

St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & The Beaches
Visitors and Convention Bureau Board of Directors Meeting
2:30 p.m., Thursday, April 21, 2011
Holiday Isle Oceanfront Resort
A1A, St. Augustine Beach, FL

Minutes

Call to Order: Chairman John Fraser called the meeting to order at 2:40 p.m.

Roll Call – Barbara Golden called roll and a quorum was present.

Present: John Fraser, Bob O'Neill, Charles Cox, Irving Kass, Tina Klinkenberg, Kathy Fleming, Virginia Whetstone, Irving Kass, Jeffrey Oliasami, Vice Mayor Andrea Samuels, Commissioner Errol Jones,

Not Present: David Mariotti, Kirk Wendland, Commissioner Jay Morris

Staff Present: Richard Goldman, Evelyn Vazquez, Barbara Golden

Others Present:

Approval of Minutes:

A motion was made by Bob O'Neil to approve the minutes from the VCB March 17, 2011 meeting. The motion was seconded by Irving Kass. **Passed Unanimously**

Treasurer's Report – Richard Goldman reported that the VCB is solvent and in a very good financial position. He reported that as of the end of March the VCB had a current checking account balance of \$267,660 with \$14,625 outstanding checks. Incoming funds from the BOCC was \$136,270. The total liabilities against incoming funds was \$392,813. The VCB Fund balance was \$59,010. Income for the month of March was \$76,315 and expenses were \$73,857. These income and expenses were mostly a result of the Birding and PhotoFest coming up April 29 through May 1. The net bed tax collections were \$526,204 to be split between all four categories. A detailed report on those funds is to follow.

Motion for approval:

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

Executive Committee Report

John Fraser reported that the Executive Committee reviewed the new partner applications. Chairman Fraser requested Board approval for new Partners.

New Partners Approval: Bob O'Neill made a motion to accept Ponte Vedra Concert Hall, St. Augustine Amphitheatre, Goldfinch Boutique, Panama Hattie's,

Jacks or Better Casino and First City Communications (the St. Augustine Tour Guide) as new VCB Partners. The motion was seconded by Charles Cox.

Approved Unanimously.

The Exec Committee also discussed the billboard campaign layouts. One has been approved and the others have some changes requested. When all of the artwork is approved by the committee it will be presented to the Board. There are 6 boards currently committed and there will be a total of 8 to 10.

Executive Director's Report

Richard Goldman reported that the Bed Tax collections had a 40% increase over last February, but only 5% if the additional penny in collections this year are taken into account. He reported that the Beach and Island have seen an increase over previous months.

Mr. Goldman reported that the Smith Travel Report indicates that occupancy is up for the 13th consecutive month, and 7 ½% up over a year ago. ADR is also up for the 4th time in five months, up 1% year-to-date, the average room rate is \$102.31. Richard clarified that not all properties in St. Johns County report to STR, so even though this report is a good barometer, the average room rate is probably higher. RevPar for the county accommodations has had its eighth consecutive month of increase, up 8% year-to-date. He also reported that Demand is up by 9% and Revenue is up 10% Year-to-Date.

In a review of our destination's competitive set, St. Johns County ranked 6th in occupancy and 4th in revenue increase among the 12 destinations in comparison.

Website Analytics – It was reported that there were no significant changes in the time spent on site. However, the bounce rate was 37.7%, down from last month. Overall activity on the site is down. There was a meeting in the previous week between YPartnership, VCB staff and Miles Media to discuss strategies to increase website activity. There is a plan being developed to create more interaction and activity on the site.

Richard reported that most of the website hits are generated by SEO. In March, YPartnership made a Google Search buy and the site did experience a slight increase of visitation as a result.

Other solutions include more Google words, the website redesign, content updates in-house and by Miles. The redesign will include more images and video on partner's profile pages. Additional strategies include a campaign to request more reciprocal partner links, adding video to partner's profile pages, tagging our webpage on the Facebook Friday videos, enhancing our social media efforts and sending more emails to the VCB consumer database.

Visitor Inquiries

The Inquiries report represents the responses from our advertising and website to Phase V call center. Advertising responses are up 66% for March; web responses are up 345%. Year to Date inquiries from new prospective visitors are down. There is no change in the anticipated party size. There is a compression to the 0 to1 month trip planning category (up by 5%). There has been a lead generation increase from Pennsylvania, Virginia and Texas.

Visitor Information Center Counts:

The Visitors Information Center report was referred to. It was noted that the City of St. Augustine Visitor Information Center has changed their method of counts, using a formula that counts 2.5x 50% of cars parked in garage. This may or may not revert back to the previous actual VIC walk-in counts. It was discussed that the VIC is now selling a Passport ticket to the Castillo, Spanish Quarter, and Government House. It was decided that some of the Board and Richard would discuss this issue further with city officials.

It was further discussed that the Cat IV administrative category would be reviewed to cover the operation costs of the Beach VIC. The possibility of the Recreation department may charge rent, which they currently do not. The VCB absorbs staffing costs. It would be requested that the VCB continue to have input in the information that is offered to visitors.

Department Reports

Partnership: The VCB has added new partners. Currently there are 244 active VCB partners.

The Sales measurement report indicates that the Sales Team is 37% ahead of goal on calls, lead distribution is up 2% ahead of goal.

Evelyn Vazquez reported on activities that included show attendance at Collaborate, a meetings trade show that is new for the VBC. She also reported that the team is bringing in two FAM Tours during THE PLAYERS. One group is tour operators and the other is meeting planners. There is also a journalist representing Mercado De Convenciones (Mexico) that will be joining the tour. There will also be a FAM in June for educators and the VCB will partner with community outlets to present a Quince Expo in September.

She also reported that the team has developed a relationship with JetBlue and that the Special Events Guide is in development with the Sales and Creative Development teams.

Richard reported that the Birding & PhotoFest will take place in late April. Sixty-nine percent of the attendees are from out of the state and region. Ticket sales exceed \$81,000. Participants are coming from as far away as Norway, Canada and Panama.

The Communications Report included updates on media impressions and values. Measurements are showing that impressions and publicity values are increasing.

In Jay Humphreys' absence, Barbara Golden presented the Communications Department report. She reported that she would be attending two media receptions in New York later in the month, one for social media journalists and outlets and one for consumer print media. In addition, she will be conducting desk-side visits with editors of major New York-based publications.

She also reported that the Facebook Friday program has had some great success. Each of the partner's FF Video deals posted on Fridays are attaining thousands of hits. She reported some of the numbers of hits and shares that the hits are receiving. In May, a report of the video hits and sharing volume will be presented in the Board packet.

She also reported on the broadcast media that Jay has been working with lately. The production companies include Alex in Florida, A Canadian Travel Program; Arthur Hanlon site location for a PBS Special, House Hunters International and right now, How to do Florida is in town filming an updated broadcast to air in Florida.

In Rick Hensler's absence, Barbara Golden also presented the report for the Promotions Department.

She updated the Board on the completion of filming of Pine Ridge production "Getting Away Together" program which will air nationally on PBS in October and re-air next winter. She informed the Board that the first cut of the production recently aired at the VRMO (Vacation Rental Managers Association) annual convention where it received a standing ovation.

She also reported that radio buy on Cox stations in the Orlando market that was negotiated by YPartnership included several on-air and site sweepstakes promotions that leveraged an additional \$300,000 in exposure for Florida's Historic Coast. Several VCB partners participated by answering a call to provide prize fulfillment for the promotions.

Barbara also reported that there is a similar promotion planned for the Tampa market through CBS radio. Staff is working with partners to arrange the promotional sweepstakes fulfillment for these programs that focus on the Hispanic market. She also reported that a third radio promotion with Radio Disney is in the final stages of negotiations.

And finally, she reported on two promotional programs that were arranged through VISIT FLORIDA. One was with an Orlando radio stations, WTKS, that would drive visitation to Ponte Vedra Beach, and the other was valued at \$113,000 with the Gwinnett Daily Post that included, print, on-line and in-school

programs where youth were encouraged to take part in a Florida Spanish Heritage trivia contest for a chance to win a family getaway to St. Augustine.

Barbara reported that these no-cost added value promotions were made possible by the generosity of Partner business contributions, allowing the VCB to leverage nearly one-half million dollars in additional publicity for Florida's Historic Coast.

Dave Reese, the President of Florida's First Coast of Golf reported that our region's "Golf's Big Week" is coming up with THE PLAYERS and the Hall of Fame Induction Ceremonies in May. FFCG will be hosting several Golf Tour Operators and media utilizing the Hospitality House during the event. In the preceding week, they will be hosting Michigan Golf Live radio for the Induction ceremony.

David reported that golf tourism in St. Johns County is up 9% for the first quarter. Five out of six months have realized a positive increase. He also reported that as a destination, we are outpacing our in-state golf competitive sets. However, Carolina destinations are ahead of us- Charleston Golf Travel is up 6.5%, Hilton Head is up 5% and Myrtle Beach is up 3.2%. Major feeder markets are Pennsylvania (33%), New York (80%) and Chicago (15%).

He reported that while March advertising responses are down, the inquiry responses overall are up due to promotional programs with the Jaguars and Michelob Ultra. He also reported that FFCG consumer database has grown over 50% since October.

Richard reported that the Partner Summer Co-op program will be launching within hours. The programs offered include a variety of low-cost opportunities that are realistic for partner participation.

The contract for the visitor profile research is in the final stages. It is currently in the hands of the county attorney. The program should begin very soon.

The VCB website redesign is moving along. It will feature easier to navigate and partner profile pages will be much more robust with imagery and the ability to upload video.

The Mobile Website has launched and is available for viewing. When viewing our website on a smart phone, the mobi-site automatically launches.

The PGA TOUR and PLAYERS have come forward with new programs for the destination. Added programs to the destination this year include full-panel branding in the Hospitality House. Advertising given to us includes web TV on Live@ PGA; radio spots on Sirius XM Radio, the Golfer Webisode broadcasting at JIA and in TOUR STOP stores, banner ads on Live @ and Sirius XM, a print add in Ponte Vedra Living, and more.

Richard reported that there has been some success in getting the state and other organizations to support the 500th Anniversary of Ponce's discovery of Florida. Updates and more information will be provided as it comes to light. It is likely that St. Augustine will be the focal point. Several of our local tourism representatives had a meeting with the Governor and feel like they have his attention about the importance of the role of St. Augustine the commemoration of the anniversary.

Richard reported that the avocation of fighting the exemption of taxes on on-line sales of hotel rooms by online travel companies has been heard by both the legislature and the senate. These bills are being reviewed and discussion in both legislative branches is still going on. There was a letter from regional CVB Directors that was published in area papers along with several other editorial stories published throughout the state advocating that OTC's must collect and pay the full sales and bed tax amounts of hotel room nights. Both the County commission and TDC are staying very involved in this issue and advocating for the tax collections. And St. Johns County is part of the lawsuit regarding OTCs and tax collections.

He thanked everyone for stepping up to help in the fight to help save VISIT FLORIDA. The industry was very well represented in lobbying to protect them from being swallowed into a new government-created economic development program. It looks like the House version of the legislation is more favorable to save the organization.

Richard will provide updates and information to the Board about any developments on all political issues as they come to light.

Other Business:

John Fraser thanked the Board and the audience for their support in blocking the demise of VISIT FLORIDA.

With no other business or public comments, a motion to adjourn was requested.

Bob O'Neill made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Tina Klinkenberg. **Approved Unanimously.**

The meeting was adjourned at 4:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of Secretary Tina Klinkenberg.

Barbara Golden