

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: TOURISM

DATE: APRIL 2 , 2007

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

SUPERVISORS TESSIER
BELDEN
GABRIELS
KENNY
SHEEHAN

OTHERS PRESENT:

KATE JOHNSON, TOURISM DIRECTOR
LINDA WOHLERS, CREATIVE DIRECTOR
HAL PAYNE, COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND FISCAL
SERVICES
JOAN SADY, CLERK
SUPERVISORS CAIMANO
F. THOMAS
LUISA SHERMAN, WARREN COUNTY COUNCIL OF CHAMBER
FRED AUSTIN, FORT WILLIAM HENRY
AMANDA ALLEN, LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

SUPERVISORS STEC
MERLINO

Mr. Tessier called the meeting of the Tourism Committee to order at 10:30 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Belden, seconded by Mr. Kenny and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the February 28th Committee meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

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

Ms. Johnson noted that the meeting would be for informational purposes only as her agenda included no resolution requests. She reminded the Committee that the meeting had originally been scheduled for March 28th, but had been re-scheduled subsequent to a fire within the Municipal Center. Ms. Johnson stated that due to the re-scheduling the public relations firm, Sawchuk Brown Associates, had been unable to attend the meeting and their presentation was postponed until the next Committee meeting.

Although the region was still in between seasons, Ms. Johnson apprised, the Tourism Department was in full swing for their Spring and Summer promotions. She said that the first newsprint ads for the season had begun on March 4th with advertisements in the *New York Daily News*, *USA Weekend* and *The Hartford Courant*, copies of which were included in the agenda, and on file with the minutes, and there were many more to come. Ms. Johnson said that these ads encouraged readers to contact the Tourism Department for information on the area via telephone or the internet. She apprised that consumer magazine ads had also been placed in the April issues of *National Geographic Traveler* and *Cooking Life* magazines and the May issues of *Ladies Home Journal*, *Better Homes & Gardens*, *Camping Life*, *AAA Car & Travel* and *Readers Digest*. She mentioned that the majority of these ads included online advertising and all of the creative displays had been produced by Linda Wohlers, Creative Director, on an in-house basis. Ms. Johnson stated that she would continue to present the published advertisements at future meetings as she felt it was important for the Committee to view the content of the publications, their placement and the surrounding ads. She noted that in addition to the printed ads internet, television and radio advertisements had already been planned and would be unveiled in the near future.

Mr. Belden noted that the advertisement in *The Hartford Courant* was not as large as the one promoting the

Catskill region and he asked if a bigger ad might be considered. Ms. Johnson replied that although size was a valid concern, she felt that if the responses to the two ads were compared the interest in the smaller Lake George promotion would be just as well received, if not better, than that of the Catskill Region. She added that in some instances bigger was not always better. Ms. Wohlers stated that the ad was intended to include more mystique than the surrounding promotions, drawing the attention of the reader to the Lake George advertisement.

Ms. Johnson advised that the first of the email broadcasts was sent on March 19th and all of the Supervisors with email addresses listed should have received it. She explained that the agenda included a chart reflecting an increase in the flow of visitors to the www.visitlakegeorge.com website subsequent to the email blast. Ms. Johnson said that the email had been designed by Ms. Wohlers and the IT (Information Technology) Department had worked flawlessly to launch the broadcast, which had been a huge success. She noted that 79,000 qualified email addresses had been acquired from persons interested in the Lake George area of which only 2,000 had been discarded as invalid. Ms. Johnson apprised that of the 77,000 broadcast recipients only 250 unsubscribed, which was an outstanding result. Comparatively, she noted, the database for the Adirondack Region, which combined eight Counties, contained only 80,000 valid email addresses with no duplications between the two databases. Ms. Johnson stated that several additional email broadcasts were planned for 2007.

A copy of the updated 2007 Rates & Dates Brochure cover was also included in the agenda, and is on file with the minutes, Ms. Johnson apprised. She noted that the new look was produced in a much more whimsical fashion, hoping to attract more interest and readers. Ms. Johnson advised that Ms. Wohlers had used various typefaces, colors and photographs to design the new brochure which would be delivered on April 20th.

Ms. Johnson stated that in addition to the changes to the Rates & Dates Brochure, the Tourism brochure envelope had also been revamped to include seasonal photographs. She explained that the envelope would be changed according to the season and the agenda included a copy of the summer envelope design. Ms. Johnson noted that this was the first time a photograph had been included on a Tourism envelope.

Referring to the copy of the internet advertisement included in the agenda, promoting area whitewater attractions, Mr. Caimano asked if further information and dates would be included. Ms. Johnson replied that by clicking on the appropriate portion of the promotion a listing of whitewater rafting facilities and dates of operation were displayed; she added that the internet advertisement was very user-friendly.

Discussion ensued.

Ms. Johnson apprised that the some changes had been made to the Consumer Trade Show schedule for 2007 based on history and attendance. She said that the majority of the Shows scheduled were now over and they had been well received at every exhibiting destination. Ms. Johnson announced that the Tourism Department had made their first appearance at the New York Times Travel Show which was held February 23rd through February 25th. She explained that this was a very large exhibition which showcased destinations world-wide and had included an aisle for New York destinations for the first time in its four year existence; *a copy of the exhibitors present at the Trade Show is included in the agenda and on file with the minutes.* The first night of the Travel Show, Ms. Johnson apprised, was open for tour operators, travel agents, writers and such and in that night alone she had captured 50 business cards for future use.

Ms. Johnson expounded that at the two-day consumer portion of the Show 725 packets of information on the Lake George area were distributed. She added that her Department's booth had been overwhelmed by the response received, distributing all of the materials brought to the convention and returning with a considerable list of individuals requesting mailed information. Ms. Johnson said that 36 Warren County businesses had also signed up to have their informational brochures distributed at the meeting, which she considered to be a great success. As per the statistics given by the New York Times, Ms. Johnson apprised that a new record had been set for attendance in the amount of 29,434 visitors along with 450 exhibitors and an audience including 8,102 trade professionals. This was considered to be one of the largest shows of this kind in the world, she added.

Ms. Johnson stated that her group would be attending the New York Times Travel Show again in 2008; however, they would not return to the Adventure in Travel Show, partially due to the fact that representatives of the Lake George Chamber of Commerce and Gore Mountain attended that show and because the exhibition fees were considerable.

Another success for the Tourism Department, Ms. Johnson stated, was the Summer TV Coupon fulfillment which they would display at the next Committee meeting. She apprised that 26 businesses had signed up to participate in the coupon advertisement at a cost of \$250 each. Ms. Johnson explained that viewers could access the coupons by either calling the Tourism Department for mailed information or by visiting the www.visitlakegeorge.com website and downloading them. The thought behind the program, she stated, was that a great value could be obtained by the combination of the coupons which would assist in offsetting increased gasoline costs. Ms. Johnson noted that only 12 businesses had participated in the program in 2006 and that number had more than doubled for 2007.

Discussion ensued.

Ms. Johnson stated that although Pam Morin, Group Tour Promoter, was not present at the meeting a copy of her Group Tour and Meeting/Convention Update Report had been included in the agenda for the Committee's review and a copy is on file with the minutes. She asked the Committee to review the information at their leisure and contact Ms. Morin with any questions they might have.

Mr. Caimano noted that he had received an email from Roberta Daab, of the Fort William Henry Resort and Conference Center, which explained that she had received a considerable amount of business from the Chicago Affordable Tradeshow. Mr. Caimano read the email, *a copy of which is included in the agenda and on file with the minutes*, which stated that 350 follow-up letters had been sent, 16 RFP's (Request for Proposals) responded to and \$75,000 worth of business had been booked for 2008. Mr. Caimano stated that he appreciated the correspondence, which led him to believe that if area properties would simply follow-up on regional events and inquiries, more business could be gained.

Referring to the 'Sour Grapes to Sweet Success' portion of Ms. Morin's report, which referenced the less than pleasurable experience of a New Jersey tour operator and longtime visitor to the area at a local property, Mr. Caimano asked what the standard procedure was for handling such complaints. Ms. Johnson replied that first and foremost, a written account of the complaint was requested followed by contact with the property owner disclosing the complaint and asking for a written plan of action, if any. Ms. Johnson stated that this was the best course of action available as the Tourism Department was in no position to pass judgement in such matters. She noted that the complaints were not shared with the Lake George Chamber of Commerce,

although that group might very well receive the same information from the unhappy party as they were a more widely known resource for such matters.

Ms. Johnson stated that the complaint procedure had been in place for some time and she asked if it was appropriate; Mr. Tessier replied that it was, although he added that most complaints were directed to the Lake George Chamber of Commerce directly. Mr. Tessier noted that compared to the level of visitors attracted to the area the number of complaints were very few.

Ms. Johnson asked Luisa Sherman, member of the Warren County Council of Chamber, how they dealt with such complaints and Ms. Sherman stated that they proceeded in a very similar manner, forwarding a letter to the property owner explaining the issue and asking for resolution. She noted that correspondence was also sent to the offended party noting that their concern was being addressed. She added that a file was kept for each property listing complaints received and those files were reviewed more extensively if a set number of complaints was reached.

Ms. Johnson pointed out that the majority of the negative feedback received was with respect to refused refunds subsequent to a groups inability to reach the area.

Ms. Wohlers apprised that a copy of "I Love NY's Culinary Tour Across New York State" brochure was included in the agenda, and a copy is on file with the minutes. She stated that the publication was categorized by location and included a roadmap of each area highlighting restaurants, events and other attractions along the way. Ms. Wohlers explained that it was the goal of the Tourism Department to expand upon this idea and develop a similar publication for Warren County in an effort to encourage visitors to explore the area and partake of all it had to offer. She added that they were also reaching out to area restaurants and attractions encouraging them to cooperate with one another in developing a type of tour between the two venues, whether it be by driving, boating, bicycling or hiking from one location to the other. Ms. Wohlers stated that such organized tours would draw increased interest in the two establishments and the points between, as well as prompt visitors out and about to explore and view some of the unknown facets of the area.

Discussion ensued.

Ms. Johnson stated that the Tourism Department's year in review information would be available for presentation at the next Committee meeting. She added that she'd had a very informative meeting with Todd Lunt, Human Resources Director, whom she felt was a great asset to the County. Ms. Johnson stated that she had learned a lot from the meeting and she would continue working with Mr. Lunt in the future.

Ms. Wohlers apprised that they had recently spent a day shooting still photography in four separate locations within the Towns of Bolton, Chestertown and Warrensburg, and examples of the images captured were included in the agenda and on file with the minutes. She stated that they were very luck to have the ability to work with one of the areas premier photographers, who specialized in Tourism photography and also worked with Sandals Resort and Walt Disney World. Ms. Johnson noted that the yield received from the one day of shooting superceded what had been garnered in the past.

Ms. Wohlers advised that they would begin Summer photography and videography shortly with advertising placing emphasis on the fact that the area was located within three hours of many of the surrounding cities and also reinforcing the new "Bet' cha we can make you smile!" catch phrase. She noted that secondary ads

featuring more tranquil scenery and referencing the proximity of the area were also being used to gain a more sophisticated view of the region.

Ms. Johnson displayed a copy of the advertisement developed for the Elvis Festival program, a copy of which is included in the agenda and on file with the minutes, and she noted that Occupancy Tax funding was contributed to the event each year and in return, Warren County received free advertising space in the event's program. She said that 2007 would mark Warren County's third appearance in the Elvis Festival program and the redesigned promotion was intended to attract the event's visitors to the area prior to and after the Elvis Festival.

Mr. Tessier asked Ms. Sherman if she had anything to add and she stated that she was in attendance as a representative of the WCCC (Warren County Council of Chambers), acting as their designated liaison to Warren County. Ms. Sherman invited all of the Supervisors to attend the WCCC's monthly dinner meeting which would be held on April 26th at the Holiday Inn. She noted that a representative of Congresswoman Kirsten Gillibrand's Office would be attending the meeting also.

As there was no further business to come before the Tourism Committee, on motion made by Mr. Kenny and seconded by Mr. Sheehan, Mr. Tessier adjourned the meeting at 11:02 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Amanda Allen, Legislative Office Specialist