

**St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & The Beaches  
Visitors and Convention Bureau Board of Directors Meeting  
2:30 p.m., Thursday, August 25, 2011  
Hilton Garden Inn – Ponte Vedra  
PGA Bld., Ponte Vedra Beach**

**Minutes**

**Call to Order:** Chair John Fraser Called the meeting to order at 2:40 p.m.

Roll Call: Barbara Golden called roll.

**Present** Bob O'Neill, John Fraser, Charles Cox, David Mariotti, Virginia Whetstone, Jeffrey Oliasami.

**Not Present:** Kathy Fleming, Tina Klinkenberg, Irving Kass, Errol Jones, Andrea Samuels

**Staff Present:** Jay Humphreys, Richard Goldman, Rick Hensler, Barbara Golden, Kristi Hansman

**Others Present:** David Hoak, David Reese, Mike Davis and Michael Motley.

**Approval of July 21 Meeting Minutes:** Bob O'Neill made a motion to accept the July 21, 2011 Board of Directors Minutes as submitted. The motion was seconded by Charles Cox. **Approved unanimously**

**Treasurer's Report** – David Mariotti reviewed the VCB financial report. He reported that on August 1, the VCB CAT I funded checking balance was \$303,362 with \$51,646 in outstanding checks. He also reported that the Board of County Commission liabilities stood at \$529,084, less \$256,645 of incoming funds leaving a liability of \$272,439.

He further reported that as of July 31, 2011, the VCB partnership funds had a cash balance of \$52,414. The total cash activity for the month of July was \$1605.

Virginia Whetstone requested that future financial reports carry a Year-to-date comparison column.

Charles Cox made a motion accept the Treasurer's Report as presented. Bob O'Neill seconded the motion. **Approved Unanimously**

**Executive Committee Report**

John Fraser introduced Dave Hoak and Michael Davis from Home Again for a report of budgeting for programs. Home Again is funded by United Way. Michael Davis provided funding details and a Home Again Overview Report.

As part of the Home Again program, all homeless service providers meet monthly. The make-up includes several businesses and community services, that exchange information and services requirements.

Home Again provides a bigger picture as a collective agency for all services. The biggest project under the agency's guise is identifying and creating a homeless shelter. There is a search underway to find an agency to operate the homeless shelter.

Current Home Again budget is used primarily for staffing. A mostly volunteer work force that operates HA programs. Most services that coordinate programs are volunteers. There are millions of dollars spent in SJC for medical care for homeless.

There was a request for the VCB Board to make a financial commitment to provide aid to get homeless off streets and out of tourism areas.

**Charles Cox made a motion to offer \$5000 to fund Home Again programs.** The motion was seconded by Bob O'Neill.

**Discussion:** The validity of the VCB funding this program was discussed. Not sure goal of VCB is to fund this organization. VCB funding must be accompanied by local involvement politically and the VCB intent is to assure a quality experience for our visitors. It was discussed that the VCB Board appoint someone to sit on committee meetings and find a temporary solution for housing.

Treasurer David Mariotti reported that the VCB does have surplus funding in the VCB budget and can afford to provide funding this year.

The motion stood as made

**Motion passes: 5 to 1**

John Fraser will sit on the committee for Home Again.

John Fraser reported that the ballot for expiring Board seats was submitted for approval to the Board prior to sending to the partnership. VCB partners have the option to vote for the Board slate of nominations or to write in a candidate of their choice. The Board seats will be awarded to the candidates with the majority of votes cast and will be announced at the VCB Annual Meeting in September.

Dave Mariotti made a motion to accept the ballot of nominations which include Bob O'Neill, representing St. Augustine lodging; Kathy Fleming, representing Attractions, and Charles Cox, representing Attractions. Jeff Oliasami seconded the motion. **Approved Unanimously**

John Fraser reported that the Executive Committee discussed and voted to reduce HR costs, directing Richard to move forward with arranging to utilize the services of Paychex to administer HR services for VCB employees and change health care provider insurance carriers from United Health Care to Blue Options, providing a 9% savings on premiums.

**New Partners Approval:**

John Fraser requested that the Board approve the slate of businesses for VCB Partnership Approval. The slate of submissions 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)

Charles Cox made a motion to accept the slated partners for approval. The motion was seconded by Bob O'Neill. **Approved Unanimously**

## **Executive Directors Report**

Richard reported STR lodging data, sourced from 41 lodging partners, indicates that every metric is up and positive for July. In July 2010, St Johns County occupancy benefited from the oil spill troubles in the Gulf and anticipated that those results would not be felt this year. But occupancy continued to grow. In July, our occupancy was 67.3%, and our Year running total in occupancy is the highest it has been since 2008.

ADR was up 4% in July and 3% for the Year to Date, the highest rates since 2008 are being booked. Revenue was up 5% in July. A 7% increase year-to-date.

Compared to our destination comp set (12 other destinations). We ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in occupancy and our ADR ranked 6<sup>th</sup>.

### Bed Tax Collections

Richard reported that for the first time in 14 months, bed tax collections were down. In June collections were down by .8%, but year-to-date collections are up 23%, minus the additional penny collected, we are still up 4.8% year-to-date on bed tax collections.

Richard reviewed the comparison of the collection areas of bed tax with the Board. Richard provided the Board with a report that explains the distribution of bed tax funding.

### Web Analytics

Richard reported that the Bounce rate on the website is down. The challenges with the website are that the unique visitors are down significantly. Possibly a result from July 2010 searches for clean beaches compared to this year. The website is undergoing a redesign and additional content and reciprocal links. Richard then reviewed the website analytics data.

### Facebook Analytics

The new Facebook monitoring analytics were presented and reviewed by Jay Humphreys. He reported that the VCB Facebook Fan page is very active with more than 38,000 fans, and briefly reviewed some of the monitoring results. At one of the upcoming Board meetings there will be a presentation about Facebook and Social Media and how our partners can better take advantage of this marketing tool.

### Visitor Inquiries

Richard reported that visitor inquiries were up 118% from advertising leads, while website requests are down. Repeat guests to the destination have increased and first time visitors are declining--possibly another result of the residuals from last year's oil spill on the Gulf Coast. Planning time closer in has increased by 6%, a trend that has been ongoing. Florida remains the top source of visitor inquiries.

He also reported the Visitor Center visitation. Of the total visits reported, .10% are from the Ponte Vedra Chamber, while the bulk of visitors are to the St. Augustine VIC, 93%.

### Partnership Report

Richard reported that there are now 273 partners, exceeding last year's total of 271.

## **Department Reports**

### Sales Report

Richard reported that the Sales Team has exceeded their goal of telemarketing calls by 22.5%. They are on goal for leads distributed ahead on room nights generated are up by 1.4%. Evelyn is currently attending Connect Marketplace in Chicago.

Kristi Hansman reported that the team had successful visits to AAA Offices and that Jaya had attended a bridal show in Tampa.

Kristi reported a 100% closing rate on five site visits in July. There was a quarterly meeting that included several of the lodging partners to review meeting co-op advertising programs.

#### Communications

Total impressions are up 93%. Media impressions year-to-date are in the billions and advertising equivalent value is \$4.7 million, 20% over last year.

#### Florida's First Coast of Golf

In July, St. Johns County had a 12% occupancy and rounds of golf booked in July. Bookings are up 11% for the year. Golf, a travel segment that tends to trail in recovery, is apparently on the comeback. Richard reviewed the FFCG web, media and advertising results.

#### Promotions

Richard Goldman reported that there are two upcoming promotions; Flavors of Florida's Historic Coast and the Gator Bowl Patch Plus program.

Rick Hensler introduced Mike Motley from Miami Tri-Events that is sponsoring the November St. Augustine Marathon to discuss the upcoming event and to request the Board's support for the event.

Rick then discussed the Gator Bowl Patch Plus program that will be available for purchase for \$5 and will provide eligibility for offers from participating partners with 50% off, 4th day free, etc. There are two opportunities that the Patch provides: families in the JAX area purchase patches and tailgate folks at the Gator Bowl sell them to opposing team visitors.

Barbara then reported that the October prix fix dining promotion, Flavors of Florida's Historic Coast, is well under way. There will be 18 restaurants participating (Ponte Vedra to Crescent Beach). Promotions include rack cards, website development, e-newsletter content, chef interview videos, recipes, press releases and messaging in standing advertising.

Rick presented the video clip of the PBS special, Getting Away Together.

The full program will air nationally in the fall on PBS. After it airs, the VCB will have rights to redistribute and use clips. The show will include scenes from the spa at Ponte Vedra Inn & Club, St. Augustine Beach and St. Augustine.

#### Director's Report

Richard reported that the VCB is working with the Florida Humanities Council's Viva Florida programs, the redesign of the VCB website, providing workshops for our partners about how to work with receptive operators and a workshop about Quincienaras.

He also reported that the VCB Weather website has been activated and is ready to report in real time the current weather status on Florida's Historic Coast through hurricane season.

Richard informed the Board that the BOCC will have a meeting on September 6<sup>th</sup> regarding the proposed increase in property tax millage. Commissioner Jay Morris asked the Board to advocate the proposed increase since property values have dropped and lowered property taxes. The additional 7.5 Mill is to be used for FCC mandated communications, fire department and other services.

Richard also presented a Jack Rabbit Book Direct demonstration about how the data from Jack Rabbit is pulling data from lodging partners to assure accuracy of room availability and rates. Hoteliers are able to sell rooms on line at no cost through VCB site and Book Direct.

#### YPartnership Advertising Presentation

Barry Lott addressed the Board about the current market and the ability of the media plan to adjust to circumstances.

He introduced Bryan Hampton and Patti Combs who presented strategies and an overview of placement plan.

Patti Combs asked the Board for approval of the concept of the media plan allowing for specific insertion orders to be approved by the advertising committee.

The Board discussed the importance of co-op plans for partners to participate.

Jeffrey Oliasami expressed a concern that there is not enough advertising reaching out to the meetings market. It was explained that more is spent to marketing to meetings through advertorial and editorial and relationship building with planners and operators.

It was decided that a more detailed plan for spending against the meetings market would be presented to group market stake holders.

A question regarding the choice of advertising in the Canadian market was asked. VF reports show visitation from Canadians is up, Google analytics for website show inquiries from Canadian Market and that the planned run in the Canadian market is a test. Bob O'Neill requested that other international markets be researched for advertising, such as the UK, Germany, Brazil and others.

CHARLES COX made a motion to approve the concept of the advertising plan as generated giving staff and YPartnership the ability to adjust the plan as needed. He also requested that staff submit a separate report/ plan to convention hoteliers that includes all trade shows, promotions, sales initiative and other programs marketing to the meetings and conference market. Bob O'Neill seconded the motion. **Approved Unanimously**

#### **Adjournment**

With no additional business to come before the Board, John Fraser adjourned the meeting at 5:30 p.m.

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