

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: TOURISM

DATE: OCTOBER 30, 2014

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

SUPERVISORS MERLINO
KENNY
CONOVER
WOOD
VANSELOW
FRASIER

OTHERS PRESENT:

REPRESENTING THE TOURISM DEPARTMENT:
KATE JOHNSON, DIRECTOR
PETER GIRARD, CREATIVE DIRECTOR
TANYA BRAND, GROUP TOUR PROMOTER
AMANDA ALLEN, DEPUTY CLERK OF THE BOARD
FRANK E. THOMAS, BUDGET OFFICER
SUPERVISORS BROCK
SEEBER

COMMITTEE MEMBER ABSENT:

SUPERVISOR DICKINSON

MICHAEL CONSUELO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, LAKE GEORGE REGIONAL
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU
GARY THORNQUIST, LAKE GEORGE RV PARK/ LAKE GEORGE REGIONAL
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
JEPHSON HILARY, INN ON THE HILL/LAKE GEORGE REGIONAL CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE
AMY COLLINS, DIRECTOR OF TOURISM FOR THE CITY OF GLENS FALLS
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 10:01 a.m.

Motion was made by Mrs. Frasier, seconded by Mr. Vanselow 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 contract with Kenyon Press, Inc. in the amount of \$4,113 for a term commencing November 21, 2014 and terminating December 31, 2014 to print 45,000 copies of the 2015 Whitewater Rafting Brochure. She explained there had been two responses to the request for quotes which was sent to four vendors and Kenyon Press, Inc. had been the lowest responsible bidder. She advised staff members had met with local rafting guides to gather the content for the brochure which she said was an excellent tool and provided good information.

Motion was made by Ms. Wood, seconded by Mrs. Frasier and carried unanimously to authorize the contract with Kenyon Press, Inc. as outlined above. *A copy of the resolution request form is on file with the minutes and the necessary resolution was authorized for the November 21, 2014 Board Meeting.*

Ms. Johnson advised she would provide an update on recent tourism promotion related activities; Tanya Brand, Group Tour Promoter, would update the Committee members of the success of the Destinations of New York State FAM (familiarization) Tour; and Peter Girard, Creative Director, would provide an update on electronic communications, new photography and projects. She noted the activity in the Tourism Department did not slow down much after the end of the summer season.

She apprised inquiries continued to be high and were garnered from a variety of programs, print and online advertisements, commercial broadcasts and referrals. She commented the leads generated were tabulated the day prior and indicated that inquiries had increased compared to the same time period for 2013. Ms. Johnson informed the production of 2015 collateral, ad placements and planning for future programs had also not slowed down and the Department was planning for winter and beyond.

Ms. Johnson said the agenda packet contained a handout representing a comparison chart of information obtained from the *Smith Travel Report*; a copy of the handout is on file with the minutes. She indicated the chart compared weekends in 2013 to those in 2014 for the following: Labor Day; the Adirondack Nationals Car Show; the Adirondack Balloon Festival; the World's Largest Garage Sale; and Columbus Day. She noted the chart compared the occupancy rates and average daily room rates for each weekend for 2013 and 2014. She pointed out for Labor Day Weekend 2013 the occupancy rate was 82.1 and the average daily room rate was \$180.35. She advised there had been an increase for the same weekend in 2014, as reflected by an occupancy rate of 86.7 and an average room rate of \$195.20. She commented the 2014 average room rates for the Adirondack Nationals Car Show and the Adirondack Balloon Festival Weekends had increased and the occupancy rates showed a slight decrease. For the World's Largest Garage Sale Weekend, she continued, the 2014 occupancy rate and average room rate both showed a slight decrease. She mentioned for Columbus Day Weekend the occupancy rate and average room rate both reflected an increase. A brief discussion ensued.

Jephson Hilary, of the Inn on the Hill/Lake George Regional Chamber of Commerce, asked how many of the area hotels contributed to the *Smith Travel Report* data and Ms. Johnson replied there were 20 hotels which were mostly flagship properties. Ms. Johnson commented the sampling was a good barometer for measuring the average occupancy and room rates.

Ms. Johnson informed the 2015 Travel Guide would be delivered on Monday, November 3, 2014 and an image of the cover was displayed for the Committee members. She said the 2015 Travel Guide would be delivered to 10 drop ship locations and the design and features would be reviewed at the next Committee Meeting. She noted the 2014 Travel Guide supply had been depleted as of that day. She advised that winter print and electronic advertisements had been placed or reserved and samples of banner and print ads were displayed for the Committee members. Ms. Johnson reported the 2014-2015 Winter Activities, Recreation & Events Brochure and the 2014-2015 Winter Events Placemat had been delivered; copies of same are on file with the minutes. She noted both pieces would be distributed shortly, as the Department would transition into winter fulfillment the following week. She pointed out both pieces covered activities and events in November through March. A brief discussion ensued.

Ms. Johnson stated the out-of-home advertising would soon commence for twenty inbound train station stops of the New Jersey Transit and a New Jersey Transit map and the design of the Platform Poster were displayed for the Committee members. She noted one of the stations would be Penn Station and the Platform Poster was viewable upon arrival. She commented the images on the Platform Poster included people engaged in outdoor winter recreational activities and contained the logos of the ski areas and the Saratoga & North Creek Railway. She pointed out the Platform Poster also contained a QR (Quick Response) Code which once scanned, directed the visitor to a webpage containing all of the County wide winter activities. She stated the message of the short drive time to the Lake George Area was important and New Jersey was one of the best markets for tourists. Mr. Girard indicated the size of the Platform Poster could be seen outside of the Tourism Office where last year's poster was currently being displayed. Ms. Johnson commented the posters were printed on vinyl and were very sturdy.

Ms. Johnson apprised winter marketing would include television commercials airing in the primary markets. She said Mr. Girard would begin production of the commercials the following week and they would be aired for the Committee members at the next Meeting. She advised the final Newsletter for the year would be distributed on November 20, 2014. She pointed out Public Relations Reports for September and October, prepared by Joanne Conley, Assistant Tourism Coordinator, were included in the agenda packet and highlights of various media advertisement placements were displayed for the Committee members. Ms. Johnson apprised Ms. Conley worked in unison with the Adirondack Regional Tourism Council's Public Relations firm, as well as with the "I ♥ NY" Division of Tourism. She informed the *Post Star* had recently produced a Travel Guide for fall and had credited the Warren County Tourism website for some of the content. She advised there was a Bolton Landing Visitors' Guide which was included on the AAA (American Automobile Association) website, www.AAA.com. She said she had previously met with a representative of AAA over the summer who had informed of the webpage which at the time had contained visitors' guides for Lake Placid, Plattsburgh and Wilmington. She noted she had indicated to the representative that a visitors' guide from Warren County should be included and two days later the Bolton Landing Visitors' Guide had been added.

Ms. Johnson indicated that "I ♥ NY" representation had been present at three Warren County events: the Adirondack Balloon Festival; the World's Largest Garage Sale; and Americade and an image of the "I ♥ NY" information pod from the Adirondack Balloon Festival was displayed for the Committee members. She said the Warren County Tourism Information Booth had been right next to the "I ♥ NY" information pod at the Adirondack Balloon Festival and the World's Largest Garage Sale. She reported these three events were considered to be mature events by New York State which functioned at a high level prior to "I ♥ NY" involvement. She said the State had used these events as opportunities to spread knowledge at other New York State events, assets and attractions. She pointed out the three events had been selected among 50 in the State and the purpose was to encourage travel throughout the State. Ms. Johnson informed Tourism Department staff would exhibit at the Ski and Snowboard Expo on the concourse of Empire State Plaza on November 7-9, 2014. She reported Part 1 of the 2015 Empire State Development Matching Funds Grant Program application had been submitted and Part 2 of the application was anticipated to arrive by November 14, 2014 and would contain an estimate of the grant award. She noted the New York State Division of Tourism expected approximately \$3.8 million would be awarded throughout the State, which was the same amount awarded in 2014. She added they anticipated Warren County would receive a similar amount to the approximate \$80,000 awarded in 2014. Ms. Johnson informed of her position on the Board of Directors of the newly formed New York State Travel Industry Association (NYSTIA) which resulted from the merger of the New York State Travel & Vacation Association (NYSTVA) and the New York State Tourism Promotion Agency (NYSTPA). She advised she had served on the Human Resources Committee of NYSTIA and they had searched for, interviewed and selected a new President, Jill Delaney from Clifton Park, New York. She reported Ms. Delaney had been introduced at the NYSTIA First Annual Meeting held on October 23-24, 2014.

Ms. Brand said her September/October 2014 Group Tour Update was included in the agenda packet and was comprised of a recap of the Lake George Area & Saratoga Springs Destinations of New York State Travel Show and FAM Tour Event which had been held on September 8-10, 2014. She circulated various examples of media coverage and operator and supplier comments to the Committee members and photos taken during the three day, two night "Follow the Rail" FAM Tour were displayed throughout Ms. Brand's presentation. She commented that a follow up survey had been conducted and responses from same were also circulated to the Committee members. She reported 55 Domestic and International Tour Operators had attended the FAM Tour, the purpose of

which was to highlight "off-the-beaten-path" activities and attractions in Warren and Saratoga Counties. She said she felt the itinerary had been well diversified to which she credited the success of the FAM Tour.

Ms. Brand reported on the Day 1 FAM Tour activities in North Creek, Pottersville and Bolton Landing, as follows:

- ▶ an Oscar's Smokehouse tasting and presentation on both buses;
- ▶ a Natural Stone Bridges & Caves presentation was provided on route;
- ▶ an opening buffet luncheon was held at Basil & Wicks during which over 20 North Creek, Thurman and North River partners addressed the Tour Operators with presentations on their businesses;
- ▶ a walk through on a Saratoga & North Creek Railway Dome Car;
- ▶ a visit to the North Creek Depot Museum;
- ▶ a walk down Main Street in North Creek;
- ▶ a Railroads on Parade site inspection in Pottersville;
- ▶ a PowerPoint Presentation and tour of the Sagamore Resort in Bolton Landing;
- ▶ a video of the Adirondack Extreme Adventure Course was played on route;
- ▶ guides on the buses offered a "Millionaires Row" tour and pointed out historical landmarks, homes and attractions; and
- ▶ the evening meal and entertainment were provided by the Saratoga Casino & Raceway and the Vapor Night Club in Saratoga.

Ms. Brand informed of the Day 2 FAM Tour activities in Lake George, Saratoga and Queensbury, as follows:

- ▶ a site visit of the Six Flags Great Escape Lodge which included a tour of some of the rooms and the Water Park;
- ▶ the two hour Destinations of New York State Trade Show held at the Saratoga City Center where Tour Operators and Group Leaders were able to visit over 100 exhibitors from all over New York State, the East Coast and the Mid-Atlantic Region;
- ▶ lunch at the Wishing Well Restaurant in Saratoga;
- ▶ tours of the Saratoga Springs Mineral Springs, the Saratoga Harness and Flat Race Tracks, the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, and the Saratoga Battlefield;
- ▶ a dinner reception at the Queensbury Hotel which included antique cars on display and a mini trade show like format with vendors including The Chapman Museum, The Hyde Collection, the Adirondack Balloon Festival, the Charles R. Wood Theatre, the World Awareness Children's Museum and the Shirt Factory Artisans; and
- ▶ a bonfire and tasting at Springbrook Hollow Farm Distillery.

Ms. Brand recounted the Day 3 FAM Tour activities in Lake George, Lake Luzerne and Hadley, as follows:

- ▶ Supervisor Merlino joined the FAM Tour as an ambassador for Warren County and the Town of Lake Luzerne;
- ▶ Luisa Craige-Sherman, of Explore History Tours, dressed in period attire and conducted a Lake George History Tour;
- ▶ a walk along the Lake with site visits of the Lake George Steamboat Company and Shoreline Cruises;
- ▶ a meet and greet at the Painted Pony Ranch in Lake Luzerne;
- ▶ local guide, Sue Wilder, dressed as Eunice Rockwell to guide the Tour to Lake Luzerne where they split into smaller groups to visit The Adirondack Folk School, the Frances Kinnear Museum of Local History and the Gailey Hill School House;

- ▶ a visit to the Bridge of Hope and a presentation by John Duncan at the Sacandaga Outdoor Center;
- ▶ a scenic tour of the Sacandaga and Hudson Rivers via the Bow Bridge;
- ▶ a historical presentation from Col. Benjamin Butler, as portrayed by Warren County resident Walt Ulrich, at the St. Mary's Episcopal Church;
- ▶ a riverside farewell luncheon provided by Andy Van Bourgondien at the Up River Café; and
- ▶ a stroll down Main Street to the Harmon House for an ice cream social sponsored by the Lake Luzerne Chamber of Commerce.

Ms. Brand informed that any down time on the busses was utilized to offer presentations of the attractions which they were unable to visit. She thanked Mr. Merlino and Ms. Johnson for manning the Warren County Tourism Booth at the Destinations of New York Trade Show which allowed her the opportunity to attend to the Tour Operators and Group Leaders. She noted the Trade Show had been a great venue and all of the comments received were positive. She thanked Amy Collins, Director of Tourism for the City of Glens Falls, for a great presentation at the Queensbury Hotel on Day 2 of the FAM Tour. She commented a long round of applause had been received from the Tour Operators when the end of the FAM Tour was announced. Ms. Brand reported that four Tour Operator companies had attended the FAM Tour and all four had indicated their intentions to book tours for 2015. She apprised Doris Herwig, of Hayfield Quality Tours, had offered guide services throughout the FAM Tour and had already obtained business from her participation. Ms. Wilder, who portrayed Eunice Rockwell during the Tour, had also received business as a result.

Ms. Brand reported international successes and announced that Viajes Falabella, of Bogata, Columbia, would be working with Gore Mountain Ski Resort on ski packages for foreign international travelers (F.I.T.'s). Viator, she continued, was a large Tour Operator out of San Francisco who had requested introductions to contacts at the Lake George Steamboat Company, Shoreline Cruises, Explore History Tours and the Sacandaga Outdoor Center. She advised that planning had already commenced for the 2015 FAM Tour which would be hosted once again in conjunction with Saratoga County. She said they had discussed partnering with the International Division of "I ♥ NY" in order to include an International Receptive Operator segment. Next year, she continued, they planned to begin the FAM Tour on a Sunday with a welcome cruise reception on Lake George and one full day and evening of touring in Warren County and one full day of touring in Saratoga County. She noted next year the FAM Tour would end with the Destinations of New York State Trade Show, as opposed to having the Trade Show take place in the middle. Ms. Brand thanked all of the Warren County businesses for their contributions towards making the FAM Tour a success.

Ms. Brand announced that 3,000 copies of the 2015 Group Travel Planner had been printed and she circulated a copy to the Committee members. She said a lot of the images included in the Planner had been derived from the FAM Tour. She pointed out the Group Travel Planner had been redesigned to condense the listings and present more information. She noted this reduced the fee for advertising in the Group Travel Planner, as well as the cost of shipping it. Ms. Brand reported the November Group Loop would be released later that week and contained information, such as a Rachel Ray Itinerary; comments from the FAM Tour; an announcement on the newly printer 2015 Group Tour Planner; and a list of shows she would be attending in 2015.

Mr. Hilary asked if local business owners could obtain a list of the attendees from the FAM Tour and Ms. Brand replied affirmatively. Mr. Merlino opined the FAM Tour had been a fun couple of days and Ms. Brand and her staff had done a very good job. He said a lot of planning and hard work had gone into the FAM Tour and he commented Ms. Brand had been nervous but it had worked out well. Ms. Johnson stated the responses from the FAM Tour had all been positive.

Mr. Girard reminded the Committee members of a previous request to feature the top ten Warren County events on the Warren County Tourism website. He said the Jazz Festival Weekend, the Adirondack Balloon Festival and the World's Largest Garage Sale were the last three of the top ten events to be added. He apprised the events were highlighted with a Feature Button which led to a landing page for each event and he noted more content would be added to the World's Largest Garage Sale landing page before it went live. He commented the landing pages included descriptions of the events, testimonials and videos from the events. He mentioned the top portion of the landing pages contained images of the events. He pointed out the Feature Buttons and landing pages would be used on the revised website once it was completed.

Mr. Girard informed there had been two email blasts released since the previous Committee Meeting, the first of which was a Canadian/Thanksgiving email blast released on October 7, 2014 to approximately 5,000 Canadian email subscribers and opened by 880 people in the three day tracking period. He commented they had the ability to separate the Canadian email addresses from the subscriber list of over 130,000 email addresses. He noted the Canadian/Thanksgiving email blast had contained shopping content because, as previously mentioned by Tom Connors, of Ad Workshop, shopping was a major interest of Canadian tourists. Mr. Girard reported the Shopping, Getaways, Locally Produced and Arts and Culture email blast had been released on October 8, 2014 to approximately 136,000 email subscribers and had been opened by about 11,000 people in the three day tracking period. He informed the Getaway packages had been a great success and he noted information gathered from email blasts, pertaining to interests, was used as indicators for future email blasts and advertising.

Mr. Girard displayed various images taken with the Hero3+ waterproof high definition camera by GoPro, including an underwater still photo, to the Committee members. He commented the Department was continually building their image and video library. He displayed images taken at the Adirondack Balloon Festival and noted both video and still photos had been taken. He commented the content would be used in the production of television commercials, print ads and brochures. He informed a full day of shooting had been completed with the Videographer which included the Fort William Henry Resort, the Lookout Café, the docks on Lake George, Adirondack Extreme Adventure Park and Ridin-Hy Ranch and he displayed images for the Committee members. He mentioned an additional image gallery had been added to the Warren County Tourism website which featured various winter photos and various images were displayed to the Committee members.

Mr. Girard informed of a meeting with a representative from Ad Workshop who was certified with Google and his attendance at a seminar where he learned about Google algorithms. After the seminar, he explained, the representative had offered a one-on-one session with him and Ms. Johnson at no cost to the County. He stated they had reviewed the Google Statistics which he displayed for the Committee members. He noted the statistics contained information, such as what information visitors found important on the Warren County website. He added this information was being used in the design of the new revised website which was currently in process. He mentioned they had been surprised to find out how popular fireworks displays were on the website. Mr. Girard informed the top interests of visitors to the Warren County website were lodging, camping and events.

Pertaining to the revised website, Mr. Girard apprised it would be converted to be more mobile device friendly and the Feature Bar section would be enlarged due to popularity. He commented videos from events throughout Warren County had been collected for about the last two years for use on the website. The most recent video, he continued, had been the Rocktoberfest event in the Village of Lake George which would soon be embedded on the site on the events video page. He noted the videos could be played directly on the Warren County Tourism website and contained a

link to direct visitors to the event's website. He reported that recently he and Ms. Johnson had traveled to Lake Luzerne to meet with John Duncan and Tracy Clothier to discuss the Sacandaga Whitewater Park and obtain a better understanding of the project.

Mr. Conover recalled that at a previous Committee Meeting he had pointed out there had been a couple of articles pertaining to the best beaches to visit on Memorial Day and the top ten places to visit in the Country which had been featured on the USA Today Travel website. He suggested the possibility of incorporating articles and press coverage of this nature into the Warren County Tourism website. Mr. Girard responded that these articles had already been incorporated into the website and he expressed they were big endorsements for the area. He indicated there were pop-up informational boxes on the homepage which were used to inform of recent press releases and articles. He added the revised website would display this type of information more prominently, as being endorsed as one of the top ten destinations in the Country was significant. Ms. Johnson pointed out there was a navigation plane on the lefthand side of the homepage which informed of recent articles.

Mr. Merlino commented there were no pending items for the Tourism Committee. He stated Christina Curley, Special Events Coordinator for the Lake George Regional Chamber of Commerce and Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB), had been unable to attend the Meeting to provide her Sales/Special Event/Convention Report.

Michael Consuelo, Executive Director of the Lake George Regional Chamber of Commerce and CVB, advised that Ms. Curley was attending the Rejuvenate Conference. He said he had spoken to Ms. Curley the previous evening and her schedule for appointments at the Conference was fully booked and she had obtained some positive leads. He commented that upon her return, Ms. Curley would be getting ready to attend the TEAMS Conference where there would be great opportunities to promote the Festival Space at Charles R. Wood Park. He noted Ms. Curley would bring copies of the pre-opening brochures for the Festival Space in order to help promote it. He noted that when Ms. Curley returned next week, she would complete her monthly report and email it to the Committee members.

On behalf of the Lake George Regional Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Consuelo thanked Mr. Merlino and Mr. Kenny for their attendance at the Annual Dinner the previous week. He noted the Dinner had been held at the Queensbury Hotel and the guest speakers had included Senator Betty Little and Gavin Landry, Executive Director of the New York State Division of Tourism. Mr. Merlino said that some of the initiatives which Mr. Landry had discussed pertaining to the North Country had been impressive. Mr. Consuelo commented that Mr. Landry was familiar with the region and had previously worked in the Saratoga area. He informed that he and Senator Little had met with the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) with regards to the Gateway Information Center at Exit 17 of the Northway. He reminded the Committee members that at a previous meeting he had displayed some conceptual ideas for improvement of the Gateway Information Center. He reported the NYSDOT had been in favor of the improvement plans but had indicated no funding was available; however, he continued, Senator Little had indicated that a source of funding would be determined. Mr. Consuelo mentioned that Senator Little found the bathrooms at the Gateway Information Center to be in dire need of improvements.

Mr. Consuelo reported his recent attendance and exhibition at the International Travel and Tourism Trade Show in Canada. He said many Canadians had visited the Lake George Regional Chamber of Commerce information booth and he attributed some of that to the marketing to Canadians conducted by the Warren County Tourism Department.

Lastly, Mr. Consuelo thanked the Committee members in advance for their consideration of the proposal submitted by the Lake George Regional Chamber of Commerce and CVB in response to the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the Sales/Special Event/Convention Agency/Association. Mr. Merlino stated two proposals had been submitted as a result of the RFP and copies of the proposals had been distributed to the Committee members; *copies of same are on file with the minutes*. Mr. Merlino requested the Committee members to review the proposals and to contact him and Ms. Johnson via email or phone by 12:00 p.m. on November 6, 2014 with any opinions. He advised that he, Mr. Kenny and Ms. Johnson would review the proposals for discussion at the next Committee Meeting. He said the proposals contained a lot of information and the Committee members would need time to review them properly. Ms. Johnson said she would email all of the Committee members after the Meeting as a reminder and to ensure they had the necessary email addresses for their responses.

As there was no further business to come before the Tourism Committee, on motion made by Mr. Kenny and seconded by Mrs. Frasier, Mr. Merlino adjourned the meeting at 10:39 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Charlene DiResta, Sr. Legislative Office Specialist