

St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & The Beaches
Visitors and Convention Bureau Board of Directors Meeting
2:30 p.m., Monday, December 20, 2010
Lodge & Club at Ponte Vedra Beach, 607 Ponte Vedra Boulevard
Ponte Vedra Beach, FL

Minutes

Call to Order – John Fraser called the meeting to order at 2:45 p.m.

Present: John Fraser, Tina Klinkenberg, Irving Kass, and County Commissioner Jay Morris. NO QUORUM.

Not Present: Charles Cox (excused), Bob O’Neil, David Mariotti (excused), Kathy Fleming (excused), Jeff Oliasami (excused), Virginia Whetstone, Commissioner Andrea Samuels(excused), Kirk Wendland (excused) and Commissioner Errol Jones (excused).

Staff Present: Richard Goldman, Barbara Golden, Evelyn Vazquez, Rick Hensler

Others Present: None

John Fraser introduced and welcomed County Commissioner Jay Morris as the newest Board member and representative to the County Commission. Commissioner Morris stated that he looks forward to serving on the Board and learning about the work of the VCB. He also announced that there is a conflict of schedule with usual VCB dates/times and other committees on which he serves.

Approval of October 21, 2010 Meeting Minutes – Approval of Minutes is deferred to next meeting.

Treasurer’s Report – Richard Goldman reported that the VCB is currently solvent. There was a deposit by the County to the bank to cover all liabilities. The county deposits 1/6 of the annual budget early in the year to cover initial operating expenses. As of October 30, FY 2011 total funds requested were \$324,873. In addition, the November report demonstrates the public and private sector accounts are funded. Approval of the Treasurer’s Report was postponed until the next regular Board of Directors Meeting.

Executive Committee Report :

John Fraser reported that although the Executive Committee lacked a quorum there was a need to approve new partner applications. These include University of Florida and St. Augustine Historical Society, representing a new category of partners at the VCB. Additional partner applications included the Lynx Tall Ship, South-a-Philly Restaurant, and Legacies and Memories. Because there was no

quorum, approval of new partners will need to be electronically submitted to Board members for approval.

Mr. Fraser also reported that on December 3, there was a VCB hosted meeting in St. Augustine to provide updates on the Reconnecting Castillo with Bayfront project. Jeremy Marquis from the Halback Group updated those in attendance with plans and the options of design for the potential configuration of traffic patterns and crosswalks. Everyone was encouraged to visit the website for the project and to give their input or comments to help select the most appropriate design. In addition, the VCB has provided dates of additional meetings and forums where the public can provide input. A handout was provided that listed the website addresses and contact information for Jeremy Marquis. It was explained that input by VCB members is requested so that industry comments are taken into consideration in the design plans. It was further noted that the project is part of a federally-funded transportation in Parks Grant Program. The project will affect downtown traffic and how it connects to the beaches area, the Bridge of Lions traffic flow and how it all relates to the Castillo de San Marcos.

Executive Director's Report – Richard Goldman

Richard Goldman reported that St. Johns County Bed Tax Collections show that October had a 44% increase with the additional penny collections. Without the additional penny, collections for October were still up 8% over last year. The contributions by zip code showed that Anastasia Island contributed the highest percentage of bed tax collection, while the Ponte Vedra area accommodations collected 25%, and St. Augustine and Vilano collected 28%. He clarified that the tax is actually paid by visitors and collected by accommodations providers.

STR data shows that St. Johns County's November occupancy was up 13.7%-- up 5.4% above a year ago. Occupancy for the state of Florida is only up 1%. For the first time in over two years the average daily room rate, along with other metrics was up, meaning that the demand has allowed hoteliers to comfortably raise their rates. Revenue per available room is up 16% from last year. Demand is up 13% for the year, that is 80,000 more room nights sold over last year. There was an additional \$1.2 million in revenue in November. Looking at our destination competitive set, occupancy of St. Johns County hotels ranks 6th, but showed the 2nd highest occupancy increase of all 12 competitors. Among our competitive set of hotel rate increases we were ranked third. All of this information indicates that our destination is strongly competing with other destinations.

Website performance reports indicate that the time on site by visitors has increased 50 seconds per visit; Bounce rates, site visitors that come in and leave in less than 30 seconds are down 5 points from October. We have been working on improving website visit relevance in advertising and promotion campaigns. Baselines and performance improvements were further explained.

Visitation to the site has improved but future improvements are anticipated. Guide orders from the site were up. It was also reported that during September and October the decline in website visitation was attributed to reduced advertising, due to end of budget constraints and seasonal low travel planning. In addition, the URL was changed in the September and October period which our developers warned would temporarily reduce search engines ability to find the site. (That's why the change was planned for September/October.)

In the near future, there will be a research proposal for data collection. In the meantime, measurement of success is garnered from the fulfillment report form Phase V. We are now 146% up in inquiries form last year. Richard further reported on the positive trends apparent in the November 2010 Inquiry Report. The Board was asked to refer to the Inquiry report in the Board packet to further review details.

Richard also reported that due to our concentrated markeign efforts in core markets, inquiries have increased from Florida, Georgia, California, New York and Pennsylvania source markets. Texas and Illinois have dropped out of the top five source states.

Richard reported that the Sales Department reports are in the packet. October was slow but November activities were very productive.

Evelyn Vazquez reported that in January there will be a post-Florida Huddle tour operator FAM and attendees will be coming to tour our destination. Florida Huddle will be taking place in Daytona. She also reported that there has been an increase in AAA travel professionals coming here for site inspections. This is a result of the VCB outreach and visits to AAA offices. She also reported that RSAA (Receptive Services of America Conference) will be attended by VCB staff in January. There are also openings for partners to participate in Destination Showcase in DC. The sales team is also working on updates of all meetings and groups collateral materials and websites.

Richard reported a 10% increase in media impressions as a result of the communications work and monitoring. The increase is due to the focus of internet exposure, where viewers have increased, but monetary values have decreased. Impressions and values calculations were explained. VCB produced 16 stories YTD, up 33% from last year.

Barbara Golden reported that there was a journalist in town working on a story for Elks Magazine. The magazine has a very large circulation and the story will appear in the March 2011 issue. There was also a recent journalist visiting here developing a story about our Civil Rights History for the Los Angeles Times which will appear in the January 23 issue. She also reported that the VCB is hosting a Media Tour for editors from Meetings publications. So far five have confirmed and there may be more. The tour will be based in Ponte Vedra and will

include site visits to World Golf Village and St. Augustine. She further reported that the 2011 Travel Planner is at the printer. The Planner is produced in-house as the primary fulfillment piece for the destination and is distributed to inquiries, at trade and consumer shows and at Visitor Centers.

Barbara also reported that the Communications team has developed and has begun to implement a social media outreach plan that includes Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. It was reported that the VCB Facebook page currently has more than 29,000 friends. The State of Florida has less than 24,000. The team is also creating an Application for iPad. A Visit Florida is funding much of the project.

And finally, she reported that Peter Greenberg's December 20th news letter, which has a distribution of over 1 million daily, featured a slide show of Holiday lights from around the world that included St. Augustine's Nights of Lights as the opening slide in the presentation.

Rick Hensler reported on the VCB Promotions and Strategic Partnerships activities. Rick explained that the work of the promotions department is to negotiate and partner with media and companies to leverage our advertising and PR efforts. Between April and October, the Promotions Department's efforts have resulted in more than \$367,000 in media exposure that cost us nothing. Rick reported that the department recently partnered with Cox Radio, Michelob Ultra and Florida's First Coast of Golf to create a golf promotion that focused on golf on Florida's Historic Coast. The program produced \$57,000 worth of exposure and created a point of sale for golf packages through Cox Radio website. The total results of the campaign will be made available in the near future.

In November, the VCB finished up fall event promotions that included Red Couch experiences at various events around the state that spun off the VCB advertising campaign. These events helped to increase the VCB data base by more than 4,000 new contacts. Rick also reported that the promotions department had coordinated and leveraged a program for Winter Wonderland with Radio Disney that provided a great of radio exposure for Winter Wonderland in exchange for exposure for Radio Disney at the event. And finally, Rick reported the Promotions Department had developed an alliance with the students in University of North Florida Marketing, PR, Advertising and Special Events classes. The students' course work was working on the VCB 2011 Marketing Plan challenges.

Rick presented the San Sebastian Wine hanger program. This program is a consumer incentive with an offer hanging from the neck of San Sebastian Wines Free Night, directing San Sebastian consumers to visit a special website where they can find offers to stay here and take advantage of one, two, three or more nights and stay one night free. The bottle tags, paid for by San Sebastian and distributed throughout the state at retail outlets will launch in January.

In December, the Website Advisory Task Force met with Miles Media to discuss the changes needed on the VCB website. Priorities were reviewed and the first priority is to mobilize the site. Other changes will be made and discussed further with the Board in the near future.

Richard also reported that Florida's First Coast of Golf reported 2046 room night bookings and 4800 rounds for October and estimated that November will be up about 1% from last year.

Projections for the year end will close 6% down for golf rounds. Not bad since other destinations are feeling a double digit loss.

With no other business to come before the Board, John Fraser adjourned the meeting at 3:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of
Tina Klinkenberg, Board Secretary

Barbara Golden