

St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & The Beaches
Visitors and Convention Bureau Board of Directors Meeting
2:30 p.m., Thursday, February 17, 2011
Renaissance Resort at World Golf Village
500 S. Legacy Trail, St. Augustine

Minutes

Present: John Fraser, Bob O'Neill, Irving Kass, Tina Klinkenberg, David Mariotti, Jeffrey Oliasami, Vice Mayor Andrea Samuels, Kirk Wendland, Commissioner Jay Morris

Not Present: Charles Cox, Kathy Fleming, Virginia Whetstone, Vice Mayor Errol Jones

Staff Present: Richard Goldman, Rick Hensler, Evelyn Vazquez, Jay Humphreys

Others Present:

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

Roll Call – Richard Goldman called roll and a quorum was present.

Approval of Minutes: A motion was made by Bob O'Neill to approve the minutes from the VCB January 20, 2011 meetings. The motion was seconded by Irving Kass. **Passed Unanimously**

Treasurer's Report – David Mariotti reported that the net bed tax collections for December 2010 was \$374,107. The VCB Fund balance is currently \$54,140. Income for January was \$4,620 and expenses were \$43,561, reflecting the expense of printing 125,000 copies of the Travel Planner.

The VCB checking balance is \$406,109, less \$65,275 in outstanding checks. The BOCC Funds liability is \$529,084.

Motion for approval:

Tina Klinkenberg made a motion to approve the Treasurer's Report. The motion was seconded by Bob O'Neill. **Approved Unanimously**

Executive Committee Report

John Fraser reported that the Executive Committee met prior to the Board meeting and discussed the need for a change in signers for the Birding and Photo Fest account to make funds in the account more accessible during the festival. The source of income and use of funds was discussed.

After discussion, Tina Klinkenberg made a motion that Erin Masters, Dena Masters and Linda Harrison be replaced as signers on the Birding and Photo Fest account with Bob O'Neill, Jay Humphreys and Richard Goldman. The motion was seconded by Irving Kass. **Approved Unanimously**

Richard Goldman presented an overview of Senate Bill 376. He reported that the proposed Bill that is in committee has language that would exempt OTA businesses (Orbitz, Expedia, etc) from collecting bed tax on profits on hotel rooms sold. The sales tax and bed tax are being paid only on the net cost of the room. The percentage markup that the OTA businesses are charging is not being taxed.

It was discussed that there are potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars in bed tax and sales tax not being charged and collected. There was discussion about the controversy of the taxing issue.

It was discussed that there is a contingent of VCB and TDC representatives from around the state that will be attending the Senate Committee meeting on Monday at 1:45 p.m. Richard will be attending to hear testimony and reach out to representatives in a request that Senate Bill 376 not proceed to the Senate floor.

Executive Director's Report

Richard Goldman reported that the Bed Tax collections for December 2010 were up 42%, the 10th straight month with real increases before the addition of the 4th penny. By accommodation types, only the hotel/motel category was up 32.8% for December.

Richard reported that due to the early date of this month's Board meeting, the data from the January 2011 STR report was not yet available. A full report of the January STR will be presented in March. However, preliminary reports indicate that the ADR is showing an increase. Compared to other destinations, St. Johns County has the 3rd highest increase in ADR among our competitive set.

Website Analytics

The January analytics for the VCB website show that the time on site has improved significantly. The bounce rate is also improving. There were 45,368 site visits in January 2011, 65% ahead of January 2010.

Nights of Lights drove a great deal of traffic to the website. The most requested page changes indicated an increase in traffic to the attractions, lodging and Nights of Lights sections. Because the event is ending, we expect to see a drop in NOL visits.

The metrics conversions of interest data indicate a 14% increase in site visitors who intend to travel here in the near future.

Richard also presented a new Google Analytic metrics that reports profile information about our website visitors. This is a new report that will be included in the Board packets when available.

Visitor Inquiries

Consumer inquiries to the VCB fulfillment house are up 216% from last year. These are direct responses to our advertising efforts. Repeat visit inquiries are up significantly, likely to Nights of Lights inquiries.

Richard reported that the bid process is underway to find a research company that will collect and report data about our actual visitors.

Department Reports

The Sales Department completed 61 sales calls in the month of January, a total of 412 year to date, 65% ahead of the department's goal. The room nights associated with those leads are 23% of the department's goals.

Evelyn Vazquez reported that the Department is planning for the TPC Meeting Planner FAM and is still in need of host hotel rooms. She also reported on upcoming sales missions and shows. There are many more partners getting involved in VCB for sales missions and shows.

Richard reported that the number of media impressions was down YTD by 30%, but the advertising value of the impressions is way up. This indicates a higher value of media exposure outlets. February will be way up, since there are several publications featuring our destination, including Southern Living and several meeting publications.

The VCB has placed or assisted in the placement of 178 stories year to date, 10% ahead of last year. Jay Humphreys reported that the Communications Department highlight for January was the Meetings Media Tour, which was a huge success. In addition there were 9 other high-quality journalists that visited the destination to gather information for upcoming features.

Jay explained that the VCB Communications department is taking a strong focus on social media. The VCB currently maintains a fan page that has more than 29,560 active fans that receive news feeds, twice the amount as VISIT FLORIDA. 9,925 fans have clicked through to pages and stories in the past month. Much of the content is user-generated and very popular.

He also reported that the VCB mobile website is nearing completion and should go live in the near future. And the VCB is preparing to begin working on the

creation of the I-Pad Application with a format design that will provide links to feature stories about the destination and layout like a magazine with current information.

Jay informed the Board that he is working on a project that is cost effective and efficient social media marketing programs that will be made available to VCB partners. More information will follow in the near future.

Richard reported that the VCB Partnership roll is down 17%. At the end of 2010, there were 271 Partners. As of February, there are 225 active partners. There was a drop of more than 60 partners not renewing as of last month. We anticipate a renewal of partnership of many of the drops.

Rick Hensler reported that the San Sebastian Winery promotion has launched. Ten lodging partners are participating by offering a "One Night Free" offer on the special landing page created for the promotion. Each bottle of San Sebastian wine in the marketplace has a neck ringer directing consumers to visit a special landing page for free night offers on Florida's Historic Coast.

Rick also reported that the 9th Annual Birding PhotoFest plans are underway. The Festival takes place April 28 – May 1. Ticket sales are up over sales the same time period for last year's event. The event has only been marketed outside the region so far. In region promotions and advertising will begin in March. The website has had over 10,000 page views.

Rick reported that the Scenic A1A and Florida's First Coast of Golf have partnered to offer a coastal scenic golf package. The program is being cross promoted to the VCB, A1A and FFCCG data bases. He also reported that the Michelob Ultra program offering golf getaways to Florida's Historic Coast will run again in March – April.

Rick also reported about a broadcast program that has been in development for about 6 months. A PBS series production by Pine Ridge Productions will be filming the first of their Getaway Together Again series on Florida's Historic Coast. There are 12 episodes being filmed. This is the same company that launched Samantha Brown travel. The main sponsor of the program is Trip Advisor. Filming will take place in March. It will air in April.

He also reported that the promotions department will be assisting the St. Augustine Beach Civic Association with putting together some promotional programs for the summer concerts on the Beach.

Richard introduced David Reese, president of Florida's First Coast of Golf (FFCG), to report on golf package bookings. David reported that the number of golf round bookings through January were up 7% over last year. Leisure golf business was down 9.3% for 2010. The upward trend started in August

indicating the road to recovery. The drop is obviously due to bad weather in January and February 2010 and the economy. NE Florida was ranked second in Florida golf bookings for 2010.

FFCG has frontloaded their budget to get a head start on advertising and promotions for this fiscal year. Outreach is concentrated in the Southeast, New York and Chicago. The organization is also more focused on collecting data to assure that market outreach is pinpointed and effective. So far this year, all advertising programs are showing good returns.

Mr Reese also reported that in addition to the Michelob Ultra and Scenic A1A promotions, FFCG is working with the VCB on programs for THE PLAYERS, and Sports Illustrated among others.

Richard informed the Board that YPartnership will be presenting the summer 2010 advertising co-op programs on March 3.

Richard also informed the Board that the VCB is preparing the mid-year budget review for submission to the TDC.

Richard Goldman and John Fraser presented a slate of six new partners for approval. It included Claude's Chocolates; Tim's Wine Market; Avalon Carriage Company, Great Wraps Café, Showboat Carwash; and Bruce Merwin Films. These businesses were presented and approved by the Executive Committee. Irving Kass made a motion to approve the presented slate for VCB Partnership. Bob O'Neill seconded the motion. **Passed Unanimously.**

John Fraser informed the board that the Annual Report was completed and a copy was provided to each board member. Board inquires should be directed to Richard who noted the report was largely a compilation of data presented in monthly reports throughout the year.

Other Business:
None presented.

Adjournment:
John Fraser adjourned the meeting at 4:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of Secretary Tina Klinkenberg.

Barbara Golden