



THE BEACHES OF
**FORT MYERS
AND SANIBEL**

TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
TDC MEETING MINUTES

October 10, 2019

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass, chair, called the Lee County Tourist Development Council (TDC) meeting to order at 9:01 a.m.

Council members in attendance: Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass, John McLain, Fran Myers, Pamela Cronin, Tony Lapi, Colleen DePasquale, Robert Wells III, Bill Waichulis and Brian Kramer. Anita Cereceda was excused.

Fran Myers made a motion to approve the Aug. 8, 2019 TDC meeting minutes. Jon McLain seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

The newest CGSP participants of Guests First recognized

Dr. Nicole King-Smith, VCB tourism & hospitality training manager, recognized 27 newly Certified Guest Service Professionals (CGSP), bringing the total to 805 CGSP graduates in Lee County.

Public to be heard

None to be heard.

Municipalities to be heard

Michelle Dean, City of Cape Coral, gave an update on the General Obligation (GO) bond that is funding major parks and recreation improvements. The seven combined public input meetings have been completed for the seven new neighborhood parks, opening by the end of 2021. Cape Coral is also currently in the first round of public input meetings for three community parks which include revisions to the Yacht Club, Yellow Fever Creek Preserve, Lake Kennedy Racquet Center and Festival Park. The second round of public input for the community parks will take place in November/December. The Cape Coral Art Studio also recently underwent renovations with grant funds received from Cultural Facilities that the state of Florida matched. The reveal is from 5 to 7 p.m. Oct. 11. Other upcoming events include, Bike Night, 5-10 p.m. Oct. 12 and the Coconut Festival, Nov. 7-10. Dean thanked the TDC for its support of the City of Cape Coral.

Report of the Executive Director

Tamara Pigott, VCB executive director, reported the preliminary resort tax collected for August 2019 was \$1,821,441 a 26.1% increase over August 2018's preliminary collections of \$1,444,873. Both 2018 and 2019's numbers exceed resort tax collected in 2017. Fiscal year-to-date preliminary tourist tax collections are \$41,114,633, an increase of 1.2% year-over-year.

Pigott also reported that the average occupancy rate in August 2019 was 55%, which is up 4% from August 2018 (52.9%). The average daily rate for August 2019 was \$115.45, up 8% from August 2018 (\$106.88) and RevPAR for August 2019 was \$63.49, up 12.3% from August 2018 (\$56.51).

During August 2019, 526,519 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW). Figures represent an increase of 5.1% in passenger traffic compared to August 2018. Year-to-date, passenger traffic is up 8.4% from the same period last year.

Domestic and International Sales update

Jill Vance, VCB sales director, reported that all but one of the fiscal year 2018-2019 sales goals were attained/exceeded. Vance also presented the final results of the group market segment production that showed the association market to be the destination's strongest group market segment. She presented highlights of fourth-quarter activities for the domestic group, travel agent and consumer sales. They included Connect Marketplace, the Minnesota Twins meeting planner client event and Southern Women's Show. Vance also presented upcoming sales activities for the new fiscal year including Connect Medical and the Dream Destinations Travel Show.

Stefanie Zinke, VCB international sales manager, reported that over the summer, the focus in UK and Scandinavia was the growth of our certified users on our e-Learning platform which was achieved with a 12% increase, as well as in-destination hosting of travel agent FAMs. In Canada, the VCB was featured on TV and online media through OpenJaw and a partnership with AirCanada Vacations. In September, the VCB participated in the inaugural Brand USA Travel week in London and conducted 34 meetings with buyers from nine European markets.

Bill Waichulis asked for an update on how the Thomas Cook liquidation could affect tourism to our area. Zinke replied that Hace Travel purchased the retail component of the company's UK brand, giving over 2,000 Thomas Cook employees their jobs back and the air travel component is still to be decided. Zinke mentioned that the total impact is uncertain, however, Thomas Cook bookings did not account for much of our visitors bookings with preliminary numbers around 600 room nights in 2019. Thomas Cook's German brand has the opportunity to receive assistance through a government provided bridge loan, with a good outlook.

Visitors Services update

Judi Durant, VCB visitor services director, reported that between July and September, 28,856 visitors were greeted and assisted while traveling through RSW. Five conferences and events were supported with volunteer Tourism Ambassador teams and four Team Tourism Summer Lecture Series workshops for tourism partners were completed. Over 500 tourism nominees and 30 winners for customer service excellence were honored at the Elaine McLaughlin Outstanding Hospitality Service Awards. Durant mentioned that the Pink Shell Beach Resort & Marina was the most inquired about property and United Airlines has a new flight coming into RSW.

Communications update

Francesca Donlan, VCB communications director, showed previews of two broadcast travel shows featuring the destination. "Raw Travel" devotes its Season 7 premiere 30-minute episode to Lee County. The show will air locally Oct. 12 at 6:30 a.m. and 2 p.m. on WXCW CW 46 and 1 p.m. on WINK CBS 11. The show airs in 173 markets nationally. Upcoming episodes of "Weekend Explorer," seen on PBS and Cox's YurView, will broadcast two, six-and-a-half-minute spots. Both shows were on-location in July and August. September included FAMs from Canada, China and Germany. A group of U.S. journalists visited during Island Hopper Songwriter Fest and have already produced social media and print coverage. Donlan said Fort Myers was listed as the No. 1 Best Place to Retire in 2020 by U.S. News & World Report. She then recognized Shelley Crant, sales & public relations manager, Florida Travel Marketing, for receiving the Golden Glow Award for Outstanding Individual at the Association of Great Lakes Outdoor Writers Annual Conference in September.

Island Hopper Songwriter Fest update

Pigott reported the preliminary attendance numbers for Island Hopper Songwriter Fest at 21,000 this year, up 17% from 2018's 18,000 in attendance. In terms of confirmed room nights, the VCB is still

awaiting occupancy surveys from some industry partners, but the preliminary numbers are at 714 room nights this year. Up 25% from the 573 room nights in 2018. This year's event saw 88 songwriters, up from 83 last year. App downloads were also up 50% with 4,200 downloads this year, up from 2,800 in 2018. Full report to come. Pigott also thanked VCB staff for all their hard work on the event.

Pigott welcomed Ray Sarracino as the VCB's new communications manager. Sarracino has over 20 years of communication and journalism experience. He most recently served as public affairs specialist for the Department of Defense at the U.S. Southern Command in Miami. Prior to that, he spent 20 years in the newspaper industry as a graphic artist for several newspapers and served part time as public affairs specialist in the Air Force Reserve. Sarracino has lived in Southwest Florida since 2000.

Pigott mentioned an invitation was sent from the Mound House to all TDC members to celebrate the attraction's listing on the National Register of Historic Places from 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 14.

Strategic Plan Update

Pamela Johnson, VCB deputy director, presented an update on the 2017-2020 strategic plan. The goals remain ambitious and, given that the destination experienced a hurricane and water quality issues over the past two years, modifications to the plan have been made. The VCB is committed to the plan's critical success factors, which include an increase in annual visitor spending, growth in revenue per available room and growth in year-round occupancy. This is a living document and the VCB is determined to get as far as it can with the outlined goals. Full strategic plan is available upon request.

John McLain posed a question in regard to creating a new strategic plan. Pigott responded that the VCB will begin to develop a new strategic plan in 2020 that will be a five-year plan, as opposed to the current four-year plan. She added the VCB does complete an annual plan every year.

Old Business

A formal letter of support for the reauthorization of VISIT FLORIDA was submitted on behalf of the Lee BoCC and Lee TDC to the President and Speaker of the Florida Senate on Aug. 20, 2019. There is no formal update, however Colleen DePasquale mentioned that Dana Young, CEO of VISIT FLORIDA, thanked the TDC and the county for being the first to submit a letter of reauthorization. It has been used as an example, in the hopes that other counties will submit letters of support. Pigott added that VISIT FLORIDA amplifies our destination and is important to tourism in Lee County.

New Business

Judie Zimomra, Sanibel city manager, presented Sanibel's pilot Red Algae Removal Program to the TDC. The goal of the program was to find a less invasive method to remove red drift algae before it accumulates on the beach, as rakes are disruptive to the area's wildlife.

After discussion, a motion was made by Myers to reimburse the city of Sanibel the total amount of \$14,748. These funds will come out of Emergency Beach Clean Up funds, not reserves. The motion was seconded by Tony Lapi, which passed unanimously.

It was noted by the TDC that requests for funds for such projects should be presented ahead of the project, not for reimbursement. The motion moved forward as this was an unusual circumstance.

TDC Member Items

- Myers reminded the TDC about the upcoming Roar Offshore event and reported on the airport hotlist. She asked Carol Obermeier, RSW director of air service development, to present on air service news.
- Waichulis recognized the VCB staff for a successful Island Hopper Songwriter Fest that the Pink Shell is thankful to have benefited from. Pink Shell is listed as the No. 4 resort in the state by Condé Nast.
- Kramer reminded the TDC about FRLA's upcoming Taco Cook-Off on Oct. 15 at the Burrough's Home. Tickets available on the FRLA website.
- Lapi thanked the VCB staff its hard work on the Island Hopper Songwriter Fest. Tween Waters had repeat business from last year's event.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 10:33 a.m.

Next TDC meeting

The next TDC meeting is at 9 a.m. Thursday, Nov. 14, 2019. The meeting will be held in Room 118, 2201 Second St., Fort Myers. To view a complete tax collections report, go to www.LeeVCB.com. Contact: Tamara Pigott, TPigott@leegov.com, Lee County VCB, 239-338-3500.