed Council that John Fumero will present a report at the June TDC Meeting.

Ms. Myers requested an update concerning the status of funding regulations changes as they relate to beach renourishment; Ms. Pigott advised that there is no news yet; however, a funding cut is probable. Steve Boutelle added that the State of Florida does not have sufficient dollars to fund all the projects and that some of them will have to wait to receive funding – six of these projects are in Lee County. Ms. Simons inquired about the status of the fertilizer issue; Tam stated that Lee County is drafting some language; there is support but also reasons for concerns.

### **Sports Authority**

Jeff Mielke presented the March report. Mr. Mielke reported that 10,000 room nights were generated during the combined months of January and February with an economic impact of \$2.1 million. He advised that Sports Authority is doing everything possible to generate room nights for inland properties when they need the occupancy. Jeff stated that sports families may have problems due to the price of gasoline. In regards to the Japan trip, Jeff reported that the 50-year-old segment of Japanese travelers is interested in the Roy Hobbs games.

There is a lot of interest from Japanese tour operators for high-end soccer and they bring a lot of students and children. Jeff added that spending quite a bit of time with the Boston Red Sox during the trip allowed the delegation to strengthen its relationship with the team. There was an inquiry as to why Fantasy Camp could not be extended to five or six weeks instead of the usual one week, as they are confident that they can fill four to five weeks.

Finally, Mr. Mielke advised that a soccer event scheduled for August on Fort Myers Beach is facing some challenges as the Town's Fire department is requesting \$2,500 to have an ambulance available. Jeff stated that this event will be in jeopardy if this issue is not resolved. Ms. Fraser, Deputy County Attorney advised Mr. Mielke to use Lee County EMS to assist. Commissioner Judah expressed his appreciation and thanked Jeff for representing us well in Japan.

Commissioner Judah invited Robert Ball, Executive Director, Southwest Florida International (RSW) to comment on the airport status. Mr. Ball advised that traffic at the airport is flat; however, revenue is positive; three airlines are in bankruptcy and the trend will continue; fuel cost has increased by 157%, there is a worldwide reduction in seat capacity and the airlines are in depression as they are unable to pay for jet fuel. Bob encouraged Council to use available marketing dollars to promote the destination; although the next season does not look great, on a positive note Mr. Ball stated that Air Berlin will have three weekly flights with connecting flights to numerous European cities. He concluded by stating that the airport numbers are stable and that staff will go after U.K. air service as well as air service to Puerto Rico.

## **CONSULTANTS' REPORTS**

### **ADVERTISING REPORT**

⇒ Mary DeLong, BVK presented the February 2008 Advertising report. Ms. DeLong advised that the push into the Japanese market is not a one-time effort; she stated that Suya has created a strong relationship with the Boston CVB and a partnership to work with Japanese tour operators and to expand this partnership into other markets.

During a PowerPoint presentation, Mary reported that during the month of February Web traffic was up by 21% compared to February 2007; visitor guide requests increased by 92% and opt-ins increased by almost 100%. A new 'Order a guide book' graphic has been added to our Web site to allow visitors to order brochures online. A new Newsletter was deployed in March and in April. A new international SEO campaign will be implemented in order to take advantage of the currency rate in the international market, a consumer program will be launched to optimize our international sites.

### **RESEARCH REPORT**

⇒ Nicole Devine, Davidson Peterson Associates (DPA) presented the February Visitor Profile report. The destination hosted over 470,000 visitors; occupancy for the month was at 76%, the Average Daily Rate (ADR) at \$175.48 and the total economic impact was \$320 million. Ms. Devine reviewed the revised October and November 2007 reports based on an updated lodging inventory.

### **Old Business**

At the March TDC Meeting, Rene Melville requested assistance with hanging banners in Lee County. The issue was brought to the County Attorney's office to determine "whether the tourist development tax revenues may be used to hang banners and/or signs to the River District". The Deputy County Attorney's opinion is that Lee County as well as other municipalities sign ordinances must be resolved prior to the determination of funding. Commissioner Judah stated that the best approach is to set an exploratory committee to explore ways to fund banners; he directed Ms. Davenport to assign staff to work with the group and Suya acquiesced. There were no objections from Council.

### **New Business**

Cape Coral officials, Mike Jackson, Economic development and Steve Pohlman, Park & Recreation reported several new initiatives to promote tourism in the City. The Cape Coral representatives stated that they are not requesting anything from Council other than to collaborate on joint tourism endeavors. Cape Coral Councilwoman Bertolini advised that the City is offering a hand to cooperate with what Council is already doing. Commissioner Judah stated that Staff could take this a step further and Ms. Davenport agreed.

### **For Council Information**

Ms. Davenport circulated an Action Plan for the German market based on Commissioner Judah's request. Suya advised that we have looked at different things in collaboration with Visit Florida; she stated that PR has greater value than advertising and because of currency exchange we continue to cooperate with partners. An Air Berlin Fam is in the making and the Airport agreed to share cost.

Suya Davenport reported on the year long Value of Tourism program that will kickoff at our Annual Tourism Breakfast in May. We will get the word out about the value of tourism by using the airport Tourism Ambassadors and the entire team including TDC to reach out to the community.

In regards to Simpleview, Suya stated that staff found funds to implement the program; she stated that it will be a valuable tool for staff to track leads sent to our hotel partners and their responses to the leads, that the Web based database will be combined and shared with our international and Washington offices and integrate the Bureau's efforts. Although the price tag comes under \$50,000, it will be presented to the BOCC for approval as additional maintenance costs are anticipated.

- ➔ Roxie Smith made a motion, seconded by Martha Simons to approve the purchase of the Simpleview program. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Simons recommended that staff send the Value of Tourism program to all municipalities; Suya advised that when staff reaches out, a full presentation will be made.

Finally, Ms. Davenport reminded Council of a few important dates: The U.K. Forum is scheduled at 9 a.m. on April 23; the Beach & Shoreline Workshop is scheduled for 1:30 p.m. on April 23; the Annual Tourism Breakfast is scheduled for 8 a.m. on May 2 at Harborside; the Annual Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon is scheduled for April 9, 2008 and Diane Short retirement reception is scheduled at 5 p.m. today at Sanibel Harbour & Spa.

#### **TDC Member Items**

- Fran Myers circulated the Airport's News & Notes and commented that Bob Ball was realistic in his assessment of the situation at the airport.
- Pamela Cronin invited everyone to a 'Roast' for Sheriff Mike Scott.
- Dolores Bertolini invited everyone to the 'Relay for Life Cancer Week' tonight starting at 5 p.m.
- Tony Lapi reported that he participated in a Visit Florida conference call regarding VF's budget; the lack of funding could impact activities in domestic and international markets. Mr. Lapi indicated his concern and stated that Visit Florida will have more information during the first week of May.

**NOTE: Due to technical difficulties, this meeting was not recorded and a tape is not available. As usual, the Minutes will be posted on: [www.leevcb.com](http://www.leevcb.com)**

**All reports are included with the Minutes and are on file at the Visitor & Convention Bureau and at the Lee County Minutes Department.**

The next Tourist Development Council meeting is scheduled for May 2, 2008 at Harborside Events Center, immediately following the Annual Tourism Breakfast.

The meeting adjourned at 12:05 p.m.