



TDC MEETING MINUTES

April 13, 2017

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass called the meeting to order at 9:01 a.m. Council members in attendance: Vice chairman René Affourtit, Anita Cereceda, Pamela Cronin, Colleen DePasquale, Mike Gibson, Brian Kramer, Tony Lapi, Fran Myers, Bill Waichulis and Rob Wells.

The TDC recognized 37 participants that recently earned the American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute's Certified Guest Service Professional (CGSP) designation. Dr. Nicole King, VCB tourism education manager, and Liz Linares, VCB customer service coordinator, announced that the total number of hospitality graduates to date is 491. King also presented a plaque of recognition to Fran Peters, owner and manager of Island Vacations of Sanibel & Captiva, Lee County's newest certified property. Island Vacations of Sanibel & Captiva is the third property in Lee County to receive the guest services gold property designation which means that all of its employees are CGSP certified.

René Affourtit made a motion, seconded by Fran Myers to approve the Feb. 9, 2017, TDC meeting minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

Public to be Heard

-Jeff Webb, president of the Lee County Hotel Association (LCHA), discussed his concerns about the current downward trend in tourism, mentioning possible contributing factors such as cold weather, water quality, Zika virus, beach construction, crowded beaches, travel bans, Brexit, the rise of the dollar, the cost of advertising during the fall election season. He asked the TDC to focus on why is Lee County is losing market shares in comparison to competing Florida counties. He said he was appreciative of the partnership and believes we can up with answers together to improve tourism trends.

-Elaine McLaughlin, chairman of Friends of Cayo Costa Island State Park, asked the TDC to consider the two beach and shoreline requests that would benefit the park.

Municipalities to be Heard

None due to six county summit meeting.

VCB Executive Director's Report

- Tamara Pigott introduced four new VCB staff members:
 - Courtney Hersl, content marketing manager
 - Megan Contreras, communications manager
 - Jackie Parker, communications manager
 - Jill Vance, director of sales
- STR Report – Bed Tax collection for both January and February were down. January was down 9.6 % and February was down 3.4%, for a fiscal-year-to-date decrease of 3.3%. February's STR Report occupancy rate was down 1.8%; average daily rate was down 2.7%; Rev/PAR decrease of 4.4%.
- RSW Report – Passenger traffic was down 4.4% in February. For the calendar year to date, passenger traffic was down 3.7%.
- The Sales, Visitor Services and Communications reports were deferred so that more time could be devoted to the Marketing update and so that the public could have more time for questions.
- Beach & Shoreline update – The TDC will begin reviewing 19 project requests for the 2017-18 fiscal year funding. The total requested is \$8,539,679, while estimated funding available is \$10.7 million. The TDC Beach & Shoreline workshop will be held at 2:30 p.m. Thursday, April 27.
- Proposed date change for November TDC meeting – The Airport Special Management Committee meeting and the TDC both have scheduled meetings Nov. 9. Alternative dates for the TDC meeting could be Nov. 13 or 14. This will be an action item at the May 11 TDC meeting.

Marketing Update

Clayton Reid, CEO of MMGY Global, presented data to show what is going on generally in the tourism landscape and how MMGY is responding specifically in the market. Reid said there is no evidence that the Trump effect is having a meaningful impact on domestic travel. He noted that the U.S. Commerce Department and U.S. Travel Association (USTA) remain bullish around travel in 2017. The European economy is predicted to rebound in the second half of 2017 and we need to continue to invest in these markets. The Traveler Sentiment Index (TSI), a quarter by quarter look at future travel demand in the U.S., show that in the second and third quarter of 2017 there is reason to be optimistic in leisure, business and group travel. For leisure travel, middle class travelers and young families are saying they will spend less this year and luxury travelers and older travelers are intending to spend more in 2017. The TSI scoring system shows that people perceive the Lee County destination positively, giving it high marks in the time to travel and interest to travel categories. Data also shows that our rates are perceived to be too high for the product quality we deliver. It was noted that this data comes from both first-time visitors and return visitors.

In terms of what is seen from marketing paints a good picture for the next six months. Reid noted the six major things being done from a marketing standpoint, including new PR audiences, new brand campaign, increased paid social investment, market testing, segmentation targeting and content personalization.

Brian Ososky, VCB marketing director, spoke about the Islandology campaign and how marketing is targeting groups in a more casual way. He presented new campaign images that focus on the beaches and downtown Fort Myers. He also presented digital screenshots and shared recent print publications that have Islandology ads, including the German edition of Readers Digest, the annual Florida Fishing Guide, Family Circle, Midwest Living, Group Tour, National Geographic Traveler and Garden & Gun.

Ososky said the Islandology TV spots will begin airing Monday, April 17, 2017, in the Northeast and Midwest markets. There are eight, 15-second spots. Two of the 15-second spots will run back-to-back to fill the 30-second timeslots. The spots will also in June, to target the in-state family travel market.

There has been a 400% increase in paid social budget over last fiscal year, allowing us to communicate more with people one on one in a very targeted and personal way. A new paid weddings campaign will also be rolled out later this fiscal year.

Marketing is working in four test markets – Chicago, Minneapolis, Tampa and Los Angeles – to gauge performance when delivering market-specific content. While it's not a direct-flight market, Los Angeles and California keeps coming up in our web data, so we decided to do some testing.

Reid said that Brand USA data shows that pockets of Europe are going to resurge into the U.S. and their economies are going to strengthen the second part of the year. Germany, always strong for Florida, we are testing in Scandinavia because there is interest, their economies have fared better and outbound travel is better than a lot of Western Europe.

In segmentation targeting, Reid said that one-third of all travel decisions are made based on influence in digital marketing. But which one third to focus on is the question. With Experian, MMGY has teamed up to collect data to look at travel behavior for Lee County. Six key data segments include country streamers (digital music listeners), dog owners, family amusement park visitors, gardening/wine enthusiasts, photographers and canoe/kayak/water activities. We believe that people in these categories have a higher propensity to enjoy what we have in Lee County. Advertising will be targeted in the Islandology campaign to these specific niche areas.

Trey Stanley, MMGY account supervisor, discussed custom content to key markets. Since last fall, pages per visit are increasing from two to three. With that, people are spending more time on the website, up 74%. The bounce rate is down 27%.

For the summer, Reid said some of the strategies include new assets to the Islandology campaign, a regional Allegiant Air partnership, expanding National Seashell Day, Travelocity Gnome visit, Scandinavian market testing and the summer shellcation promotion.

TDC Member Items

- Pigott said the one-page report on water quality, called the Lee Board of County Commissioners Investment in Water-Related Project, April 11, will be part of a presentation will from Lee County Natural Resources next month.
- Travel Rally, from 4-7 p.m. May 2 at Lakes Park.
- There will be a brand reveal by the Mainsail Hotel for the new downtown hotel at Sidney and Berne Davis Art Center at 10:30 a.m. April 20.

The meeting adjourned at 10:54 a.m.

Next TDC meeting

The next TDC meeting will be held at 9 a.m. Thursday, May 11, 2017, at the Lee County Admin East building, first floor conference room 118, 2201 Second Street, Fort Myers, FL 33901.

To view a complete tax collections report, go to www.LeeVCB.com. Contact: Tamara Pigott, TPigott@leegov.com, Lee County VCB, 239-338-3500.