

St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & The Beaches
Visitors and Convention Bureau Board of Directors Meeting
2:30 p.m., Thursday, May 19, 2011
Courtyard by Marriott
S.R. 16, St. Augustine, FL

Minutes

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

Roll Call – Jay Humphreys called roll and a quorum was present.

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

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

Staff Present: Rick Hensler, Jay Humphreys, Kristi Hansman

Others Present: Michelle Reval, Courtyard by Marriott (host); Sherry Janssens; Beau Phillips

Approval of Minutes:

A motion was made by Irving Kass to approve the minutes from the VCB April 20, 2011 meeting. The motion was seconded by Tina Klinkenberg. **Passed Unanimously**

Treasurer's Report – David Mariotti reported that the VCB has a current checking account balance of \$305,998. The BOCC funds available are \$529,084 and the VCB liabilities are \$241,940. The VCB fund balance as of May 1 was \$50,871. May income was \$12,537 and expenses were \$20,675. David also reported that the Tourist Development Tax collections for March were 38% over February collections.

Motion for approval:

Bob O'Neil made a motion to approve the Treasurer's Report. The motion was seconded by Irving Kass. **Approved Unanimously**

Executive Committee Report

John Fraser reported that the Executive Committee reviewed the billboards concepts and placements. He reported the first billboards could be in place as early as next week. Chairman Fraser requested Board approval for new Partners.

John Fraser presented that there was only one application for partnership approval, The Tasting Tours, a wine and food tasting tour that includes Bed & Breakfast Inns. **New Partners Approval:** David Mariotti made a motion to approve The Tasting Tours for VCB Partnership. The motion was seconded by Tina Klinkenberg. **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

Rick Hensler presented the report in Richard Goldman's absence. Mr. Hensler reported that the Bed Tax Collections for March were up 5% before the 4th penny and year to date collections are very strong at 6% up over last year, before the 4th penny. He reported the April STR Report indicated that ADR and occupancy are up and RevPar is showing considerable growth. St. Johns County is ranked 4th among our competitive set of destinations for occupancy, and in the lower third with ADR.

After reviewing the STR Report, Mr. Hensler reported to the Board that the number of unique visitors to the website are down, but user activity is up. Source of traffic to the site is primarily from search engines.

Website Analytics

In 2010, 44% of our site visitors came through search engine YTD for 2011, 66% of visitors to the site came through search engines. Of the total visitors to the site in April, 6,605 demonstrated signals of intent to travel to the destination. There is a very apparent recovery from the January and February decline in website visitation. Activity was up 16% and total page views were up 21%. Total visits to the site YTD are up 1%.

Visitor Inquiries

Data presented from the inquiry report included stats on planning time and feeder markets. Campaigns and marketing efforts are being launched to accommodate visitors planning cycle.

John Fraser asked what the VCB was doing to reach out to potential visitors via social media.

Jay Humphreys explained that the VCB has a very high number of followers on Facebook. Currently there are over 34,000 fans on the VCB Fanpage. He further explained the partners have the opportunity to reach out to potential visitors by monitoring and following consumer comments posted on the VCB Fanpage.

Particularly when fans request information about what is going on or where to eat. This provides a great opportunity for partners to market one-on-one to potential visitors through internet conversation. A presentation about how partners can better utilize the VCB Facebook Fan page for lead generation may be presented at the next Board meeting.

He reported that promotions for the PLAYERS were added to the YouTube Channel, as well as two Facebook Friday videos, all linking to the VCB Facebook page.

Visitor Information Center Counts:

Rick reported on the counts to the visitor centers located within the county. Year-to-date, there have been more than 196,861 visitors to the centers. It was further discussed that the City of St. Augustine visitor counts will be based on garage counts. There are other count methods being considered.

It was also discussed that at a recent TDC meeting it was decided that costs incurred by the VCB to operate the Beach VIC will be reimbursed.

Department Reports

Kristi Hansman reported that the Sales Team is 31% ahead of goal on calls, lead distribution is 2% ahead of goal. Lead Rooms generated is flat.

She also thanked all the partners who contributed to the success of the meeting planner FAM tour. There was a very good turnout of planners who had not previously been to the destination.

Kristi reported that the Sales Team is currently working on budget and initiatives for FY 2012. New programs will increase Wedding and corporate business.

She also reported that Jet Blue has just expanded new service to Puerto Rico. She has been working with their wholesale rep to develop Jet Blue packages for our destination.

Evelyn Vazquez and a few of our partners are currently attending International Pow Wow , an international travel show for US destinations that creates awareness of travel destinations to international markets. Barbara Golden is also attending the show to assure our international media coverage is increased.

Kristi informed the Board that in the upcoming month sales team members, along with the Renaissance, will be attending Destination Showcase in Chicago.

And finally, Kristi reported that the new Meeting Planner Guide/Group Travel Planner is in development.

Jay Humphreys reported on Communications Department initiatives. Total impressions are way up. Impressions have increased due to the inclusion of social media impact.

Jay also reported that Barbara recently attended the VISIT FLORIDA media receptions in New York which was very productive. In addition, she worked with a media rep that the VCB uses to arrange for additional desk-side visits with influential editors and media representatives. Jay reported examples of social media hits.

Jay also reported about a visit from a Mexican journalist who visited during the PLAYERS. This visit will result in a high profile Latin American publication. This visit was a part of the VCB Hispanic media outreach.

Recent Media inquiries resulted in major coverage of our attractions. A story by Jay Clarke that will appear in several major newspapers.

Rick Hensler reported on the impact of the 2011 Birding and PhotoFest. The impact was almost one-half million dollars for the 5-day event. A complete report on the impact was presented.

Rick reported that Richard's activities in the previous month included continued monitoring of legislative issues such as the Tax Exemptions of OTC's and the potential dissolution of VISIT FLORIDA. Fortunately the dissolution of VISIT FLORIDA was stopped.

Rick and Jay reported on the launch of the mobile site. The metrics for the site are not yet available. They also reported that the VCB I-Pad App, which was created using a Visit Florida grant, is ready to launch. Within the next month, the I-Pad application will be available to download for free from the iTunes store.

Rick also reported on the success of THE PLAYERS.

Rick then reported on promotions and strategic alliances. He gave an overview of the leveraging of promotions and events that were add-ons to our radio advertising in the Tampa and Orlando markets. In his summary, he reported that there were 7 promotions and events with COX, 10 promotions and events with CBS, 4 promotions and events with Radio Disney that provided a total ROI of media exposure values at more than \$350,000.

He also reported on recent VCB assistance with the television productions that the VCB was involved in production. These included two PBS productions, *Getting Away Together* and the new show *You Travel with Chef Bob*. Part of the VCB sponsorship of these programs included the provision of high resolution B-roll for our use. Clips from each production were presented.

At the end of Director's report, Irving Kass cautioned that visitation this summer will be much more realistic in terms of numbers because there is no oil spill to push people here. But said visitation will be up and predicted gas prices will be down to \$3.50 this summer.

Other Business:

Rick Hensler announced that there will be a State of Tourism Industry workshop presentation on Monday June 13, the entire St. Johns County tourism industry is invited to attend.

Andrea Samuels announced that the Concert by The Sea Series is underway and distributed the summer concert schedule. She said more than 1,000 people attended the first concert in the series.

Rick Hensler reported that the St. Augustine Air show will take place at the Northeast Florida Regional Airport over Memorial Day Weekend.

David Mariotti reported that Richard had made a very informative report to the North Florida Lodging Association. He said that as part of Richard's presentation he handed out copies of the Tourism: Lifeblood of St. Johns County flyer. David asked that the information in that flyer be widely distributed.

John Fraser thanked the Courtyard Marriott for hosting the meeting.

With no other new business, John Fraser requested a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Bob O'Neil made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Tina Klinkenberg. **Approved Unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 3:45 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted on behalf of Secretary Tina Klinkenberg.

Barbara Golden