

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: TOURISM

DATE: September 24, 2009

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

SUPERVISORS TESSIER
BELDEN
KENNY
MERLINO
STRAINER

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

SUPERVISORS SHEEHAN
SIMMES

OTHERS PRESENT:

REPRESENTING THE TOURISM DEPARTMENT:

KATE JOHNSON, DIRECTOR
PETER GIRARD, CREATIVE DIRECTOR
TANYA BRAND, GROUP TOUR PROMOTER
LIESA GRANT, PRINCIPAL ACCOUNT CLERK
FREDERICK MONROE, CHAIRMAN

JOANN MCKINSTRY, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF
ADMINISTRATIVE & FISCAL SERVICES

JOAN SADY, CLERK OF THE BOARD

SUPERVISOR PITKIN

SUPERVISOR TAYLOR

SUPERVISOR GIRARD

SUPERVISOR THOMAS

SUPERVISOR O'CONNOR

SUSAN STRATTON, STRATTON PARTNERS ADVERTISING

THOM RANDALL, *ADIRONDACK JOURNAL*

JOANNE COLLINS, LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

Mr. Tessier called the meeting of the Tourism Committee to order at 11:00 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Belden, seconded by Mr. Merlino and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the August 26, 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 presented a request to extend the contract with James McEntee of Creative Minds Photography, for digital photography services for the Tourism Department, for the period commencing January 1, 2010 through December 31, 2010, for an amount not to exceed \$16,000.

Motion was made by Mr. Kenny, seconded by Mr. Belden and carried unanimously to approve the request to extend the contract as outlined above and the necessary resolution was authorized for the October 16, 2009 Board meeting. *A copy of the resolution request form is on file with the minutes.*

Pertaining to the pending item, Ms. Johnson apprised that Paul Dusek, County Attorney, had provided information relative to the Tourism Department's request to charge a fee to businesses for the use of ad spaces located within email blasts. She

noted that there were approximately 110,000 email addresses listed, and there would be three ad spaces available for one email blast opportunity per month.

Ms. Johnson reported that Mr. Dusek had conveyed that it would be permissible to sell ad space on the email blasts, as long as the ad clearly denoted the sponsors of the blast and remained separate from the main advertisement message, with an occupancy limit of not more than 25% of the total space. Additionally, she stated that Mr. Dusek recommended that fees be deemed reasonable and the revenue be used to offset the email expenses. Ms. Johnson stated that the Tourism Department staff was in favor of charging for the use of ad space in this manner and she noted that there was often more than one email blast sent per month; however, she stated, they were from segmented lists of less than 110,000 addresses. Ms. Johnson suggested that the current start up fee of \$12 per one thousand addresses be charged.

Mr. Kenny inquired about the selection process that Ms. Johnson would use for the ad space and she stated that a first-come, first-served method for selection would be used. She reiterated that there would be a three ad maximum per monthly blast and she suggested that for those not selected for that month, a second email blast could be offered to include their ad. She added that the Chamber of Commerce might have an interest in the use of ad space which could be linked to their website.

Motion was made by Mr. Belden, seconded by Mr. Strainer and carried unanimously to approve the request to sell ad space as outlined above. Joan Sady, Clerk of the Board, noted that a resolution was not required for this action.

Pertaining to the volume of requests for information, Ms. Johnson reported a record high number of over 32,000 requests for information (RFI) for the summer of 2009. She credited the importance of understanding the markets and maintaining state-of-the-art technology, which contributed to maintaining the region as a popular destination.

Ms. Johnson reported success with summer print buys through New York State with a co-op circle. As of the end of August, she stated that 161,934 RFI's had been processed. Additionally, she said, The Adirondack Regional Tourism Council also used email blasts and she pointed out that the Lake George/Adirondack region was named the number one receiver of outbound traffic by the ad agency's workshop.

A discussion ensued.

Ms. Johnson stated that the 2010 Travel Guides had been sent for printing and she pointed out that Peter Girard, Creative Director, would show the single paged outdoor recreation page to the Committee. She said the books were expected to be completed by next month for distribution at the Albany Snow Exposition to be held from November 6 through 8, 2009. She added that the web-page had download capabilities and an on-line flip page capability which created a value for those who placed ads.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Tanya Brand, Group Tour Promoter, who stated that Mr. Girard was working on a new design for the back cover of the Travel Guide.

Ms. Brand stated that she had included new pages which provided answers to frequently asked questions, three new sample itineraries, a scenic drives & services information page for drivers, all of which would be available to view at the next Committee meeting. She further stated that there were several new listings in the planner which included Blue Water Manor, the Warren County Fish Hatchery, and The Lake George Forum, for which a site inspection had been done.

Ms. Brand noted the leads which resulted from the Bass Tournament and Connect Magazine. She added that she remained abreast of meeting coverage for Lake George and had sent the Request for Pricing (RFP) for The Church of Pentecost, which would include between 2,000 and 3,000 attendees for 2010 and/or 2011.

Continuing, Ms. Brand stated that Ted Bigelow, of the Warren County Assessors Association, had contacted her in an effort to bring a conference to Warren County next year whereby donated items would be needed. Ms. Brand asserted that the contributions for donated items from Warren County Businesses were outstanding and denoted evidence of their support for the conference.

Pertaining to the Familiarization (FAM) Tour held in July, Ms. Brand pointed out the survey included in the packets provided positive feedback and indicated the desire for groups to return to the area in 2011. She reported that the TIKI Resort Enthusiast Weekend was a great success with an estimated 250 enthusiasts and the overflow for accommodations were referred to the Lake George Holiday Inn. She noted that a major organizer for the event had expressed their desire to return to the area to repeat the event next year.

New for 2010, Ms. Brand apprised that shows for the coming year would include some different niche groups such as an African American travel conference, a team sports event industry show, and a Connect (Magazine) meeting show.

Mr. Kenny thanked and commended Ms. Brand and he referenced a letter from Mr. Bigelow who highlighted the assistance she had offered and the superior quality of the package distribution. Mr. Strainer also recognized Ms. Brand for her efforts.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Mr. Girard, who reiterated that all print materials would be sent for printing this week. He reported that a warm weather email blast was sent to the full list of addresses on August 5, 2009, and was well received with a click-through rate of 11.6%.

Ms. Johnson expounded that for permission based or house list email blasts, the click-through rate was determined by the number of viewers who opened the blast and moved through to another page. She noted the average click through rate from the house list was 3% to 5%, the Events blast was 27.5%, and the Fall Contest was outstanding at 41.3%. Mr. Girard pointed out that the click-through statistics reflected the numbers captured within three days following the email blast.

Mr. Girard displayed the Fall Events blast and he summarized the three day click-through rates for the Lake George Jazz Festival at 336, the Adirondack Balloon Festival

at 783 and the Warrensburg Garage Sale at 795. He added that he had created an informative quarterly newsletter at the request of various hotels.

Pertaining to the website design, Mr. Girard stated that he had recently implemented the transformation into the fall theme, which included the Fall Contest Giveaway, fall commercials, and a link to the New York State foliage report. The newest feature, he noted, was the fishing gallery page whereby visitors could post images of themselves with a brief description, relative to their fishing experience.

Mr. Girard ran the fall commercial for the Committee.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Susan Stratton, who referred to the Fall 2009 Television (TV) Summary included in the agenda. She apprised of programming running from August 17 through October 11, 2009 which was chosen based upon effectiveness and cost efficiency, with a target group that included women and men aged 25 to 54. She stated that 15 second commercials were used on the major networks and 30 second commercials were run in Albany, New York (NY), Springfield, Massachusetts (MA), Hartford and New Haven, Connecticut (CT) and NCC Cable which included Time Warner, Cablevision/Comcast Interconnect for Metro NY, Long Island, Hudson Valley, NJ and CT. She stated that the cable companies had the necessary technology to provide the names and addresses of the responding viewers, which created a catalog mailing opportunity.

Ms. Stratton referred to the two-page summary report which reflected the number of commercials and expenditures. She apprised that programming had been scheduled for the early morning and evening news programs to prime access areas. She added that the Run of Stations (ROS) program which ran from Mondays through Sundays from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m. was also purchased, as well as many other valued programming opportunities.

Ms. Stratton apprised that she planned to explore opportunities for the use of a news pre roll option with Ms. Johnson. The option, she said, was a popular method by which to reach internet news viewers which displayed a banner on the website which was activated upon the selection of particular video story of interest.

Ms. Stratton explained that Requests For Information (RFI) capabilities were limited to the digital Time Warner Cable systems reaching 1.2 million households in the Metro NY area and parts of the Hudson Valley. With regard to RFI and VOD technology, she explained that the features allowed the viewer to use their remote during a commercial to make a selection at the bottom of the screen relative to receiving information and/or viewing a video. She reported over 32,000 RFI's for which numbers had increased in the Albany region, as well as in the NJ, Long Island, part of the Hudson Valley and western CT regions due to the fact that Cablevision/Comcast had added RFI and VOD technology, with CT's usage lagging behind as VOD technology was not currently being promoted in that region. Long Format Video (LFV) viewing was strong, she stated,

with over 45,000 viewers.

Looking ahead to 2010, Ms. Stratton apprised that due to the constant growth of interactive technology, media use was shifting, and cable viewing and internet usage had also increased, all of which contributed to increased efforts to expand into internet markets.

Concluding her report, Ms. Stafford apprised of a new feature whereby weather and traffic information could be accessed on a cell phone via a 12-second audio pre roll, and she would consider sponsoring such services following a thorough analysis for viability. She apprised of some changes with downstate Cablevision, a new feature for RFI users whereby a billboard ad would appear on the TV screen, the program would pause, to allow a call-to-action message. Eventually, an Enhanced Binary Interfaced Format (EBIF), also referred to as a click-call would be available thereby enabling customers to type in their phone number during a commercial for a call back the next business day. Another advancement, she stated, was the Widget, which provided upper corner micro website information which included the webname in micro form with the RFI option. Lastly, Ms. Statton noted that e-commerce capabilities allowed the customer to complete a purchase for a travel booking while the commercial was running.

Ms. Johnson stated that following both the Department Head meeting and a discussion with Liesa Grant, Principal Account Clerk, it was agreed to eliminate most overtime and a part-time staff person in 2010 and to refer the recommendations to the Budget Officer, and Hal Payne, Commissioner of Administrative and Fiscal Services. She stated that the use of part-time staff had been limited to the summer months and the Department would continue to utilize volunteers, and remain vigilant regarding overtime usage.

Regarding the I Love New York (ILNY) matching funds program, Ms. Johnson reported that there was an expected reduction in matching funds of 15% to 19%.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Dick Wilmen, owner of the Colonel Williams Motel on State Route 9. He cautioned that in light of such a positive Tourism report, that occupancy tax revenue was down considerably and he asserted that significant changes would be necessary for the recovery of small businesses who could not compete with packaged programs. He stated that he could not support increased town taxes due to the decreasing incomes of many residents. He further stated that he felt next year would be worse in terms of business. The Warren County Tourism Department, he said, should not be exempt from budget reductions relative to advertising, and disagreed with the continued advertising costs incurred by the Department. He noted that in his 45 years in business he had seen an increasing number of hotels forced to close due to the economy and competition and it had become cost prohibitive for many businesses to remain open in the winter. Noting his 10 years of experience in the motor coach industry, he projected that the industry

would no longer be in existence in 10 years. He stated that Warren County lacked the expertise required for decision making relative to the expenditure of County funds relative to occupancy tax revenue. He asserted that, in his opinion, the Board of Supervisors must also require the Tourism Department to reduce their budget. In conclusion, he said that as expenses, such as Town, County and Federal taxes increased, the incomes of the small business had decreased, and he noted that it was the small businesses that were instrumental in building the local business community.

Mr. Merlino asked Mr. Wilmen to recommend ideas, in addition to spending reductions, that would help the County to reach its goals. He articulated that such challenges were complex and that the Board invited specific suggestions regarding their budgetary goals. Mr. Merlino acknowledged the difficult fiscal situation currently faced by the County in achieving the budgetary goals, and he conveyed his confidence in Warren County to that end.

Mr. Wilmen stated that he felt the County had overspent in some areas which was a contributing factor in the current fiscal situation and he asked for more professionalism on the part of the Warren County Board of Supervisors. He conveyed his willingness to offer assistance.

As there was no further business to come before the Tourism Committee, on motion made by Mr. Strainer and seconded by Mr. Belden, Mr. Tessier adjourned the meeting at 11:40 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joanne Collins, Legislative Office Specialist