

River Parishes Tourist Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
April 20, 2010

Meeting Attendance

Present: Paul Aucoin, Delores Florent, Peter Jasper, Mike Norton,  
Nancy Robert, Judy Songy, Nicole Veillon

Absent: Betty Haydel

Staff: Kimmie Carlos, Coy St. Pierre, Jay Tusa

Stakeholders/Guests: Tom Binion (Hampton), Rachael Burns (Holiday Inn Express), Cathy Matherne (Airboat Tours by Arthur), Vikas Patel (Best Western LaPlace), Debbie Reulet (St. Joseph Plantation), Catherine Schons (Pleasure Bend Nature Tours), Carmen Walsh (Suburban), Sheilah Wentzell (Quality Inn LaPlace)

I. Call to order

Chairman Paul Aucoin asked that roll be taken; recognized a quorum and called the meeting to order.

II. Approval of March Minutes

- Paul asked for a motion to approve the March minutes

*A motion was made by Mike Norton and seconded by Nicole Veillon to approve the March minutes. The motion was unanimously approved.*

III. Monthly Financial Reports

RPTC Mtg. Minutes

Apr 20, 2010/pg 2

- Our total assets have increased by \$2,000 from last month
- Total assets are \$612,253 in CD and checking accounts
- Income for the month ending 3/31 was about \$1,000 less than budgeted
- We are down about \$80,000 for the year
- This does not include our expected revenue from the state which will be about \$32,000 therefore that variance will change next month
- The budget will also be revised which will help close the gap in the variance
- For *Program Services* we spent \$19,000 and budgeted \$29,000; for the year we spent \$256,509 and budgeted \$271,717
- *Salaries and Benefits* are right on budget
- For *General & Administrative* there is about a \$4,000 variance to the good since we budgeted \$44,000 for the nine months period and spent \$40,000

*A motion was made by Nicole Veillon and seconded by Judy Songy to approve the March financials. The motion was unanimously approved.*

- Paul reviewed the charts for the three parishes
- St. John Parish's income tends to go up and down with the other two parishes staying the same

*A motion was made by Mike Norton and seconded by Nicole Veillon to approve the hotel occupancy tax for March. The motion was unanimously approved.*

- Paul reviewed the General Ledger which is a list of all expenses current and year to date for each category

*A motion was made by Nancy Robert and seconded by Judy Songy to approve the invoices paid for March. The motion was unanimously approved.*

- Paul reviewed the bank reconciliation report
- Ending balance per book is \$102,378.46
- The Omni Bank Statement was reviewed

*A motion was made by Delores Florent and seconded by Nancy Robert to approve the bank statement for March. The motion was unanimously approved.*

Revised Budget

- Jay put in the actual numbers we had for the past three or four months along with the amount from the state rebate we will be getting at the end of the month
- Jay reduced the St. Charles Parish income from \$7,000 to \$6,500 to be more conservative
- We are now looking at an income of \$496,966 for the year
- Jay thinks we'll do a little better than that with the income from the hotel/motel occupancy taxes
- Jay went through and looked at the expenses and because of where we are in the year there wasn't a lot to trim
- We were originally looking at a budget of \$520,000 and now were at \$505,000

*A motion was made by Judy Songy and seconded by Nancy Robert to approve the revised budget ending June 2010. The motion was unanimously approved.*

*A motion was made by Mike Norton and seconded by Judy Songy to go into recess. The motion was unanimously approved.*

Break 1:20 - 1:30

*A motion was made by Judy Songy and seconded by Nicole Veillon to reconvene. The motion was unanimously approved.*

Roll was once again taken; a quorum was recognized and the meeting was called to order and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

#### IV. Director's Report

##### Website

- Jay reviewed the web report that Jennifer Barbee prepares each month
- For March we had 458 keywords ranking on 1<sup>st</sup> page of search results
- 684 direct visits to the page in March
- The site has seen 3,361 visits in the month of March
- Our Google pay per clicks have received 443,193 impressions and 1,612 clicks
- Have received 94 brochure requests through the website for the month
- Our visits have increased by 400 visits from last month
- The month prior when we were with CompuCast we had a total of 300 visits

## RPTC Mtg. Minutes

Apr 20, 2010/pg 4

- Last month for the visits to the plantations page, we had 3,513 visits and this month we had 4,340
- Jay mentioned that Hannah with Jennifer Barbee is researching some new key words for us to add to the ones we currently have
- Key words that have to do with accommodations and oil refineries
- Jay mentioned that we are always monitoring and updating the key words and recently asked Jennifer Barbee to look into more the industry related side and not just tourism side
- Paul asked Jay if we can distribute the brochure request information to our hotels and stakeholders
- Jay agreed if the stakeholders would like the information we would pass it along to them
- Jay also mentioned that we are doing a campaign with Compass Marketing where we're running a Family Travel Planner insert in publications nationally and specifically in the Southeast
- We have gotten over 7,000 leads for requests for brochures from Compass Marketing
- We have sent out brochures to these leads however if any of the stakeholders would like that list we can send that out as well
- Jay mentioned that we are planning a promo this summer to give away a little trip to the area
- Jay would like to create a postcard in conjunction with the promo and send it to the recent mailing addresses that we have received asking them to register to win a trip to New Orleans Plantation Country and at the same time when they register we can capture their email address
- At that time we can start soliciting them via email instead of the expense of having a printed piece and this will also build our email database
- Jay mentioned that we are working on some new content for our website and asked Coy to give an update since she has been overseeing the developments
- Coy reported that for the wedding page we're adding venues, historic churches, list of Justices of the Peace, marriage requirements and fees, Clerk of Court's address along with their hours for each parish
- For the Group section we are adding venues that can accommodate groups
- Have added a *Cajun Words & Terms* page to the *About* section
- Working on adding *Cajun Foods* along with recipes under the *Dine* section
- Under the film section we have added a page to include info on accommodations
- We own the url Film-Louisiana.com which is being directed to the film section on our website
- The film section includes Accommodations, Browse Locations, Soundstage, Films and Commercials shot in the area and Louisiana Tax Incentives

- For the shopping page, we have listed all the unique shopping in the three parishes including the gift shops at the plantations
- We will also have a section titled 'Seasonal Events' which will each have a page dedicated to seasonal events such as Mardi Gras Season (this page will give the history of Mardi Gras, the King Cake and list the area parades), Crawfish Season (this page will tell when Crawfish Season begins and ends, where and how to catch crawfish, and how to boil and eat crawfish), Lenten Season (this will give a history of Lent), Snowball Season (this page will give a description of our uniquely cool treat along with locations of snowball stands throughout the River Parishes), Hunting & Fishing Season (this page will give license fees, open season dates for each wildlife/game and listings of boat launches), Gumbo Season (this page will give a history of gumbo), Crab and Shrimp Season (this page will tell what time of year is typical for crab and shrimp), and Bonfire Season (this will give a history of the season, explain the construction process and list dates and times for the lighting)
- In the process of listing tour companies on our website since we get a lot of tourists thinking we are a tour company
- We have two interns that are working on these pages and once we approve them we will make those pages live for the public to view

#### PR & Advertising

- The Family Travel Planner insert that we're doing with Compass Marketing is doing really well for us
- We have received over 7,000 leads
- Jay has been talking to different PR & Advertising agencies in looking to hire a new company to handle that for us
- Three of those companies are Graham Group, Peter Mayer and Beuerman-Miller-Fitzgerald
- They are working on getting proposals together for us which we'll have to look over at the next meeting so we can make a recommendation for a new advertising agency and start using them to kick off next year
- Jay mentioned that he's looking to do a new advertising campaign since we have been using the current one for three years now

#### Plantation Country Biker Event

## RPTC Mtg. Minutes

Apr 20, 2010/pg 6

- Jay met with Richard Orgeron about a biker event and his recommendation is to wait until at least the Spring because when asking for sponsorship most won't have it in their budget if asking for sponsorships for this Fall
- He suggested before this year ends approach those prospective individuals and let them know about the event and the amount we're looking for so if their able to do it, they can put it in their budget for next year
- Jay asked the board if they wanted to do something for next Spring then we would have to start working on it now since it takes time to put together these events
- Jay asked Richard Orgeron what he thought it would cost to put on an event and he said between the advertising and hiring the bands it would be around a \$50,000 event
- Some of the money can be recouped with sponsorships but to what level is not certain
- Paul asked to see a budget and have Richard come back and address to us what this would entail in hosting a bike event
- Paul personally feels that when he spoke to Richard he was told that for a first time event he could get 1500 bikers
- Paul feels if we can get 1500 bikers spending 2 nights in our area, that's 3000 room nights which is really good
- Paul also stated that the hope is not only having sponsors but also having those that rent booths to sell their merchandise to bikers
- Paul thinks we need to explore it further without committing ourselves to an event
- Some stakeholders suggested doing a fall event instead of a Spring event so as not to conflict with the plantations festivals
- Stakeholders also suggested weighing how well the New Orleans bike event does in their second year before hosting our own event
- Paul mentioned that we will have Richard back at the next meeting to answer more questions that anyone would have
- Jay mentioned that he didn't think we would be able to recoup the benefit we want from spending \$50,000
- Jay doesn't think the hotels will see room nights that they want to see and the plantations won't see the attendance they want to see for that type of investment

### Sales

- Tour operators are very excited about the New Orleans Area Sugar Trail that the Houma CVB has put together

## RPTC Mtg. Minutes

Apr 20, 2010/pg 7

- Kimmie presented a rough draft of the Sugar Trail brochure that shows how tourist will be able to follow the 1800's to present day and learn how sugarcane is grown and turned into sugar
- The trail will allow tourist to plan their own itinerary from New Orleans area attractions including manufacturing facilities to see how unique sugar related products are produced
- Travel South Leads will be received by the end of the week
- Kimmie had some tour operators asking about hotels in the area so those leads will be included as well
- Kimmie talked about the Louisiana Student Travel Planner which is being spearheaded by Audubon Institute along with World Wide Concepts
- This will be showcased and launched at SYTA on August 27 -30
- The planner will have 4 different sections; where to play, where to eat, what to do, where to sleep
- Kimmie is trying to get 5 stakeholders for each section
- *Where to play* section means where can student groups perform
- It's a \$159 one-time fee for the listing
- Every CVB that is listed in the planner will be bringing it to trade shows
- Every ABA and SYTA member will receive the planner which is great exposure
- World Wide Concepts has chosen Destrehan Plantation for their tour group of 650 students to do a mini heritage day on July 3<sup>rd</sup>
- Kimmie is working on profile sheets for POW WOW and would like to know if any of the plantations have material or tours that is translated into another language so she can include that on the profile sheet
- Sandra with World Wide Concepts would like to do an African American history tour to tie in with the Congo Festival in November and would like talk about slavery and visit Destrehan and Laura Plantation
- Kimmie asked if anyone else has a good story from the plantations that would tie into that concept to let her know so they can add them to the tour
- Kimmie is trying to work on creating more packages and sample itineraries
- Some have expressed interest in student itineraries

### Show Update

- ***Travel South Showcase*** – Birmingham, AL
- Kimmie stated that this was a great show
- Kimmie met with 45 tour operators
- Booked business at the show for the first time with a group going to Houmas House for lunch and a tour in May

## RPTC Mtg. Minutes

Apr 20, 2010/pg 8

- Very positive feedback about bringing groups back to the area
- Most tour operators are selling student groups because it's a big market
- They are looking for interactive things to do for the student groups

### Upcoming Schedule for RPTC:

- FMCA (Family Motorcoach Association), Shreveport, LA - April 21-22
- LACVB will be hosting a dinner for 50 chapter presidents and their wives of FMCA. We will have a table to display our destination in hopes that they will book pre or post excursions for the big rally in September that will also be held in Shreveport
- US Travel Association's International POW WOW – Orlando, FL - May 15-19
- POW WOW is an international trade show that Kimmie will be attending with the state to meet with international tour operators

### Stakeholders Comments

- Carmen Walsh with Suburban Hotel suggested creating some coupons with discounts to the area attractions in order to keep hotel guests from going into the city
- Nancy Robert with Destrehan Plantation suggested it could be done by creating an inexpensive rack card with cut out coupons listed on the back

## V. Chairman's Monthly Report- Paul Aucoin

### St. John Tax Collection

- We're still working with the collector from St. John Parish on the issue of the RV parks
- We're having a difficult time making it clear that we want everyone that is not a permanent resident to be taxed
- Now we're trying to define what's a permanent resident and what's not a permanent resident
- Hopefully next month we'll have the issue resolved

Personal Financial Disclosure Forms

- All our commissioners have to file their personal disclosure forms by May 15
- A blank copy is included in every board member's packet
- Paul encouraged board members to complete the forms and send them in as soon as possible

Closing Comments

- Paul mentioned that there will be a River Parishes day at the legislature
- Anyone wanting to come is welcome
- The date is May 12 from 12:00 – 8:00
- It will be represented by the three parishes plus Ascension Parish
- There will be food and entertainment
- It will be located in the Pentagon Barracks
- It will be an all day event where we can meet and greet the legislators
- Jay and Paul have met with Kevin Kelly with Houmas House and he has agreed to keep his membership with us for another year
- Rachel Burns with Holiday Inn Express expressed her concern over the people that were evacuated from Norco to Kenner hotels because of the pipeline leak
- She asked Paul if he had a contact that could remind the plants about the hotels in the area that do provide food service should they ever need to evacuate in the future
- Paul mentioned that each parish that we represent has an office of emergency preparedness that makes that call and we need to notify them that we can handle these events
- Paul stated his plan will be to notify each Office of Emergency Preparedness that they should have done that locally, copy the parish president and copy each Economic Development Board and ask that they send a letter themselves

*A motion was made by Mike Norton and seconded by Nicole Veillon to adjourn the meeting. The motion was unanimously approved.*

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.