



TDC Meeting Minutes

October 12, 2023

Commissioner Brian Hamman called the Lee County Tourist Development Council meeting to order at 9:04 a.m.

Council members in attendance

Commissioner Brian Hamman, Dan Allers, Tony Lapi, Fran Myers, Larry Fiesel, Jay Johnson, Holly Smith, Bill Steinke, Bill Waichulis and Nigel Fullick.

Robert Wells III, Liston Bochette, Brian Kramer and Pamela Cronin were excused.

Guests First recognizes newest graduates

Dr. Nicole King-Smith, Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB) training and development manager, and Crystal Wanke, VCB Hospitality Customer Service Training Specialist, awarded certificates to the newest certified guest service professionals (CGSPs), bringing the total to 1,106 CGSP graduates and 16 certified properties in Lee County.

Approval of previous meeting minutes

Bill Waichulis made a motion to approve the August 10, 2023 meeting minutes. Jay Johnson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Public to be heard

Amberly Bucci, Marketing & Communications Manager, Michele Olivier, Director of Sales & Marketing and Tracy Snyder, Senior Sales & Catering Manager at Margaritaville Resort Fort Myers Beach informed the TDC the resort will open December 26.

Lisa Wilson, Edison Ford Winter Estates (EFWE), Marketing & PR Manager, shared that they are having an orchid sale and symposium this weekend, and on October 28 they are holding a family-friendly Fall Festival including a pumpkin patch. During the month of November, EFWE will have their garden festival and the 48th annual Holiday Nights event will kick off the day after Thanksgiving and continue until January 1.

Municipalities to be heard

Sharon Woodbury, City of Cape Coral, Economic & Business Development Officer, shared an update of events and new projects coming to Cape Coral. Events coming up: Bike Night October 14, Trunk or Treat October 27, Concert Series on the Lawn November 2, Veteran's Day Parade November 11, Cape Music & Arts Fusion Walk November 18, Holiday Tree Lighting November 30, Reindeer Run December 9, Holiday Boat-A-Long paired with Movie in the Park December 16, and New Years Eve celebration December 31.

Coming up on October 19 there will be a groundbreaking ceremony for the Bimini Square development and on October 20 the City of Cape Coral will host the Workforce & Education Industry Roundtable.

The Cape Coral Quest mobile app developed in partnership with the VCB has had 3,763 people sign up, 6,603 locations checked, 86 Sunsplash season passes awarded, 149 people added to Westin stay contest, 435 prizes claimed, and 159 coupons redeemed.

The Economic Development office just kicked off an economic and business development public survey. The Cape hosted a Resilience Rally for the anniversary of Hurricane Ian and had 2,000 residents attend. They collected 2,500 pounds of food items for donations.

Jeff Hauge, Town of Fort Myers Beach, Cultural Parks and Recreation Director, shared an update on the Town of Fort Myers Beach. The Town held a remembrance ceremony on the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Ian. They unveiled the new iconic Times Square clock which is an exact replica of the original. The wavy wall in Times Square received a fresh coat of paint, and new palm trees have been planted in the Times Square area as well. The Mound House is open Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday for museum tours and the grounds are open daily. The Mound House hosts two FGCU tours per week as well as home school tours and general kayaking tours. Businesses have been reopening, and traffic has been increasing on Fort Myers Beach. The Town is currently working to restore the Newton Park beach accesses, restrooms, and replacing signage and garbage and recycling containers. Bay Oaks Little League ball field is complete and will reopen October 25. Bay Oaks will host a Fright Night Halloween event on October 20 from 4:30-6:30pm and will include a Trunk or Treat, bounce houses, food vendors, costume contests and more. Thank you to the VCB for bringing the Island Hopper Songwriter Festival back to the island this year, everything went so well, and people really enjoyed the live music.

Jason Freeman, Town of Fort Myers Beach, Public Works Director, thanked the TDC for all their ongoing support of beach maintenance activities. With the support of TDC grant funds, the Town has been able to supply portable bathrooms for visitors in the Times Square area and other beach accesses on the island. The Town is looking at replacing a restroom trailer for the Palm Avenue beach access as well as review options for restrooms at Newton Park. The Town is working hard to restore beach accesses, native plantings, and signage. The Town appreciates all the support that the TDC and VCB have given us.

Report of the executive director

Tamara Pigott, VCB executive director, reported the preliminary resort tax collected for August 2023 was \$1,876,067, a 38.4% decrease over August 2022 preliminary collections of \$3,043,772. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$34,612,306 a decrease of 46.3% year-over-year.

Pigott also reported that the average hotel occupancy rate for August 2023 was 62.4%, which is up 7.1% from August 2022. The average daily rate for August 2023 was \$123.82, down 7.1% from August 2022 and RevPAR for August 2023 was \$77.32, down 0.6% from August 2022.

For vacation rentals, the average occupancy rate for August 2023 was 18%, which is down 39.7% from August 2022. The average daily rate for August 2023 was \$161, down 26.4% from August 2022 and RevPAR for August 2023 was \$28, down 55.7% from August 2022.

During August 2023, 601,542 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport, a decrease of 3.1% compared to August 2022.

Communications report

Ray Sarracino, VCB communications director, reported that coverage and unique views per month (UVM) numbers remained strong during the months of July through Sept. 2023. Island Hopper coverage resulted in 1.4 billion unique views, quarterly impressions came in at 2,924,910,997, and year-to-date impressions

totaled 5,692,850,400. Aug. through Sept. brought six international journalists and one domestic journalist to the destination to cover tourism-related topics. We received notable coverage during the fourth quarter from the UK Daily Mail, Conde Nast Traveler, and ABC7 morning show Island Hopper Songwriter Fest interviews with Jackie Parker and Miriam Dotson. Upcoming activities include hosting travel journalist Michael Meyers, a domestic journalist familiarization tour (FAM), and a German travel journalist FAM.

Sales report

Jill Vance, VCB sales director, reported that the team has attained all six sales goals for FY22-23. She shared highlights of successful third-quarter group media buys and sales activities. The sales team attended a variety of in-person meeting planner and travel trade shows, including the Florida Society of Association Executives Annual Conference, Destination Southeast, and the West Coast Florida Travel Agency Sales Mission. Vance also presented upcoming sales activities for October through December including IMEX America, NTA Travel Exchange and American Express INTERaction. Charm Evans, global sales manager, provided a recap on the sales activities including Air Canada Vacations Showcase, Denmark and Sweden Travel Advisor dinner events and the Scandinavian Fam group. Evans also presented an update on the international sales activities such as the Visit USA UK Roadshow and Brand USA's Travel Week.

Visitor Services report

Simone Behr, VCB director of visitor services, reported that the Tourism Ambassador volunteers assisted 51,794 visitors during the fourth quarter of FY22-23. In August, Visitor Services hosted the 23rd Annual Elaine McLaughlin Outstanding Hospitality Service awards honoring our tourism hospitality heroes at the Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village. On September 19th, VCB volunteers celebrated National Talk Like a Pirate Day at RSW by handing out shell necklaces and pirate favors to the traveling public. Visitor Services has recruited several new volunteers who are currently in training. Thank you to many of our industry partners who are hosting our volunteers for their fall destination education training.

TDC member items

- Nigel Fullick asked how we determine the effect of the war in Gaza on international travel to the area? Fullick shared that the 24th Annual Veteran's Day celebration is coming up for Bonita Springs. Downtown businesses in Bonita Springs will be holding a Halloween event on October 31.
- Dan Allers shared that Jason and Jeff covered the majority of his report and added that the Town will be having fireworks again this year thanks to a generous donation from an island resident.
- Jay Johnson shared that the FRLA is hosting High School Taco Cookoff at Shangri-La Springs in Bonita Springs at 5pm today and there are still tickets available for purchase.
- Bill Waichulis congratulated Sanibel for the Conde Nest Reader's Choice Award and Brian Kramer for the Hyatt's hotel award.
- Fran Myers shared that she sold the Red Coconut RV Resort and the company that bought it is a good quality family company. She is working with the new company in the capacity of a business partner.
- Bill Steinke shared that Cape Coral will be having Trunk or Treat event at City Hall on October 27th and a Veteran's Day parade on November 11th.
- Holly Smith congratulated Tony Lapi on his Tourism Hall of Fame award at the 2023 Governor's Conference and thanked him for all he has done for the community over the years. Congratulations to the VCB on winning the top Henry Award for the Good Day Campaign in direct marketing. Great job to the VCB staff for Island Hopper and thanks to everyone involved in free toll Sundays. Industry appreciation Awards are presented by the Horizon Foundation on October 27th at the Caloosa Sound Convention Center, please attend if you can. Smith shared that she will be traveling to Washington D.C. on Federal, State, and City business for local grant opportunities. Recent post Hurricane-Ian data shows

that there are currently 1,000 people living on Sanibel, 207 short-term lodging units are available. Currently, there is 25% of our 2600 short-term rentals will be operational by 2025 season.

- Larry Fiesel shared that Estero will be having a Veteran's Day celebration on November 11 including an American made car show and free hotdogs. Congratulations to Tony Lapi on his Tourism Hall of Fame award.
- Tony Lapi shared that the airport numbers have been a little bit down and wondered how full our planes are that are coming into RSW. Ben Siegel, RSW said that planes are 85-90% full which is considered full capacity. September numbers are up about 10-12% and FY up 15%. Lapi shared that United Way is kicking off their annual campaign.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:43 a.m.

Next TDC meeting

There is no TDC meeting in November due to the Annual Meeting. The next regularly scheduled TDC meeting will be held at **9 a.m. Thursday, December 14, 2023**, at the Lee County Admin East Building, Room 118, 2201 Second St., Fort Myers. To view a complete tax collections report, go to LeeVCB.com. Contact: Tamara Pigott, TPigott@leegov.com, Lee County VCB, 239-338-3500.