

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: TOURISM

DATE: MAY 27, 2009

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

SUPERVISORS TESSIER
BELDEN
KENNY
MERLINO
SIMMES
STRAINER

COMMITTEE MEMBER ABSENT:

SUPERVISOR SHEEHAN

OTHERS PRESENT:

REPRESENTING THE TOURISM DEPARTMENT:

KATE JOHNSON, DIRECTOR
PETER GIRARD, CREATIVE DIRECTOR
TANYA BRAND, GROUP TOUR PROMOTER
JOANN MCKINSTRY, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF
ADMINISTRATIVE & FISCAL SERVICES
JOAN SADY, CLERK OF THE BOARD
SUPERVISOR CHAMPAGNE
SUPERVISOR TAYLOR
SUPERVISOR SOKOL
SUPERVISOR PITKIN
FRED AUSTIN, THE FORT WILLIAM HENRY
LUISA CRAIGE-SHERMAN, WARREN COUNTY COUNCIL OF
CHAMBERS
BRIAN COLE, CLARION INN & SUITES
BOB SGARLATA, SIX FLAGS LODGE
KERGY CLAUS, SIX FLAGS LODGE
LINDA MERLINO, TOWN OF LAKE LUZERNE
JOANNE COLLINS, LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

Mr. Tessier called the meeting of the Tourism Committee to order at 9:32 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Merlino, seconded by Mr. Kenny and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the April 29, 2009 Committee meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Kate Johnson, Director of the Tourism Department, who distributed copies of the agenda to the Committee members; *a copy of the agenda is on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Johnson requested permission to make changes to the Tourism Department sign located in front of the Municipal Center. She stated that the purpose of the change would be to add wording to indicate that visitor information was available in the Tourism Office. Ms. Johnson stated that she had spoken to Frank Morehouse, Superintendent of Building and Grounds, who indicated that space was available on the sign to add some additional text.

Mr. Tessier stated that a resolution was not required and advised Ms. Johnson to submit her request to Mr. Morehouse.

Item two presented by Ms. Johnson pertained to the travel requirements of Tanya

Brand, Group Tour Promoter. She apprised that Ms. Brand traveled to Canada twice annually on behalf of the Tourism Department and that she did not have a passport. She stated that the cost for an enhanced drivers license for use by land and sea, or a passport were \$70 and \$100, respectively. Ms. Johnson requested permission to expend up to \$100 from her budget for same.

It was the consensus of the Committee that Ms. Johnson obtain the necessary documents required for Canadian travel for a staff member of the Tourism Department.

Next, Ms. Johnson apprised that the Tourism Department had launched an effort to collect feedback from individuals that represented area businesses who came into the Tourism Office. She reported that the findings indicated generally good activity for the period from April 28 to May 26, 2009 and noted that her staff had diligently kept businesses stocked with print collateral. She referred the Committee to the data included in the agenda packets. She said the Tourism Department staff had been very busy with a higher than normal number of information requests. As a result of the increased volume of mailings, Ms. Johnson stated that volunteers from the Countryside Adult Home provided assistance with the mailing. With regard to the volume of interest in the form of inquiries, Ms. Johnson reported that the period from May 1 through May 26 had generated 40,939 visits to the website (VisitLakeGeorge.com), 437 downloads of the 2009 travel guide, and 2,045 downloads of the summer coupons. She noted the average time spent on our website by a viewer was five minutes and 74% were new visitors, which were excellent statistics. Currently, she said, the greatest number of referred visitors were derived from the VisitAdirondacks.com and the touxexpo.com ([Americade](http://Americade.com)) websites.

Ms. Johnson stated that Peter Girard, Creative Director, would proceed with a powerpoint presentation as Ms. Johnson continued her review. She stated the first electronic newsletter/bulletin was sent recently for the purpose of informing area businesses about some Departments' planned advertising efforts. She stated that distribution included 246 tourism related businesses which had provided their email addresses. She apprised that the results showed that 72% had viewed the newsletter which included multiple link choices, email blast information, coupons, articles, and a summary of the Family Summer Fun blast.

Continuing, Ms. Johnson reported that on May 13th an email blast was sent to 96,837 recipients and 16,700 of those were opened within the first three days which was the normal measurement criteria for success. She noted the average time spent on the site was 3.59 minutes which was impressive and evidenced the sites success in terms of interest and information content.

As a result of the excellent weather forecast for the Memorial Day holiday weekend, Ms. Johnson informed the Committee that on the Tuesday preceding the holiday, she and Mr. Girard made a decision to prepare and send an email blast which conveyed the weather forecast and the short drive to the Lake George region. Additionally, she said, the email blast showcased the indigenous beauty, diversity, and myriad offerings in the region which included golfing, hiking, fishing, and kayaking, to name a few. She conveyed the importance of the Department's ability to react and prepare information

blasts quickly in light of weather conditions.

Another strategy, Ms. Johnson noted, was the selection of pertinent images for the home page of the website. She apprised that just prior to the Memorial Day holiday, Mr. Girard changed the image to reflect the Memorial holiday parade and subsequently changed it to show rotating images of the area which showed a full range of activities and events.

New since the previous meeting, Ms. Johnson reported that two press releases had been sent, the first of which pertained to Canadian Friendship Week (May 17 to 22, 2009) which was sent to forty Canadian editors. The second, she apprised, was a release containing the Rates and Dates brochure targeted at both domestic and Canadian populations.

With regard to recent publicity received, Ms. Johnson announced that the New York Post website (NYPOST.com) advertised one hundred summer destinations within a six and one half hour drive of New York City and Lake George, New York was number two on the list.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Ms. Brand who stated that there were typically no promotional shows held in May; therefore, she said, the time was used for solicitation of the 2010 planner which had a June 19th deadline for advertising.

With respect to tourists who made a last minute decision for a short excursion to the area, Ms. Brand reported that she had attended the AMTRAK New York By Rail Day held on May 19, 2009 which yielded very positive results. She said her booth was well attended and she received confirmation from several attendees regarding their planned itineraries to Lake George.

Regarding the mission to partner with the region, Ms. Brand informed the Committee of the Department's continued marketing initiative for same. She reported that a postcard was created which contained visual interest and color and would appear in the August issue of Group Tour Magazine. The post-card, she said, was a lead-in to the regional website where viewers could sign up for an on-line FAM (familiarization) Tour slated for September 23, 2009. She added that another incentive post-card would be distributed, to encourage booth attendance at the American Bus Association (ABA) show to be held in January.

Ms. Brand apprised that several new links were added to the website to provide information to group leaders and tour operators regarding dining options and other attractions. Ms. Brand stated that she updated the site as often as necessary and welcomed new information which could be added efficiently and quickly. Further, she said, a sports venue link had been created to appeal to families who visited the area for students' sporting events, and who wished to enhance their trip with vacation activities. She noted that two press releases were issued relating to the two new links as outlined above.

Pertaining to the 2008 Canadian shows, Ms. Brand stated her plan to make follow-up

phone calls to assess the plans and interests of Canadian tour operators for 2009 and 2010, respectively. She stated she was working on two new itineraries for agri-tours (agricultural tours) and shopping tours.

Pertaining to a recent tour given by Pam Morin of Adirondack Adventures & Tours, who hosted 45 adults from Brooklyn, New York, Ms. Brand noted that she assisted with the Glens Falls portion of the tour which included a visit and picture with Jack Diamond, Mayor of the City of Glens Falls, and visits to the Davidson Brothers Restaurant and The New York Wine Cork. The Lake George portion, she said, included visits to the Tiki Motor Lodge and a cruise with the Lake George Steamboat Company.

In an effort to generate enthusiasm, Ms. Brand expounded that a new Casino theme would be presented for this years upcoming meeting planner show, the Empire State Society of Association Executives (ESSAE) show to be held in Saratoga, New York. She said that attendance would include Six Flags, The Queensbury Hotel, The Fort William Henry Resort, and the Lake George Steamboat Company. She noted that Vicki Eastwood, Producer for the Lake George Dinner Theater, would provide props which would include a Wheel of Fortune and giant dice with a lighted sign to create thematic visual interest. The goal, she said, was to encourage attendees to stop at each booth and she noted that a raffle incentive was planned to encourage participation.

Next, Ms. Brand stated that the Office was notified that a group of 18 children from a New Jersey YMCA would spend one week at Camp Chingachgook for sailing instruction. The group, she said, received welcome bags from the Tourism Department.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Luisa Craige-Sherman, liaison for the Warren County Council of Chambers, who apprised the Committee of the monthly dinner meeting held last week at George Henry's in Warrensburg. The dinner, she said, was hosted by the Warrensburg Chamber of Commerce. She thanked Messrs. Kenny, Merlino and Thomas for their attendance and support at the dinner meeting.

Ms. Craige-Sherman reiterated that the Tourism Department's report evidenced a strong interest in the region as a drive-to location. She apprised that the information booth located in Penn Station, New York City, quickly exhausted their brochure supply and additional brochures were expedited.

Ms. Craige-Sherman announced that in recognition of the region as a prime destination for short excursions, the Council of Chambers offered free events which proved successful in attracting visitors. She stated that planning was underway for a hospitality seminar to be held on June 23, 2009 at the Wingate, which was funded by revenue from Warren County Occupancy Tax. She noted that the full day event would provide a morning and afternoon session and would address front-line hospitality customer service which accounted for the retention and growth of tourism.

Ms. Craig-Sherman apprised that Sharon Sano, Senior Employment Counselor with the Warren County Employment & Training Administration (ETA), spoke at the aforementioned dinner about seasonal employment opportunities available through ETA. She noted the next meeting would be held at the Northern Lake George Resort in Hague, New York.

Ms. Johnson asked Ms. Craige-Sherman what information sources she planned to utilize for the hospitality seminar and Ms. Craige-Sherman stated that she planned to utilize a range of various databases from around the County such as those from Warren County and the Adirondack Regional Chamber of Commerce. Ms. Johnson offered her assistance and willingness to share resources and materials from the Tourism Department. Ms. Craige-Sherman said that she would inform the educational committee of Ms. Johnson's offer to provide assistance. Ms. Craige-Sherman apprised that the projection of footage of the region would be an excellent back-drop during the check-in period and between sessions.

Mr. Merlino asked if an email blast had been done for the Elvis Festival and Ms. Johnson expounded that an email blast specifically for the Elvis Festival had not been sent; however, she stated, information about the Festival was included with information which covered other activities and events. Ms. Johnson stated that a special email for this purpose could be prepared.

Mr. Belden stated that several Supervisors on the Department of Public Works (DPW) Committee met recently with the Upper Hudson River Railroad (UHRR) representatives, and discussed promotional and marketing techniques. Mr. Pitkin stated that he felt the UHRR staff lacked marketing expertise. Ms. Johnson offered to contact them and she noted that their website did not contain current information. She recognized the efforts made by the UHRR staff and she said they were aware of Warren County's programs and the County's interest in their success. Ms. Johnson stated that it was her desire to see the UHRR take greater advantage of County programs to increase tourist train business.

Mr. Kenny inquired about the status of the summer email blast and if the Degas exhibit at the Hyde Collection would be featured. Ms. Johnson replied affirmatively and noted that the next email blast would focus on the arts and would be available to view next month. She stated that she would take the necessary action to confirm inclusion of the Degas exhibit in the blast.

As there was no further business to come before the Tourism Committee, on motion made by Mr. Kenny and seconded by Mr. Belden, Mr. Tessier adjourned the meeting at 10:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joanne Collins, Legislative Office Specialist