

**St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & The Beaches
Visitors and Convention Bureau Board of Directors Meeting
2:30 p.m., Thursday, July 21, 2011
Renaissance World Golf Village Resort
500 S. Legacy Trail (World Golf Village)
St. Augustine, FL**

Minutes

Call to Order: Incoming Chair Bob O'Neill called the meeting to order at 2:35 p.m.

Roll Call: Barbara Golden called roll.

Present:, Bob O'Neill, Irving Kass, Tina Klinkenberg, David Mariotti, Charles Cox, Virginia Whetstone, Jeffrey Oliasami, Kathy Fleming, Vice Mayor Andrea Samuels, Commissioner Jay Morris, Kirk Wendland.

Not Present: John Fraser, David Mariotti, Commissioner Errol Jones.

Staff Present: Richard Goldman, Rick Hensler, Jay Humphreys, and Barbara Golden

Others Present: David Hoak, Ellen Walden, **Scott Hannah**, Felicia Fink, Joe Finnegan, David Reese, and Sandra Atkins.

Approval of June 16 Meeting Minutes: Bob O'Neill requested a motion to approve the June 16, 2011 Board Minutes. A motion was made by Irving Kass to wave the reading of the minutes and approve as submitted. The motion was seconded by Charles Cox. **Approved Unanimously**

Treasurer's Report – Tina Klinkenberg reported that the VCB Category I checking account balance is \$305,400.01, with outstanding checks in the amount of \$87,207.74. The Board of County Commission funds liability is \$529,084 less incoming funds of \$174,044.06. The Total CAT I Liabilities balance is \$355,039.94. The VCB Fund Balance is \$54,019.04. Expenses for the month of June were \$11,317.90. These expenses were primarily associated with the Birding and PhotoFest.

Charles Cox made a motion to approve the financial report as presented. Irving Kass seconded the motions. **Approved Unanimously**

Executive Committee Report

New Partners Approval:

Charles Cox made a motion to approve the submitted list of businesses for VCB Partnership. The list included:

- TPC Sawgrass (Clubhouse)
- The Tasting Room (Restaurant)

- Florida Living History
- Resort Rentals of St. Augustine (Vacation Rentals)
- Peterbrooke Chocolatier Anastasia Island
- Caribongo (clothing retail - St. George Street)
- Meehan's Irish Pub (restaurant)

The motion was seconded by Irving Kass. **Approved Unanimously**

In response to the Board's request for a review of the \$5,000 given to the United Way two years ago to fund homeless programs, and prior to providing any additional funds Richard Goldman introduced David Hoak and Ellen Walden, representatives of Home Again St. Johns, a program of First Coast United Way, to review the funding expenditures from the past contribution.

Mr. Hoak briefed the Board about the 10-year plan to end homelessness in St. Johns County. The program included a ½ staff person from United Way and with contributions from various groups around the county the program began in 2008. The VCB was one of the contributors of \$5,000. Mr. Hoak reported that with the funds collected, the group organized a committee structure to deal with homeless issues and to hire staff and fund volunteer support services. The group came up with 5 basic projects that included housing; coordination of agencies; a central place for homeless victims to get service; outreach programs to get the information about service to the homeless; and advocacy for adjusting laws and ordinances pertaining to homeless issues.

Mr. Hoak presented a very detailed description of services and focus of the group's programs. The program had a focus for a new location for the St. Francis House homeless shelter, which has not progressed. He reported that the volunteer outreach program was effective. He presented the Board with outreach resource collateral material, Opening Doors, which assists in finding resources for homeless; and discussed the Second Harvest food programs for the homeless. Mr. Hoak also informed the Board of other planned programs, the situation of lack of funding programs, homeless shelter/one-stop service location, and support staff. Future funding provided would be used to assist in keeping initiatives and programs going. He said that previous funds supplied by the VCB were used to fund staffing to support programs.

Tina Klinkenberg requested a financial report of the funds previously supplied by the VCB. Mr. Hoak informed the Board that the funds were expended by United Way to pay for staff for the Home Again St. Johns programs. He said that the Executive Director of United Way will have to provide that information. There were no direct funds provided on the VCB's behalf directly to Home Again St. Johns.

Virginia Whetstone requested that the Board be presented with clear accountability for the funds that were contributed in these efforts. There was a concern about why VCB funds were used to address the homeless issue. Bob O'Neill reported that the Board had voted in 2009 to provide \$5000 in support of

this effort to solve homeless issues. It was further explained that the homeless situation at the time was having an effect on the visitor experience in St. Johns County. Further clarification of the purpose of the VCB financial support indicated it was to assist resolving to housing problems.

Bob O'Neill expressed a concern that the VCB funds which were to be used to address housing issues were to be matched with other funds from other sources. Mr. Hoak reported that funds were matched by the City of St. Augustine, St. Johns County and several individuals.

Bob O'Neill suggested the issue be tabled to a future meeting when United Way is able to provide clear financial records to the Board.

Tina Klinkenberg made a motion to table the discussion of providing additional funds toward addressing homelessness until there is a reasonable accounting of all contributed funds to United Way for the St. Johns homeless issues in St. Johns County. The motion was seconded by Virginia Whetstone. **Approved Unanimously**

Executive Director's Report – Richard Goldman

Richard Goldman introduced David Reese, Executive Director of Florida's First Coast of Golf (FFCG). Mr. Goldman informed the Board that Mr. Reese and FFCG handles the Marketing for St. Johns County's leisure golf. Florida's First Coast of Golf has been successfully marketing golf to the leisure market for almost 20 years.

Mr. Reese reported that in 2010, FFCG generated 21,209 room nights resulting in conservative revenue of \$2,049,638 to hotels. He also reported that 49,903 rounds of golf were played in St. Johns County, resulting in \$3,249,683 in golf course revenue. FFCG estimates that results from their marketing services had a \$35,301,075 travel economic impact on St. Johns County in 2010.

He reported that in 2010, FFCG marketing efforts provided St. Johns County with a 1,168% return on investment of marketing golf here. He also reported that the media generated by the efforts of FFCG resulted in more than 24,812,049 impressions with a publicity value of more than \$868,000.

Mr. Reese presented the Board with an outline of the FFCG 2011-12 Marketing plan. He then made a FY 2011-12 marketing request for \$171,046 for St. Johns County's partnership with Florida's First Coast of Golf. The 2011-12 fee does represent a 5% increase over last year.

Kathy Fleming made a motion to approve \$171,046 for the FY 2011-12 participation fee with Florida's First Coast of Golf. The motion was seconded by Charles Cox. **Approved Unanimously**

Department Reports

Bed Tax Collections

Richard Goldman began the Department Reports portion of the meeting. He reported that the St. Johns County Bed Tax collections for May were up 8% over May 2010 and that year-to-date collections were up 28% overall and 6% if the 4th penny was factored out.

He reported that geographically, Ponte Vedra, and World Golf Village collections are up for the year. The beach areas are doing well and it is anticipated that the area will see flat to slightly increased collections over the summer months.

STR Report

He reported that the STR report that came in the day before demonstrates that June occupancy was up 4%. YTD actual room rates were up. Revenue was up 2.8% for the month of May and 7.5% YTD, and 9.6% for the rolling calendar year.

Website Traffic

He also reported slight improvement to the website analytics. Time on site is up and there is a significant decrease in the bounce rate. However, there is a slight decrease in visits to the site over the past couple of months. There is a 4% year-to-date increases in website visits. There were 9,142 views of Partner profile pages on the site in June. It will be requested that YPartnership take action and increase Google and online advertising buys to drive more traffic to the site. Most viewed pages included Attractions and Accommodations.

Consumer Emails

Open rates of VCB consumer e-mails are above industry averages, a good indication that the VCB consumer email data-base is clean and that recipients like what they are receiving.

Social Media

Richard reported that the VCB social media programs are very successful. Currently there are nearly 36,000 followers of the VCB Facebook Fan Page. In June there were 14,687 active users and 2,281 Fans were added.

Visitor Inquiries

The visitor inquiry report indicates that consumer inquiries to our fulfillment house driven by advertising were up 130%, inquiries from the website were down 17%. Repeat visitors and first-time inquiries were flat, as were party sizes. There is a slight change in the amount of planning time, in that consumers are taking less time to their trips.

Source market states have changed lightly. This time last year, many of our visitor inquiries were generated from Gulf States because of the oil spill. This summer we are seeing more inquiries from the mid-west and southeastern states.

Partners are reporting that some that booked new business because of the oil spill are getting repeat business as a result of the experiences visitors had here last year.

Partnership

Richard reported that Partnership is down 4% for the year. He also reported that year-to-date, staff has conducted 19 Partner Orientation presentations and 43 new Partners have joined.

Visitor Centers Report

Approximately 90-91 % of visitors reported stopped in the Downtown St. Augustine Visitor Center. The airport breaks down their visitors to Ponte Vedra and St. Augustine. It was discussed whether or not visitors to the Ponte Vedra Chamber are requesting visitor services only.

There was discussion about the location and concern of low visit numbers to the Ponte Vedra VIC. It was expressed that the funding and location of this center is a TDC issue and does not affect the VCB Cat I funding. It was also expressed that the Ponte Vedra-based businesses are in support of the center.

Andrea Samuels inquired about a funding shift and contract regarding the expansion of the St. Augustine Beach VIC. Richard informed the Board that the issue of Cat I funding versus Cat IV funding for the Beach VIC was discussed with the county administration. There is a budgeting shift to Category IV being considered.

Sales Report

Richard reported that the Sales Team has logged 945 telephone sales calls year-to-date, 25% over goal. The team generated 26 leads in June, 1% above goal, and generated 6,694 room nights in June, 3% over goal. He also reported that Kristi is attending Association Executives in Gainesville and will be attending MPI in Orlando.

The team will be hosting a teacher's FAM in June, conducting a receptive operators workshop and a workshop on how to attract Quincenaria celebrations as a new business.

In the Fall the VCB will be hosting a "Fifteen and Forever Expo" for quince and wedding celebrations.

Communications

In comparison to last year, the team has generated 124% in media impressions and a 26% increase publicity value of media coverage. Jay Humphreys briefed the Board on the Communications Department activities including an accounting of the VCB Facebook Fan page increases; the opportunity for Partners to benefit from the 36,000 plus consumers that follow us on Facebook; the VCB coverage of Halloween Ghost Stories and Nights of Lights in upcoming publications; and volume of visiting media this summer.

Barbara Golden reported on coverage of St. Augustine and Ponte Vedra in *Meetings Focus* as a result of an interview in San Francisco with one of the editors. Coverage included the cover image of the magazine.

She also presented information about the October *Flavors of Florida's Historic Coast*, prix fixe dining program. She provided the updates about the program and how the VCB will be promoting it this year.

She also reported on the results of the Gwinnet Daily Post promotion in May. Promotions generated through efforts of VISIT FLORIDA and the VCB with Gwinnett Daily Post in the Atlanta market generated more than \$153,000 of publicity value in print and on-line media and created more than 4.716,000 impressions.

Research

Richard introduced Scott Hannah, president of Guest Research Corporation that will be conducting a Florida Historic Coast Visitor Profile program. Mr. Hannah commented that the visitor research program is very important in helping the county determine an accurate visitor profile for FHC. His main purpose for visiting now is to meet with accommodation providers and other tourism-related businesses to get information and contacts about their guests. These guests will be surveyed to determine the interests and what helps them choose our destination for their vacation. Mr. Hannah reported that in addition to the email surveys, there will be intercept interviews of visitors. He explained the techniques that will be used to capture data and surveys from our visitors, in market and from our hoteliers. Individual results will be confidential and a collective report of all results will be provided to the TDC and VCB when the survey and study is complete in late August.

Andrea Samuels suggested the Wednesday evening Concerts By the Sea and Farmer's Market as test areas for the visitor inquiry areas.

Mr. Hannah thanked the Board and the VCB partners for their cooperation in getting the program going.

Executive Director's Report

Richard Goldman reported the draft for the VCB Marketing Plan has been completed and approved through the TDC. The Marketing Plan is available online.

The VCB is actively participating with Flagler College and Florida Humanity Council in the development of the Viva Florida Conference. Florida's Historic Coast will host one of three Florida destinations that will host commemorating the 500th Anniversary of Ponce de Leon's discovery of La Florida.

Florida's First Coast of Golf

Dave Reese reported in June there was a 17.48% increase in rooms booked over June 2010. He also reported a 17.55 increase in rounds of golf booked in the same time periods. Year-to-date rooms booked have realized a 10.9% increase and rounds of golf booked a 10.91% increase.

He reported that inquiries from advertising have decreased 228% for the year. This is due to the reduction of advertising in the market. He also reported that while June saw a decrease in visitation to the FFCG website, there was a .64% increase in June.

He reported that FFCG is cleaning up their e-news data base and will have effective numbers to report in the coming months.

Website Design

Richard reported that the redesign of the site is moving along nicely. Earlier this year, a VCB website committee worked with Miles Media to develop site design priorities and changes. The progress of the site redesign has advanced and VCB staff has been working diligently to review and provide content to Miles Media for their work.

Richard provided the Board with visuals and a basic outline of the new site.

Promotions

Rick Hensler reported the status of current and recent promotional programs. These included Tampa Radio (WSJT), come Play in our Sandbox; Cox Orlando (Fireworks at the Fountain); Radio Disney Mascot Games, Selena Gomez Concert and Vets Sweepstakes; Cox Radio Mich Ultra Golf Getaway.

He also reported that two VCB-sponsored programs will air on PBS in the Fall - - "Getting Away Together" and "UTravel with Chef Bob".

Other promotional programs in development include Florida's Historic Coast Brand Resources and the 500th and 450th partnerships and promotions.

Rick presented the branding logos and applications of the VCB logo and layout of the Florida's Historic Coast Photo Passport and other merchandising licensing projects.

He also presented a sample of the history cartoons being created to tell the story of Florida's Historic Coast. These clips are Riply-esque presentations of the area's nature and historic story. These will be published in English and Spanish and will be placed in media outlets in the South Florida market.

Other Business

Richard mentioned that at the August meeting, there will be two Board seats that come up for replacement or renewal.

Barbara Golden reported that the VCB August Board Meeting will take place on August 18 at the Hilton Garden Inn in Ponte Vedra.

Adjournment

Bob O'Neill thanked Jeffry Oliasami for hosting the meeting at the Renaissance at World Golf Village and adjourned the meeting at 4:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of Secretary Tina Klinkenberg By Barbara Golden.