

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: TOURISM

DATE: JANUARY 27, 2010

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

SUPERVISORS MERLINO
KENNY
BELDEN
STRAINER
GOODSPEED
MCCOY
CONOVER

OTHERS PRESENT:

REPRESENTING THE TOURISM DEPARTMENT:
KATE JOHNSON, DIRECTOR
PETER GIRARD, CREATIVE DIRECTOR
TANYA BRAND, GROUP TOUR PROMOTER
FREDERICK MONROE, CHAIRMAN
NICOLE LIVINGSTON, DEPUTY CLERK OF THE BOARD
KEVIN GERAGHTY, BUDGET OFFICER
SUPERVISORS McDEVITT
STEC
THOMAS
ALICE GREYER, DIRECTOR OF TOURISM, CITY OF GLENS FALLS
LUISA CRAIGE-SHERMAN, WARREN COUNTY COUNCIL OF CHAMBERS
FRED AUSTIN, FORT WILLIAM HENRY
DON LEHMAN, *THE POST STAR*
CHARLENE DiRESTA, SR. LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

Mr. Merlino called the meeting of the Tourism Committee to order at 10:18 a.m.

Mr. Merlino welcomed Messrs. Conover and McCoy to the Tourism Committee. Mr. Merlino noted this would be his first Tourism Committee meeting as Chairman.

Motion was made by Mr. Belden, seconded by Mr. Strainer and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the previous 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 requested a resolution supporting the reinstatement of the full amount of funding for the I Love NY Gateway Information Center in Beekmantown, New York into the Governor's 2010 Budget. She advised the Governor had proposed several budget reductions and the elimination of many programs from his 2010 Budget. One of which, she added, was the I Love NY Gateway Information Center in Beekmantown, New York. She noted the Center was on Interstate 87 southbound between Exits 41 and 42. She apprised the Adirondack Regional Tourism Council operated the Center on behalf of the State, who provided \$196,000 in funding each year to cover the cost of operations. She added the \$196,000 in funding had been eliminated from the Governor's 2010 Budget, along with funding for the Welcome Center in Binghamton, New York; and the Visitors Interpretive Centers in Paul Smiths, New York and Newcomb, New York. She advised four full time employees and one part-time employee were employed to operate the I Love NY Gateway Information Center in Beekmantown, New York.

Mr. Goodspeed entered the meeting at 10:22 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Belden, seconded by Mr. Kenny and carried unanimously to authorize a resolution supporting the reinstatement of the full amount of funding for the I Love NY Gateway Information Center in Beekmantown, New York in the Governor's 2010 Budget. *A copy of the resolution request form is on file with the minutes and the necessary resolution was authorized for the February 19, 2010 Board meeting.*

Ms. Johnson referred to the pull-up displays which were located on the windowsill of the Board Room and stated these were the displays which were taken to the consumer and trade shows. She noted the pull-up displays had been designed by Peter Girard, Creative Director for the Tourism Department. She advised the Tourism Department attended consumer shows, which started around this time and continued until late spring. She added they were theme based shows, with themes such as travel, fishing, outdoor activities, boating and camping. She noted they attended shows which were seasoned, had high traffic and represented the demographic that was targeted. She pointed out the pull-up displays could be lowered to be displayed on a table top. She stated the Warren County Tourism booth was always well received at the consumer and trade shows. She apprised the private sector was invited to participate in the consumer and trade shows, by means of the Tourism Department displaying their brochures at the shows for a nominal fee. She added there were 53 participants this year, a list of which was included in the agenda packet. She stated the Chambers of Commerce were invited to provide their brochures free of charge. She apprised the New York State Travel and Vacation Association displayed the Warren County Travel Guides at many of their shows.

Ms. Johnson displayed the home page for the Warren County Tourism winter website. She explained they had initiated a mid-week lodging program for summer two years ago at the request of a local hotelier. She added some of the summer participants had requested a similar program run in the winter, as well. She advised they had run the program this winter and had seven participants who were required to create up to three mid-week offers valid from December 1, 2009 to March 31, 2010. She said an email blast had been sent out to over 100,000 subscribers and a prominent link to the program was placed on the Warren County Tourism website.

Ms. Johnson stated the Department had begun distributing the Tourism Newsletter last year and it was distributed quarterly to over 900 Tourism related businesses in Warren County. She advised a comparison of the newsletters distributed in 2009 was included in the agenda packet and added they were currently working on the newsletter which would be distributed on February 18, 2010. She apprised for the last three years the New York State Division of Tourism had not been as proactive as they had been in the past. She added a New York State Summer Travel Guide had not been produced for the last three years. She continued by saying they had reintroduced the Summer Travel Guide for 2010 and Warren County Tourism had reserved one full page, asking local businesses to partner with them for the advertising space. She said 36 local businesses had participated in the advertisement which would be located on the inside front cover of the Guide and added a list of the businesses was included in the agenda packet. She noted Warren County Tourism had also reserved one full page for the New York State Winter Travel Guide in 2009, which had been placed on the outside back cover. Ms. Johnson apprised Warren County Tourism had a new tagline, which was 'Make This Summer One To Remember'. She noted the tagline would be used for all four seasons, replacing the

word 'Summer' with the appropriate season.

Discussion ensued.

Ms. Johnson pointed out two large posters which were displayed in the Board Room. She noted they were New York City subway platform posters which were part of the "out-of-home" advertising completed by the Tourism Department. She stated the posters were displayed in thirteen high traffic New York City subway locations. She noted the posters highlighted the three primary ski areas in Warren County. She apprised the posters were produced through coordination with Len Fosbrook, President of the Warren County Economic Development Corporation, in an effort to promote the Ski3 concept. She pointed out pictures of the posters hanging in their locations on the subway platforms were included in the agenda packet.

Ms. Johnson displayed a picture of a kiosk on the New York State Thruway. She advised Warren County Tourism had materials at three high traffic kiosks on the Thruway at the Sloatsburg, Plattekill and New Baltimore rest areas. She explained the kiosk would air a video which would play 24 hours a day and would have Warren County Travel Guides prominently displayed. She said in 2008 over 23,000 Travel Guides had been distributed via the kiosks.

Ms. Johnson stated Warren County Tourism had worked diligently for years to collect email addresses from permission based subscribers. She added they now had over 103,000 email addresses, to which theme based email blasts were sent once or twice a month. This year, she continued, there was a new campaign which included sponsors in the email blasts.

Mr. Girard stated winter email blasts were less popular than the summer ones. He displayed the email blast from the winter contest and noted the contests were always popular. He explained the winter contest email blast was sent to 103,000 people, was opened by 14,000 people and 4,000 people had entered. He stated the winter contest email blast had included links to the websites of the local businesses that participated in the contest. He displayed the first email blast which had contained sponsored advertisements and added the first participant had been the Fort William Henry Resort. He said the email blast had been opened by approximately 11,000 people and 800 people entered the contest. Ms. Johnson noted the goal for 2009 had been to hit 100,000 email addresses, which they had exceeded. She said they added email addresses to the list when they were at the consumer and trade shows.

Ms. Johnson stated the winter television campaign was in the second month and had aired in December and January. She noted they had contracted with a new broadcast media buyer for 2010, Ad Workshop of Lake Placid, New York. She announced Tom Connors, of Ad Workshop, would give a presentation at the March 31st Committee meeting.

Mr. Girard played the 30 second winter television commercial for the Committee members. Ms. Johnson explained the commercial aired in the Albany Time Warner market, as well as on Channel 9, Bravo, FX, HGTV, Discovery, and VH1. She noted the largest market was Metro New York, which included New York City, Long Island, Westchester, Rockland, western Connecticut and all of New Jersey. She noted Warren County was one of eight counties that comprised the Adirondack Region. She said the Adirondack Regional Tourism Council (ARTC) met monthly and produced regional marketing campaigns, which included electronic email blasts to 108,000 subscribers. Mr. Girard displayed the ARTC web page for the Committee

members. Mr. Girard played a 30 second clip of the ARTC television commercial and noted the Warren County Tourism Department had provided some of the footage used. Ms. Johnson noted the entire commercial could be viewed at www.visitadirondacks.com.

Ms. Johnson apprised there had been a great story in *Snowgoer Magazine* pertaining to their visit to the area last year. She added the area had been mentioned on *The New York Post* online and *The Winter Park Observer* online. Mr. Merlino stated *Snowgoer Magazine* was one of the largest snowmobile magazines in the Country. He added the representatives from the magazine had spent four days in the area last year and had enjoyed their stay. Ms. Johnson said the representatives had preferred the area over the Old Forge area and Mr. Merlino added they had enjoyed the scenery.

Ms. Johnson stated she would present the 2009 Year in Review Binder at an upcoming Committee meeting. She noted the Department's inquiries had decreased by 1.8% as compared to 2008 and added they had handled 216,709 requests for information in 2009 as compared to approximately 220,000 in 2008. She continued by saying 2008 and 2009 had been the two highest years for requests. She noted the website had an increase of 26% in the number of visits, which amounted to 429,592 visits, an increase of 88,288 visits as compared to 2008. Referring to the matching funds which were received from the I Love NY Program, Ms. Johnson reported they had been asked to complete an intense marketing plan and application. She said the application had been approved in April of 2009 but there was still no notification on the amount of funding which would be received. She added she had budgeted \$144,000, which was a reduction of 15% from the amount received in 2009.

Mr. Merlino noted a recent report from the Treasurer's Office which stated that as of January 14, 2010, the total of occupancy tax collections for 2009 had decreased by \$353,805 when compared to 2008 collections. He added these figures would affect the 2011 Budget. Ms. Johnson stated the total occupancy tax collections for 2009 would not be available until the end of March.

Tanya Brand, Group Tour Promoter, reviewed the Group Tour and Meeting/Convention Update for the Committee; a copy of which is on file with the minutes. She advised at the end of each year she completed a Group Tour Survey, which had been distributed to 113 properties for 2009. She added the Survey provided feedback pertaining to Motorcoach traffic to the area. She said she would give a report on the results of the Survey at the next Committee meeting. She noted she would update the cover of the Meeting Site Planner and the properties listed within would update their listings.

Ms. Brand stated she was working with the Model T Ford Club International for a potential event in 2012, details of which are listed in the Group Tour and Meeting/Convention Update. She noted they were seriously considering the area for the event. She reported she was continuing to assist with the DA's (District Attorney's) Association of New York Summer Conference to be held at the Sagamore Resort on July 7-11, 2010 and noted she would attend the DA's Association Winter Conference currently being held in New York City in order to help

promote the Summer Conference. She added each place setting at the Luncheon would have a mini Adirondack chair with a postcard that said "See you in Lake George". She apprised she was continuing to provide assistance to the NYS (New York State) Probation Association for their Annual Meeting to be held June 28-30, 2010.

Ms. Brand distributed an information packet of The Velo Quebec Grand Tour and confirmed the event would be held August 7-8, 2010, utilizing the ground of Adirondack Community College (ACC); a copy of the information packet is on file with the minutes. She advised they would return to the area in February for a press conference. She added 80 rooms had been reserved at the Fort William Henry and a representative was currently in the area to reserve an additional 40 to 50 rooms. She apprised she would attempt to form a committee of local representatives to determine ways to help promote the event and to form a welcome committee.

Ms. Brand informed the Committee Pathway Tours would return to hold the "Shake on the Lake" Tour from May 23-25, 2010 and advised they would bring 80 Motorcoaches to the area. She noted Pathway Tours would offer 2,3 and 4-day packages which would include concerts, hotel nights, meals and attractions. She explained as part of the Tour, Comedian Charlie Prose would perform at Glens Falls High School and Irish Tenor Daniel O'Donnell would perform at Saratoga Performing Arts Center. She noted at least ten area hotels would be booked for the event. She added the projected total economic impact of the Tour was as much as \$960,000.

Ms. Brand stated she had attended the American Bus Association Marketplace from January 15-19, 2010. She displayed the new Tour Operator Binder which was distributed to delegates at the Marketplace and noted they had run out of binders this year.

Ms. Johnson commended Ms. Brand for being selected as an Industry Leader in *Connect Magazine*. She noted there was a half page article in the magazine which listed Ms. Brand's background; a copy of which is on file with the minutes.

Mr. Girard displayed a sampling of recent print advertisements developed by the Tourism Department and advised the Rates & Dates Brochure was currently in production. He added the new summer television commercial and VOD (Video on Demand) had been produced. He apprised the Department was working with a new videographer, Taylor Morrison, who used a R3d Camera which was the most advanced technology for film. He noted the camera captured many images quickly, which allowed the video stills to be used for print advertising. He pointed out one of the table top displays contained a high definition still picture which had been derived from a video captured by the R3d Camera. He stated one advantage of the R3d Camera was they did not need to hire both a photographer and a videographer for a shoot. He apprised possible locations for the shooting of the spring footage were being discussed.

Mr. Girard stated the Department was continuing with their endeavor to launch into social media. He added they had been on YouTube for a while and had used it as a way to embed the television commercials onto the Warren County Tourism website. He noted the video

commercials were also placed on the YouTube site and were being viewed there, as well. The next logical progression, he continued, was to utilize other social media sites, such as Facebook.

Mr. Merlino commended the staff of the Tourism Department and added he was always impressed with the work completed. He noted 2010 would be a tough year for the economy and Warren County would need to compete with other tourist areas in order to attract visitors. Mr. Goodspeed said he was really excited to be on the Tourism Committee and hoped he could play a positive role moving forward. He stated having the three ski areas on the advertising, identified by name was key to the northern part of the County. He advised it merged the brands of the ski areas and Warren County Tourism and allowed them to benefit each other.

Mr. McCoy said he was pleased to be on the Tourism Committee and had been impressed with everything presented today and added that cross marketing was important. He explained people who came to the area for Americade were not always aware of the Automobile Show and vice versa. He voiced his disappointment there were no representatives from the business sector at the meeting, to see the good job the Department was doing in promoting tourism. Mr. Merlino noted none of the print advertisements had the name Warren County on them and asked the reason. Ms. Johnson responded every state had a Warren County and added the Lake George Area in the Adirondacks was more easily identifiable.

Chairman Monroe stated he had heard negative comments from the business community relating to promotion of tourism. He asked if the Department did enough to try to include the businesses and brief them on what was accomplished. Ms. Johnson said the local businesses were very aware of the promotion completed. She added normally there were representatives from the local businesses at the meeting. She noted the quarterly newsletter also contained information on what was accomplished for tourism promotion and added monthly presentations were held.

Luisa Craige-Sherman, of the Warren County Council of Chambers, said at the last meeting she attended she had noted the Council was working on the end of year survey. She advised they had received 56 responses from the approximately 1,000 surveys which were sent. She noted a little more than 50% stated their Memorial Day to Columbus Day proceeds were below average. She said there had been a slight increase in the visitors from Massachusetts, Connecticut and Albany, New York area, as well as Pennsylvania, western New York and downstate New York. The businesses who responded, she noted, had advised the one thing which had been done differently this year was that special discounts had been offered and more effort had been placed on beautification. She apprised the impact from the special events was reported as being the same, with Americade having the largest impact. She listed the order of impact as: Americade, Warrensburg World's Largest Garage Sale, New York State Association of Fire Chief's Convention, Elvis Festival and other local events. Most of those surveyed, she continued, felt the reason for the decrease was attributed to the economy and the poor weather.

Ms. Craige-Sherman reported the schedule of Warren County Council of Chambers dinners, as follows:

- the February meeting would be hosted by the Gore Mountain Regional Chamber of Commerce;
- the March meeting would be hosted by the North Warren Regional Chamber of Commerce;
- the April meeting would be hosted by the Lake Luzerne Regional Chamber of Commerce;
- the May meeting would be hosted by the Warrensburg Regional Chamber of Commerce; and
- the June meeting would be hosted by the Hague Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Ms. Craige-Sherman said she was pleased with the Committee's support for the reinstatement of funding for the the I Love NY Gateway Information Center at Beekmantown, New York. She advised she would present the subject at the delegates' meeting and request a letter of support, as well. She stated whenever the County had similar advocacy issues, they should inform her so the Council could add their support. She questioned which Committee would be able to give an update on the Broadband Initiative. She stated she was amazed at how much of the northern part of the County did not have cell phone coverage. She noted internet access was key to attracting business travelers to the area.

Chairman Monroe explained CBN Connect was working on the needs analysis, which was nearly complete. He added the next step was to complete an engineering design. He reported applications had been submitted to various funding sources for the completion of the needs analysis and the engineering design. He advised the original goal was to be able to submit a Federal Economic Stimulus application by the end of March; however, he added the deadline had been extended. He apprised Congressman Murphy was in favor of the Broadband Initiative and added he had received an email from Congressman Murphy's Office which informed of a press conference to announce the introduction of new legislation to encourage broadband. He voiced his opinion that the needs analysis and engineering design should be completed in time to submit an application for Federal Economic Stimulus funding and he felt there was a good chance that funding would be awarded. Referring to cell phone coverage, Chairman Monroe reported the Adirondack Park Agency had approved applications for T Mobile and Verizon, which would improve cell phone coverage to the entire Northway. Mr. Belden stated the Planning & Community Development Committee was the best source for further updates on the Broadband Initiative.

Ms. Craige-Sherman reported the Warren County Council of Chambers website would be updated to include access to additional economic development data pertaining to tourism and commerce.

Regarding representatives from the business sector, Ms. Craige-Sherman advised complaints were being received on a regular basis pertaining to their lack of input on tourism matters. She said the meeting hosted last year was more of a presentation format. She explained the Committee meetings were an opportunity for Department Heads and staff to present to the Supervisors, which was a different format than a workshop, which allowed representatives from the business sector to provide their input. She apprised the Tourism Department received a

wealth of information, which, if communicated in a workshop format, would generate a more cohesive dialog. She said businesses wanted to know prior to release what the new advertisements produced by the Tourism Department would look like. Ms. Johnson interjected she was in touch with the local businesses via email. Ms. Craige-Sherman said the last workshop session had turned into a presentation of what was completed by the Tourism Department and did not function as a means for the local businesses to give their input.

Ms. Craige-Sherman stated the local economy was reported to be 1/3 dependent on tourism but she argued she believed it was 2/3 dependent on tourism. She noted if the tourism economy was decreased it had a trickle down effect. She advised people would support what they helped to create and if the business sector felt they had helped to create the advertising they would embrace it.

Mr. Strainer commented the Warren County Council of Chambers dinners were worth attending. He said the concept of bringing in representatives from the businesses to share ideas made him nervous, as the Tourism Department needed to focus on the whole County. He noted some businesses did not complete any advertising on their own behalf and depended on the Tourism Department to attract visitors to the area. He stated the Tourism Department had been doing a great job of promoting tourism in Warren County.

Mr. Kenny explained he had heard similar complaints from some businesses. He added he had assisted Ms. Johnson in organizing the workshop session last year, which he agreed had been more of a presentation. He said he had been amazed by how little the public understood what was accomplished in order to promote tourism. He advised no constructive criticism had been received at the end of the workshop session, other than complaints that the Tourism Department should ask the businesses what should be done prior to anything being completed. He voiced his opinion that if he was a business owner who was concerned with Warren County's advertising for the summer, he would be present at the January Committee meeting. Ms. Craige-Sherman responded according to the feedback she had received, the businesses did not feel the structure of the monthly Committee meetings allowed the businesses to provide their ideas. She suggested that a different format of meeting should be held on a regular basis to allow the businesses to share their ideas with the Tourism Department. Ms. Johnson responded the door to the Tourism Department was always open and many of the businesses kept in direct contact with the Department.

Ms. Craige-Sherman reported there would be a Web-inar entitled "Forecasting in Uncertain Times" held on February 2, 2010 at 2:00 p.m., which was available through the Lake George Regional Chamber of Commerce. She urged the Supervisors to attend their local Chamber of Commerce meetings.

As there was no further business to come before the Tourism Committee, on motion made by Mr. Belden and seconded by Mr. Kenny, Mr. Merlino adjourned the meeting at 11:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Charlene DiResta, Sr. Legislative Office Specialist