

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: TOURISM

DATE: OCTOBER 3, 2007

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

SUPERVISORS TESSIER
KENNY
SHEEHAN
STEC
MERLINO

OTHERS PRESENT:

REPRESENTING THE TOURISM DEPARTMENT:
KATE JOHNSON, DIRECTOR
LINDA WOHLERS, CREATIVE DIRECTOR
REPRESENTING SAWCHUCK BROWN ASSOCIATES:
KATE OSTERHOUT, ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE
WILLIAM THOMAS, CHAIRMAN
HAL PAYNE, COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATIVE &
FISCAL SERVICES
JOAN SADY, CLERK OF THE BOARD
SUPERVISOR SOKOL
SUPERVISOR VANNESS
FRANCIS X. O'KEEFE, COUNTY TREASURER
ROB HOSFORD, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
FRED AUSTIN, FORT WILLIAM HENRY
ALICE GREYER, DIRECTOR OF TOURISM FOR THE
CITY OF GLENS FALLS
CHARLENE DIRESTA, LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

SUPERVISORS BELDEN
GABRIELS

Mr. Tessier called the meeting of the Tourism Committee to order at 10:32 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Merlino, seconded by Mr. Kenny and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the August 23, 2007 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 apprised that the first item on the Agenda was a request to amend the 2007 County budget to increase estimated revenues and appropriations in the amount of \$5,615, to reflect the receipt of revenue from Travel Guide and Whitewater Rafting advertisements and the Group Tour Planner.

Motion was made by Mr. Kenny, seconded by Mr. Sheehan and carried unanimously to approve the request to amend the 2007 County budget, as outlined above, and to refer same to the Finance Committee. *A copy of the*

resolution request is on file with the minutes.

Ms. Johnson stated that the next item on the Agenda was to discuss the allocation of the Occupancy Tax penalties and interest. She added that the penalties and interest were currently credited to the General Fund and she felt they should be credited to the Tourism budget. She said this issue had been referred to the Finance Committee last month and they had referred it back to the Tourism Committee. She noted that the total penalties and interest collected from 2004 to date was \$37,516.58.

Mr. Tessier questioned if the discussion was just penalties or if it was penalties as well as interest earned from the bank. Mr. Kenny stated that the interest that was in question were interest charges on the penalties for late payments. He added that Frank O' Keefe, County Treasurer, had commented that the Treasurer's Office incurred expenses in the collection of Occupancy Tax and were allowed by law to retain 10% of the penalties and interest. Ms. Johnson stated that if expenses were incurred through postal mailings, the mailings could be done through the Tourism Department.

Mr. O' Keefe entered the meeting at 10:36 a.m.

Mr. Kenny informed Mr. O'Keefe that the topic of discussion was allocation of Occupancy Tax penalties and interest. Mr. O'Keefe said that the opinion of the Treasurer's Office was that penalties and interest should be credited to the General Fund and if the Treasurer's Department needed additional administrative funds, they could ask for them. Ms. Johnson asked if the Treasurer's Office was currently receiving administrative funds from Tourism. Mr. O'Keefe responded that the Treasurer's Office was allocated \$4,000 for the collection of Occupancy Tax, which did not fully cover their expenses. He added that the Treasurer's Office could allocate up to 10% of the funds, if necessary. He said that the administrative funds were used for postage, filing cabinets, paper and other administrative costs and he added, the costs of administering the Occupancy Tax funds were more than the \$4,000 allotted. He further said that there would be a full briefing on this subject at the Occupancy Tax Committee meeting later that day. Mr. Tessier questioned if Mr. O'Keefe would have a breakdown of all the administrative expenditures and he added, that if the costs were more than \$4,000, the Treasurer's Office was entitled to reimbursement for the excess. Mr. O'Keefe stated that as long as he was able to stay within the budget there would be no need to ask for additional funds.

Mr. Tessier apprised that the General Fund was comprised of Countywide dollars,

whereas Occupancy Tax funds were tourism dollars. Mr. O'Keefe said that it was up to the Committee where the funds were allocated; however, he reiterated, it was the opinion of the Treasurer's Office that the funds should be allocated to the General Fund. Mr. Tessier questioned if the newly instated quarterly collection of Occupancy Tax would decrease the amount of penalties and interest. Mr. O'Keefe responded that some business owners would continue to make late payments and would incur penalties and interest.

Mr. Kenny read the following from Local Law No. 4 of 2003, Section 16, Disposition of Revenues, *a copy of which is on file with the minutes*:

“All revenues resulting from imposition of the tax under this local law shall be paid into the Treasury of the County of Warren and shall be credited to and deposited in the general fund of the County, thereafter to be allocated only for tourism promotion and tourist and convention development; provided, however, that a portion of such revenue may be specifically allocated to the expense of the County in administering such tax. The revenues derived from such tax, after deducting the amount provided for administering such tax, shall be allocated to enhance the general economy of the County of Warren, and its city, towns and villages through the promotion of tourist activities, conventions, trade shows, special events and other directly-related and supported activities. The amount retained by Warren County with respect to administering said tax shall not exceed ten percent (10%) of the revenues collected from the imposition of this tax.”

Mr. Kenny apprised that according to this Local Law the funds should be credited to the General Fund and then allocated to Tourism. Mr. O'Keefe stated that all Departments were budgeted and if they were unable to stay within their budget they could request to amend their budget to receive the necessary additional funding.

Chairman Thomas entered the meeting at 10:41 a.m.

Mr. Kenny stated that he would like to see the penalties and interest allocated to the Tourism Department's budget and Mr. O'Keefe responded that eventually the funds would be allocated to the Tourism budget.

Discussion ensued.

Mr. O'Keefe stated that they could discuss this issue further at the Occupancy Tax

Committee meeting later that day.

Mr. O'Keefe exited the meeting at 10:44 a.m.

Ms. Johnson stated that Susan Stratton, Stratton Partners Advertising, who was the broadcast media buyer for Warren County Tourism was unable to be present at today's meeting to make her presentation. She added that Ms. Stratton had provided a Summary Presentation handout for the Committee's review. *A copy of the Summary Presentation from Stratton Partners Advertising is on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Johnson presented the new Warren County Highway Map and she stated, that the Tourism Department's address, phone number and website had been added to the back cover. *A copy of the Warren County Highway Map is on file with the minutes.*

Mr. Stec entered the meeting at 10:45 a.m.

Linda Wohlers, Creative Director of the Tourism Department, reviewed various email blasts and mailings from the Fall 'Rekindle' Campaign, copies of which are on file with the minutes.

Ms. Wohlers said that the Warren County Tourism website, www.VisitLakeGeorge.com, would be changing its format with each season. She added that the website was now in the fall format, featuring the 'Rekindle' campaign. She said that Warren County Tourism was having a romantic weekend giveaway promotion. She added that the following Inns had donated a romantic weekend for two, as part of this promotion:

- Fern Lodge, Chestertown, NY;
- Allyn's Butterfly Inn Bed & Breakfast, Warrensburg, NY;
- Lamplight Inn Bed & Breakfast, Lake Luzerne, NY;
- Cedarwood B&B In The Adirondacks, North River, NY;
- Inn of Lake George, Lake George, NY.

Ms. Wohlers stated that also included on the website was a 'road tour' which would take travelers throughout Warren County. She added that the 'road tour' described a route that was 'off the beaten path' and would encompass spectacular views and waterfalls. She said that throughout the written 'road tour' suggestions had been made for places to shop, dine and sight see. She added that the 'road tour' was also included in the Autumn Brochure, a copy of which is on file with the minutes.

Ms. Wohlers apprised that the fall brochures, envelopes, email blasts and website design all had a common look. She added that the balloon festival advertisement had included the 'road tour, previously mentioned. Ms. Johnson noted that the fall email blast was sent to over 86,000 people and within two days the website had received over 15,000 visitors.

Ms. Wohlers played the fall television commercial, from the website, for the Committee. Ms. Johnson stated that over 6,800 entries had been received for the 'Rekindle' romantic weekend giveaway. Ms. Johnson noted that the romantic weekend giveaway promotion had been geared towards 'empty nesters'.

Ms. Wohlers apprised that an update on group tours, meetings and conventions was in the Agenda packet for the Committee's review. *A copy of the Group Tour and Meeting/ Convention Update is on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Johnson stated that Luisa Sherman, Warren County Council of Chambers, was unable to be present today; however, she added, Ms. Sherman had sent a monthly report which had been included in the Agenda packet for the Committee's review. *A copy of the Monthly Report for the Warren County Council of Chambers is on file with the minutes.*

Fred Austin exited the meeting at 11:00 a.m.

Ms. Johnson introduced Kate Osterhout, Account Executive for Sawchuk Brown Associates, who presented a Power Point Presentation, a copy of which is on file with the minutes. Ms. Osterhout apprised that the Stewart's Name the Ice Cream Contest had been successful with 181 entries by mail and 283 entries online, from 15 different states. She said that all of the entrants had been added to the Tourism mailing database. She added that the contest had run from June 25, 2007 to July 15, 2007. She said the winning ice cream name had been announced on August 1, 2007 at the Bay Road Stewart's in Queensbury. She added that the winning ice cream name had been '32-Mile Smile' which had been submitted by Barbara Watson of Scotia, New York. She expounded that the judging panel had chosen '32-Mile Smile' because they had felt that it was a play on words of the Warren County Tourism tagline, "Bet'cha we can make you smile!".

Ms. Osterhout apprised that Sawchuk Brown Associates were also working on additional press releases and pitches for Warren County Tourism. She added that fall activities and events had been highlighted in the fall release. She said that a similar release was being prepared for the winter and they were currently working on a release to promote the Floyd Bennett Memorial Airport. She apprised that one of the pitches that they were working on involved the concept of second homes in

Warren County. She added that they had pitched the idea to the *New York Times*; however, she said, the paper had just run a similar story about the Staten Island area and they wanted to wait until spring before running this story. She said that they had also pitched the same idea to *The Times Union*. She apprised that ProfNet was a company that sent Sawchuk Brown Associates a list of stories that local reporters were working on. She added that two additional pitches had been derived from this information, which were military discounts and fall foliage. She added that she had sent a list of businesses in the area that offered military discounts to the reporter that was writing that story. She said that she had sent pictures of fall foliage in the area to the reporter who was writing that story, although she had not heard back from him as of yet.

Ms. Osterhout apprised that there had been additional FAM visits from writers to the area since her last visit. She added that Terry Conway, travel writer for various publications including the *Delaware County Times*, had visited in July and Melanie Barnas, *Genesee Valley Parent Magazine*, had visited in August. She said that there were visits pending for John Fox-Clinch, *Western Daily Press*, and Christine Harvey, *New Living Magazine*.

Ms. Osterhout stated that the next presentation from Sawchuk Brown Associates would be at the November Committee meeting. Ms. Johnson thanked Ms. Osterhout for her presentation.

Mr. Kenny stated that Alice Grether, Director of Tourism for the City of Glens Falls, was present and he thanked her for coming. He said that Occupancy Tax for Warren County for the week of September 17-22, 2007 had been up 20% over 2006 and that the rates had been up 22% for the same week. Mr. Tessier apprised that August had been a good month for local businesses and he added, that one restaurant owner had told him that his profits were up 22% for the month of August 2007 over 2006.

As there was no further business to come before the Tourism Committee, on motion made by Mr. Stec and seconded by Mr. Kenny, Mr. Tessier adjourned the meeting at 11:15 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Charlene DiResta, Legislative Office Specialist