

## WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

**COMMITTEE: TOURISM**

**DATE: SEPTEMBER 28, 2011**

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**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

SUPERVISORS MERLINO  
KENNY  
STRAINER  
MCCOY

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

REPRESENTING THE TOURISM DEPARTMENT:  
KATE JOHNSON, DIRECTOR  
PETER GIRARD, CREATIVE DIRECTOR  
TANYA BRAND, GROUP TOUR PROMOTER  
JOAN SADY, CLERK OF THE BOARD

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:**

SUPERVISORS BELDEN  
GOODSPEED  
CONOVER

SUPERVISORS LOEB  
TAYLOR  
THOMAS  
JOANN MCKINSTRY, ASSISTANT TO THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR  
DAVID BULMER, WARREN COUNTY COUNCIL OF CHAMBERS  
PAUL OLIVER, L&P MEDIA  
BLAKE JONES, *THE POST STAR*  
CHARLENE DIRESTA, SR. LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

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Mr. Merlino called the meeting of the Tourism Committee to order at 10:08 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Strainer, seconded by Mr. Kenny 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.*

Commencing the agenda review, Ms. Johnson requested a transfer of funds in the amount of \$1,253 with \$273 being transferred from Salaries-Part-time (A.6417 130) and \$980 being transferred from Promotion (A.6417 481) and the total amount being transferred to Salaries-Overtime (A.6417 120) to cover a shortfall in the overtime budget.

Motion was made by Mr. McCoy, seconded by Mr. Strainer and carried unanimously to approve the request for a transfer of funds as outlined above and to forward same to the Finance Committee. *A copy of the Request for Transfer of Funds form is on file with the minutes.*

Ms. Johnson reported that the 2012 Travel Guide had been sent to the printer and delivery was anticipated on October 26-27, 2011. Mr. Strainer inquired about the number of advertisers for the 2012 Travel Guide and Ms. Johnson replied that the number of advertisers had decreased slightly but the number of advertisement pages had remained the same due to a four-page ad placed by Gore Mountain. She added that the amount of revenue from advertisements had decreased slightly. Peter Girard, Creative Director, stated that many of the advertisers for the 2012 Travel Guide had improved the appearance of their ads.

Ms. Johnson informed she had been contacted by Lang Media and they offered an opportunity to advertise on digital billboards. She explained that advertisements had been placed on digital billboards at four locations between I-87 and I-90 at a cost of \$1,200. She noted the digital ads would appear 15,400 times during a 28-day period and would be seen by 58,000 to 72,000 vehicles per day at each location. A brief discussion ensued.

Ms. Johnson said the Fall Online Giveaway had been posted on the website which offered a chance to win one of four lodging packages. She noted the drawing would be held on October 4, 2011 and she listed the participating lodging properties as follows: Country Road Lodge; Wingate by Wyndham; and Dillon Hill Inn and Cabins. She said that last year the Fall Online Giveaway had garnered 5,600 entries and so far this year there were over 6,000 entries.

Ms. Johnson apprised there was a link on the website to the "I ♥ NY" Fall Foliage landing page and the Tourism Department had the capability to update photos on the page as needed. She listed the three most frequently discussed topics by potential tourists as follows: changing colors, the Adirondack Balloon Festival and the Worlds Largest Garage Sale.

Ms. Johnson reported she had received a letter from Robert Blais, Mayor of the Village of Lake George, offering advertising space at the Lake George Visitors Center for the Saratoga-North Creek Railway (SNCR). She added that she had referred the letter to the Parks, Recreation & Railroad Department.

Ms. Johnson advised that last year Joanne Conley, Tourism Specialist, had worked with a writer from *Autoweek Magazine* who had visited for a tour of the area and the resultant article had recently been published. She said the Magazine had sent a copy of the article and a copy had also been forwarded by Mayor Blais; *a copy of the article is on file with the minutes*. She apprised of an article on the area in *Capital District Parents Magazine* which included the results of a survey naming Lake George as the "Favorite Day Trip" and The Great Escape as the "Favorite Family Splurge"; *a copy of the article is on file with the minutes*. She mentioned that *Le Soleil*, a Canadian magazine, had featured an article on Lake George and the Adirondack Region; *a copy of the article is on file with the minutes*. She noted that *National Geographic* had featured an article entitled "The Adirondack Park; Forever Wild"; *a copy of the article is on file with the minutes*.

Ms. Johnson commented that during Tropical Storm Irene, the Department had received several phone calls from tourists with hotel reservations who were unable to get through to their hotels and assistance was provided with communication between the hotels and their guests. She noted an email broadcast had been sent to all the email addresses in the database to inform them that the Lake George Area remained open for business. She added that the Adirondack Regional Tourism Council and "I ♥ NY" had completed public service announcements with similar messages. Ms. Johnson pointed out that the Office of Emergency Services (OES) had contacted the Tourism Department for assistance with contacting the lodging properties to determine if there were damages to their property caused by Tropical Storm Irene.

Ms. Johnson reported a press release had been issued pertaining to the upcoming deadline for applications to receive Occupancy Tax Special Event Funding. She said the press release was sent to all the local media and all the recipients of 2011 Occupancy Tax Special Event Funding. She noted a survey had been sent to all the lodging properties asking them which events had the greatest impact to their business this year.

Ms. Johnson reported that "I ♥ NY" was considering realigning the eleven travel and tourism regions in New York State. She said they had identified the Adirondack Region as the most effectively functioning region in New York State due to strong marketing programs. She apprised that certain counties were in favor of changing their designated region and Fulton County was interested in joining the Adirondack Region.

Mr. Merlino stated that *Saratoga Magazine* had featured a great article on SNCRR which had been discussed at the recent Warren County Council of Chambers Dinner. He commended Ms. Johnson on the initiative taken in releasing an email broadcast during Tropical Storm Irene to inform visitors that the Lake George Area was open for business. Ms. Johnson informed that she had been contacted by the Director of the Albany Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) requesting details on tourism spending in the area and the request had been fulfilled. She explained that the newly established Economic Development Councils had included Warren County in the Capital District Economic Development Council and the Director of the Albany CVB was completing a report for them.

Tanya Brand, Group Tour Promoter, informed that the 2012 Group Tour Planner had been sent to the printer and delivery was anticipated by October 20, 2011. She mentioned that the August Group Loop Electronic Newsletter had been sent to 4,586 recipients and the topics had included new attractions such as the SNCRR and the Explore History Walking Tours.

Ms. Brand reported that two representatives from Bus Tours Magazine had completed a FAM (familiarization) Tour in early September to gather information for an editorial. She said she and Ms. Johnson had attended the Lakes to Locks Annual Meeting and the keynote speaker had been Congressman Paul Tonko.

Ms. Brand apprised that Anderson Coach, a Tour Operator based in Greenville, Pennsylvania, brought six motor coaches with over 300 passengers to the area as part of their three-day "Birthday Bash" to celebrate 74 years in business. She added that the participants had enjoyed activities, such as a luncheon cruise on the Lac Du Saint Sacrament operated by Lake George Steamboat Company, a dinner show at The Tiki Resort and sightseeing.

Ms. Brand informed that the Tourism Department was receiving international leads resultant of a FAM Tour conducted with Kay New Century Tours, a Tour Operator based in Israel. The most recent international lead, she continued, was a family of five who stayed at the Holiday Inn Resort for a ten-day period.

Peter Girard, Creative Director, displayed the three most recent email blasts to the Committee members. He noted that the database of email addresses was currently around 135,000 subscribers. He apprised the three email blasts were sent on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, August 17<sup>th</sup> and September 7<sup>th</sup>, respectively and approximately 18,000 subscribers had opened and reviewed each of the blasts during the tracking period. Mr. Girard displayed the Monthly News Bulletin, the Winter Brochure and the Placemat to the Committee members and he noted the Winter Brochure was currently at the printer and the Placemat was now printed in color. He explained that the News Bulletin was sent to area businesses in order to keep them informed of opportunities they could participate in. He pointed out that the Placemat contained a bar code which could be scanned with a smart phone and the Winter Placemat's bar code would direct people to a website to view the Winter video. Mr. Girard reported that video/photo shoots had been conducted of recent events/activities including the Adirondack Car Show, a tour of Prospect Mountain, SunKiss Balloon Festival and the Glen Air Paint Out Festival in Chestertown. He displayed photos taken at the various video/photo shoots to the Committee members.

Mr. Girard introduced Paul Oliver, of L&P Media, who reviewed the various attributes of the new Drupal website which Mr. Girard displayed to the Committee members. Mr. Oliver pointed out that the rotating images on the home page of the website could be updated by Mr. Girard as needed. He

noted the ability of the user to complete tasks, such as ordering brochures and checking the weather in Lake George. He explained that the home page contained social media buttons to allow visitors to view the Warren County Tourism Facebook, Twitter or Flickr pages. Mr. Girard commented that every feature on the website was content manageable and user friendly. Mr. Oliver apprised that the Drupal website would allow Mr. Girard to select a module and upload it directly to the Tourism website. Mr. Girard explained that a module was a component on the website, such as a photo gallery module or a calendar of events module. Mr. Oliver mentioned there was space on the home page to display up to nine affiliate logos. Mr. Girard commented that the most attractive feature of the Drupal website was that it allowed the Tourism Department to have internal control over almost every aspect of the website. He noted the final phase of initiating the new Drupal website would be to begin uploading the content, followed by further training. A brief discussion ensued.

Mr. Merlino announced that Michael Consuelo, Special Events Coordinator for the Lake George Regional CVB, was not present today but had forwarded his Monthly Activity Report for the Committee members. Ms. Brand pointed out that Mr. Consuelo was working with USA Track & Field Region 1 Junior Olympic Cross Country Championships, which would be held at the Queensbury High School on November 20, 2011, to assist them with negotiating hotel rates for the athletes and their families.

David Bulmer, of the Warren County Council of Chambers, reported that the last Dinner had been held at Basil & Wicks in the Town of North Creek on September 27, 2011. He said the guest speaker was Jody Moore, Director of Operations for SNCRR, who had provided statistics relative to the railroad. Mr. Bulmer stated that the SNCRR had exceeded the number of riders they had anticipated and added there had been 8,500 regular riders to date and 5,000 riders for the Thomas the Tank Engine Event. He said SNCRR was projecting an additional 5,000 to 6,000 riders this fall and they had already sold out for all trips on Saturdays this fall departing from Saratoga. Mr. Bulmer apprised that SNCRR had created 29 full time jobs which had been filled by local residents. He said SNCRR had exceeded the number of trips required by their contract with Warren County. Mr. Merlino pointed out that the contract required SCNRR to run 100 trips this year and by the end of October they would exceed that requirement.

Mr. Bulmer announced that the train schedule would be amended next year for to coordinate with the race track being closed on Tuesdays in the month of August. He reported that the Ski Trains would operate three days per week and SNCRR would invest over \$100,000 in marketing the Ski Train this winter. He noted SNCRR were proposing investing several hundred thousand dollars in track upgrades in order to bring the track grade up to 45 miles per hour. He stated that SNCRR had become a community partner with the towns on the route and would be purchasing two buses for a shuttle service with regards to the Ski Train.

Mr. Bulmer said the topic of discussion at the Warren County Council of Chambers Delegates Meeting had been the initiation of a communications program with all of their member businesses. He explained that a newsletter program would be initiated which would be sent directly to nearly 11,000 businesses.

Mr. Bulmer reported that he had spent four days in Canada with Mr. Consuelo attending the Centurion Cycling Event. He noted the Event had exceeded the expectations of the municipalities in Canada and the same was anticipated for the upcoming Event in Warren County.

Mr. Merlino mentioned that SNCRR planned to purchase four additional train cars and initiate a trip between Corinth and Thurman.

Pertaining to Pending Items, Ms. Johnson commented that a decision had been reached to continue the Client Label Program for the clients who were currently receiving printed labels. She added that information would be sent in the Newsletters to inform businesses of the electronic means of obtaining addresses.

Mr. Merlino apprised that the Committee had initiated reports from Town Supervisors last month pertaining to feedback, comments or insights regarding their local tourism. He added that this month Mr. McCoy would provide a report on the Town of Lake George.

Mr. McCoy reported that the weather in May and June had resulted in a slow start for tourism in the Town of Lake George. He said business had picked up after the Fourth of July; however, he described the summer business as mediocre. He stated that Tropical Storm Irene had decreased business on a weekend in August which had historically been favorable; however, he remarked that due to the aforementioned press release and the work completed by the County, Town and Village of Lake George Highway Departments, Tropical Storm Irene had little effect on the tourists. He apprised that Labor Day Weekend had been busier than anticipated; however, he added, the majority of September had seen a decrease in tourists.

Mr. McCoy advised that the corporate hotel chains, particularly those located on the Lake, had a very successful summer while the smaller privately owned hotels were not as fortunate. He attributed the majority of the decrease in tourism to people having less discretionary funds at their disposal. He said the Town of Lake George was becoming an event oriented destination and the Adirondack Car Show weekend and Americade weekend were highly successful.

Mr. Kenny volunteered to present a report at the next Committee meeting on tourism in the City of Glens Falls.

Mr. Merlino stated that an executive session was scheduled for this meeting but due to the number of Committee members not present he suggested delaying until the next Committee meeting.

Mr. Strainer commented that the Tourism Department had done a great job in promoting Warren County. He mentioned that he had attended the Adirondack Balloon Festival and he felt that Mark Donohue and his staff had done a great job with the event. He noted that some of the food vendors had run out of food due to a higher attendance than had been anticipated. He opined that the County should continue to support the Adirondack Balloon Festival via Occupancy Tax Special Event Funding. He suggested that the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Adirondack Balloon Festival be featured in one of the Tourism Departments upcoming brochures. Mr. Strainer stated that although he had initially been opposed to the railroad, his opinion had changed since SNCRR had assumed operations and restored the railroad to its former glory.

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

Respectfully submitted,  
Charlene DiResta, Sr. Legislative Office Specialist