

TDC MEETING MINUTES, June 6, 2008

Commissioner Judah called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

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

- ➔ René Affourtit made a motion, seconded by Roxie Smith to approve TDC Meeting Minutes of May 2, 2008. The motion passed unanimously.

Public to be Heard

➔ Steve Tutko addressed Council in support of the Randell Research Center Board's funding request. Mr. Tutko stated that echo tourism is very important to the County, that the Calusa Blueway at Pine Island is an ecosystem that has a great impact on the entire destination and he urged Council to support the Randell Research Center's request.

➔ Jack Carver, RV Travel Association, informed Council that RV rentals is quite a large business in Florida and he invited TDC Members to participate in the RV Association's efforts, as this is a critical audience that has been overlooked for too long.

➔ John Kiseda, Parks & Recreation spoke to Council in support of echo tourism; he also advised that he has a flyer regarding the Calusa Blueway ongoing events, between October 25 and November 2, 2008.

Municipalities to be Heard

➔ None

Director's Report

- ⇒ Suya Davenport reported that \$ 2,161,414 was collected in bed tax for the month of April 2008, a decrease of 5.4% versus April 2007. The shortfall may be attributed to an early Easter.
- ⇒ The April STR report shows occupancy in Lee County at 62.8%, a decreased of 6.1%, the average daily rate was at \$152.62 versus \$155.95 last April, which represents a 2.1% decrease and RevPAR declined by 8.1%. Ms. Davenport stated that although we experienced a decrease during April, other Florida Counties suffered larger decreases.
- ⇒ 834,689 passengers traveled through the airport during the month of April vs. 924,919 in April 2007, which represents a 9.8% decrease.
- ⇒ The Administration Activity Report is included for Council's review.

Suya Davenport informed Council that she just returned from Pow Wow in Las Vegas and that Bureau staff had a solidly booked calendar and great meetings. She advised that operators from international markets such as Germany, the U.K. and The Netherlands have reported increased bookings for this summer. Suya introduced Jo Piani, the Bureau's U.K., Ireland and Scandinavia representative to TDC members who did not have an opportunity to meet her during the recent U.K. Forum in Fort Myers.

⇒ **Sales Report**

Pamela Johnson presented the May 2008 Sales Activity report. She advised that Pow Wow was a good event, that staff had great appointments with representatives from major international markets as well as with representatives from Central European countries and South America. Ms. Johnson advised that an expanded U.K. and German reports are included for Council's review; these reports provide good information regarding contractors' efforts in these markets.

⇒ **Communications Report**

Lee Rose presented the May Communications report; he stated that staff assisted 147 journalists who are developing editorial coverage, promoted the destination at a Visit Florida Luncheon in New York and hosted 38 publishers, editors and writers for the AAA Home & Away publication at the Edison & Ford Winter estates. Mr. Rose thanked Chris Pendleton and Lisa Sbuttoni for their hard work to make this event a success. Lee then introduced colleague, Rosamé Piret who provided Council with a recap of the Bureau's efforts in the French media market. She stated that we have made in-roads in the French Market by reaching all types of media: national radio, cable TV & national TV, as well as trade publications & consumer magazines, and French travel Web sites. Ms. Piret offered examples of the radio and TV programs that were aired in France and French speaking countries throughout Europe and occasionally all over the world. She also spoke about articles written in trade and consumer French press; she stated that the Bureau garnered almost \$500,000 as a result of last years' media trip to France, with such prestigious magazines as Le Figaro Magazine, Monsieur Magazine and Voyages de Pêche. Rosamé concluded her report by stating that VCB's media success can be directly attributed to the Bureau's strong commitment to this market.

⇒ **Visitor services report**

Ms. Durant presented the department's activity report for May and stated that although visitors' numbers are low, the airport continues to be busy. Judi thanked some key partners for hosting our volunteers: Sea Rocket USA, Six Mile Cypress Slough, the Courtyard by Marriott at Gulf Coast Center. Finally Judi reported on some activities in the Tourism Education area: Guests First workshops, working on outreach with taxi drivers and attending the Airport's Hurricane Symposium. Ms. Durant concluded her report by stating that there was a great article written about our volunteers in the Fort Myers Sand newspaper.

⇒ **Beach & Shoreline Report**

Tamara Pigott reported that she is interviewing candidates interested in the currently vacant VCB Beach & Shoreline position and that perhaps by September someone else will be presenting this report to Council. Ms. Pigott added that this \$6 million program is important and that it will be good to have someone to be the liaison with Council. Tam also advised that Mr. Neal is in the audience should there be questions concerning funding allocation for the Blind Pass project. Finally, Ms. Pigott announced the sad news that Allison Hagerup, Captiva Erosion Prevention passed away; she worked with several associations and was a leader in beach renourishment.

⇒ **Sports Authority Report**

Jeff Mielke informed Council that the YBOA Girls State Basketball tournament was very successful; the event was held over the Memorial Day weekend and was sold out when typically it is a quiet weekend. Mr. Mielke reported that 3,000 room nights were generated in April, translating to \$3 million in economic impact.

- ➔ Chairman, Commissioner Ray Judah advised that the consultants' reports will be presented after 'New Business'.

Old Business

None

New Business

a) Chris Pendleton, Edison & Ford Winter Estates, reported that two Board members will be serving on the Estates Board of trustees: Commissioner Tammy Hall, BOCC and Colleen DePasquale, TDC Member. Along with Lisa Sbuttoni, Ms. Pendleton made the annual funding request in the amount of \$49,995 under the Attractions Marketing program for fiscal year 2008/2009. She stated that the overall program is almost \$1 million. Chris offered thanks to all partners and announced that a new initiative will include keeping the Estates open during the whole month of February to celebrate the Edison Festival. Also, the Red Sox open nights will be in March with great packaging with the Red Sox to encourage visitation after the games.

- ➔ René Affourtit made a motion, seconded by Pamela Cronin to approve the Edison & Ford Winter estates' funding request and marketing plan for FY08/09 under the Attractions Marketing Program. The motion passed unanimously.

b) In the absence of Rose Rundle, Harborside Event Center, Rhonda Dechert presented the annual funding request in the amount of \$49,993 under the Attractions Marketing program for fiscal year 2008/2009. Rhonda thanked Council for its support and staff for holding several events at Harborside.

- ➔ Pam Cronin made a motion, seconded by Roxie Smith to approve Harborside Event Center's funding request and marketing plan for FY08/09 under the Attractions marketing Program. The motion passed unanimously.

c) Will Prather, on behalf of the Southwest Florida Attractions Foundation, reported that last year the Foundation received funding requests from 41 organizations under the Attractions Marketing program and distributed \$816,000. The TDC share was \$225,000. Mr. Prather advised that this program's criteria are thorough, with talented Board members such as Pamela Cronin, Scott Siler, Stuart Brown and him. He stated that the funds' gatekeeper is the SWF Attractions Foundation and that funding recipients must submit a report. Will made a request for \$225,000 under the Attractions Marketing program for fiscal year 2008/2009.

- ➔ Martha Simons made a motion, seconded by Rob Wells to approve the SWF Attractions Foundation's funding request. The motion passed unanimously.

d) Elaine McLaughlin and Bill Marquardt made a funding request in the amount of \$43,722 to restore the Gill House on Pineland; it houses the Randell Research Center offices. The House would be open to visitors and media. The Randell Research Center has already received \$85,538 from private donations; \$79,880 from the University of Florida, \$40,435 from Lee County Historic Preservation; however, the organization is still in need of \$42,722.

- ➔ Rob Wells made a motion, seconded by Martha Simons to approve Randell Research Center's funding request.

A discussion ensued regarding TDC's funding source and funding available in reserves. Commissioner Judah stated that this is no doubt the type of partnership that should be considered, with private and public sectors coming together on a project. With no further discussions, the motion passed unanimously. Ms. McLaughlin invited all to visit the Center in Pineland.

e) John Fumero, LLW provided an update regarding TDC's Water Resource Initiative. Mr. Fumero stated that for the upcoming year, the priorities of this program will be to continue to work with the Corps of Engineers to reduce discharges from Lake Okeechobee into the Caloosahatchee River; to add a water quality treatment component to the C-43 West Basin Storage Reservoir; to create a Water Quality Treatment Area (BOMA), and to implement the Northern Everglades Estuary Protection Act.

f) Pamela Cronin, Chairperson, TDC Events Marketing subcommittee presented a funding recommendation to Council for FY2008/2009. Ms. Cronin advised that Roxie Smith, René Affourtit and Colleen DePasquale are on the subcommittee and that after reviewing all the applications, the full \$200,000 available to this program annually has been tentatively allocated.

- ➔ René Affourtit made a motion, seconded by Roxie Smith to approve \$200,000 for the Events Marketing Program for Fiscal year 2008/2009. The motion passed unanimously.

g) Donna Harn, Clerk of Courts Director of Finance & Records made a request for \$75,000 to purchase software that would provide better interface with Internal Audit: bed tax could be paid online and reports would be available sooner. Ms. Simons inquired if the funding could come from Clerk of Courts reserves and Mr. Wells had concerns about taking \$75,000 from hoteliers' marketing efforts in a downturn economy. Mr. Affourtit speculated about the legal use of the bed tax funds to purchase computer software for Clerk of Courts; he inquired if the software could not be purchased from the 3% fee or approximately \$600,000 TDC pays Clerk of Courts annually, to enforce bed tax collections. Asked if there was any left over from this fund, Ms. Harn responded that there is a left over each year and that it is returned to the County general funds. Ms. DePasquale stated that this may not be a legal use of the bed tax dollars and Ms. Cronin speculated that the 3% fee might need to be re-evaluated. Ms. Smith suggested that the software expenditure should come from the 3% fee rather than from the marketing budget.

- ➔ Martha Simons made a motion, seconded by Roxie Smith to table this request until the July TDC meeting, and for Charlie Green to provide Council with an analysis of how much bed tax dollars have been turned over to the Board of County Commissioners' reserves annually. The motion passed unanimously.

CONSULTANTS' REPORTS

ADVERTISING REPORT

⇒ Victoria Simons presented the April 2008 advertising report. Ms. Simons reported that during the first Quarter Web activities went up by 13%, pageviews by 95.6% and that requests for planning material went up by 51%. She reviewed some media watch activities and Mr. Affourtit inquired if we were not stopping too early in July to which Ms. Simons responded that the AAU study done last year, indicate that people were planning further ahead than anticipated. Victoria reminded Council that a Marketing-Media Workshop will be held on July 16 and that Pete Winniger will come early in order to provide an update on our Coop.

RESEARCH REPORT

⇒ Nicole Devine, Davidson Peterson Associates (DPA) presented the April 2008 Visitor Profile report. During the reporting month, the destination hosted 218,441 visitors in paid accommodations. Ms. Devine advised that occupancy was at 60.3%, Average Daily Rate (ADR) at \$150.24, which was down from last April but normal for an early Easter, and that the total economic impact was almost \$277 million.

For Council Information

Ms. Davenport informed Council that:

- A letter addressed to Commissioner Judah regarding an observation/fishing pier at Mound House is included in Council members' books for their review.
- A Packaging Workshop will be held on June 13 and she invited all to attend.
- A Hurricane Preparedness meeting will be held on June 18 and she invited all to attend.

TDC Member Items

- Fran Myers circulated the Airport's News & Notes. Ms. Myers noted that it may have appeared that Bob Ball, Executive Director at RSW was negative when he recently spoke to Council. She added that now we can see that he was on target and foresaw what was coming; she hopes that there will be more talks about the situation we are facing in the upcoming months.
- Rob Wells encouraged everyone to take the time to view a great video included in the Randell Research center packet.
- Roxie Smith invited everyone to join in the Fort Myers Beach Taste of the Town event, scheduled for this coming weekend.
- Tony Lapi reflected on Allison Hagerup passing away; he stated that she will be sorely missed for all she has done for this County.

- As a follow-up to Fran Myers' comments, Colleen DePasquale speculated whether we should look at how, when and where we market and if there is a need for a short-term change of the Statutes to accomplish any necessary changes to market the destination in the future. In view of the airline crisis situation, Roxie Smith agreed that we should seriously look at what we are currently doing. René Affourtit suggested that year-round marketing should be placed on the July TDC Meeting Agenda and Pamela Cronin advised that comments regarding the changes should be requested from Legal. Ms. Davenport stated during the next meeting she will present information concerning FY 2008/2009 budget as two budgets have been proposed: a zero-growth budget and one based on revenue.

All reports are included with the Minutes and are on file at the Visitor & Convention Bureau and at the Lee County Minutes Department. The Minutes may also be found on www.Leevcb.com

The next Tourist Development Council meeting is scheduled for July 11, 2008 at the Visitor & Convention Bureau.

The meeting adjourned at 11:55 a.m.