

River Parishes Tourist Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
April 12, 2011

Meeting Attendance

Present: Paul Aucoin, Dolores Florent, Judy Songy, Nicolle Veillon

Absent: Betty Haydel, Peter Jasper

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

Stakeholders/Guests: Paul Bair (Cajun Pride Swamp Tours), Buddy Boe, Jane Heltz (Quality Inn), Jesse Lambert (Houmas House), Audrey Temple (St. James Welcome Center), Wynne Waltman (Graham Group)

I. Call to order

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

Paul asked if anyone wished to make any public comments on any agenda items to identify themselves at this time. No public comments were made.

Opening comments

- Paul announced that Nancy Robert has resigned from the board and a copy of her letter of resignation was placed in everyone's meeting binder
- Paul mentioned that he would discuss Nancy's resignation further in the regular portion of the meeting

II. Approval of March Minutes

- Paul asked for a motion to approve the March minutes

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

### III. Monthly Financial Reports

- Current assets for March 31, 2011 are \$628,112 which is \$3,715 above last month's total assets
- Paul reviewed the income or Public Support from our Hotel/Motel tax for the month ending March 31 which was \$29,681, budgeted was \$27,715
- We're \$10,000 above budget for the year for income
- *Total Program Services* expenses for the month was \$17,825 and \$18,716 was budgeted
- For the year actual verses budgeted, we had budgeted \$223,935 and spent \$222,173 therefore we're \$1,700 below budget
- For *Salaries & Benefits* for one month ending we had an expense of \$1,400 which wasn't budgeted
- Jay explained the expense was for insurance which the budget didn't reflect since we recently made the change but it is in the new budget that will be approved later in the meeting
- For period ending 9 months we spent \$139,691 and budgeted \$142,321 therefore we're \$2,629 below budget which balances off the \$1,400 we hadn't budgeted for
- For *General & Administrative Expenses* we're a little over budgeted for the month but for the year we're \$3,775 below budget
- *Total Expenses* was \$25,966 in actual and \$21,416 was budgeted therefore we're \$4,034 above budget for the month but for the year we're \$8,167 below budget

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

- Paul reviewed the charts for the three parishes showing the monthly income
- Paul reviewed the Hotel/Motel chart showing current year actual to budget and prior year actual

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

- Paul reviewed the General Ledger and Bank Statement

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- Ending balance per book was \$121,014.68 and ending balance per bank was \$127,307.02 with \$6,292.34 in outstanding checks
- Paul asked for a motion to approve the bank statement for March

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

- Paul reviewed the invoices paid and transaction listing for the month

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

- Paul reminded everyone that a couple of meetings ago he asked Jay to speak to our annual auditor who gives a report to the legislative auditor to make sure our credit card policy was good
- Even though the auditor stated we are doing fine Paul stated he would like to have a written report on it
- Jay stated that he was sent an email from our auditor, Pernell which his response was the credit card policy we currently have in place is very comprehensive and one of the better ones he's reviewed
- Pernell advised there are limitations placed on employees by U.S. Department of Labor when it comes to withholding amounts from the employees payroll checks for items such as personal expenses paid via company credit card. Withholding cannot reduce the employees net pay to less than what has been received had the employee been receiving the less than minimum legal wage
- Jay mentioned he needs to investigate further how we can reword that portion of the policy which he feels we need to just put that verbiage into the policy
- Paul reviewed the amended budget which was revised on April 12, 2011
- Anticipated receipts for the year is approximately \$500,000
- Total salaries for the year will be \$196,000
- General & Administrative Expenses will total \$44,000
- Program Services which includes our advertising will total \$258,900
- Total expenses will be \$498,967 versus income of \$504,000
- Paul would like to make sure we're keeping a good ratio between advertising and total income and asked Jay if he could figure out the percentage for the next meeting
- Paul complimented Jay on keeping a close budget
- Jay mentioned he is a bit concerned with the tax rebate we get from the state for next year
- Jay thinks we'll be down again next year because this year we received an extra \$20,000 due to some funds that wasn't being allocated to us
- Since next year we're not going to get this extra money Jay is a little concerned with next year's budget

- Paul suggested being a little more conservative by dropping it down another 10% for budgeting purposes
- Jay stated that this year we should finish at \$153,000 therefore next year if we take out the extra \$20,000 then that will put us at around \$130,000 but considering our cap is \$200,000 and at one time we were getting very close to that it's something we need to be aware of
- Paul suggested taking the figure we received, take out the extra \$20,000 and reduce it by 10%

*A motion was made by Nicole Veillon and seconded by Dolores Florent to go into recess. The motion was unanimously approved.*

Break 10:20 - 10:30

*A motion was made by Nicole Veillon and seconded by Judy Songy 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.

#### Opening Comments

- Paul welcomed Paul Bair, the new owner and operator of Cajun Pride Swamp Tours to the meeting
- Paul Bair announced he is open 7 days a week and has enjoyed meeting everyone in the area
- Paul wished him the very best and if there is anything we can do to help that he not hesitate to give us a call

#### IV. Director's Report- Jay Tusa

##### Approval 2010/2011 Amended Budget

- Paul noted that the budget was reviewed in the financial portion of the meeting but waited until the public portion for approval to allow for any public comments
- Paul asked if there were any questions or public comments on the budget
- Without any questions or comments, Paul asked for a motion to approve the amended budget

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

#### BP Grant Update

- Jay received some good news from the Lt. Governor's office that we were approved for the grant
- Jay mentioned that he has to get back to them with some baseline numbers so they can see where we are now and where we'll be in a year from now
- Jay recapped some of the projects we will be doing such as the wayfinding signs, FAM tours, video pod casting, new promotional videos and a couple of advertising opportunities
- Jay is waiting to hear back from another grant we applied for through the Louisiana Office of Tourism called the Project Enhancement Grant
- Additional money was applied for some wayfinding signs, additional advertising and smart phone and iphone app with that grant

#### Approval Board Resolutions for PEI & CMP Grants

- Jay asked for board approval on two resolutions granting him authority to sign on behalf of the Tourist Commission for two grants
- Jay read the two resolutions to the board that was included in the board packets
- One is for the Project Enhancement Initiative (PEI) Grant Program with the Louisiana Office of Tourism and the other is for the CMP (Cooperative Marketing Program) through the Louisiana Office of Tourism
- Paul asked when were the applications due
- Jay stated the applications have already been submitted but LOT allowed him to hold off on the resolutions until the board meeting because they were due before our board meeting
- Paul asked if there was any public comment on the two resolutions
- Paul asked for two separate approvals on each resolution
- Jay noted that he has not signed any contracts, merely sent in applications

*A motion was made by Nicole Veillon and seconded by Judy Songy to authorize Jay to act on behalf of the Tourist Commission with respect to the Project Enhancement Initiative (PEI) Grant. The motion was unanimously approved.*

*A motion was made by Nicole Veillon and seconded by Dolores Florent to authorize Jay to act on behalf of the Tourist Commission with respect to the Cooperative Marketing Program (CMP) Grant. The motion was unanimously approved.*

#### Advertising & PR Update

- Wynne mentioned that we are currently working on plans for next year
- Wynne showed the ads in the new Louisiana Tour Guide and also in the Attractions Guide
- Jay noted that we have our tags in the Tour Guide ad and we've already starting getting inquiries via our tags
- Wynne mentioned we received a lot of new leads through Facebook and have also added some extra tracking to Facebook so we can track not only who comes in to Facebook pages but also if they go on to click through stories
- Jay mentioned he is working on the Marketing Plan for next year and our budget which he'll have for the next meeting since we give it out a month before it's to be voted on to give the board time to review it so we can vote on it in June

#### Website

- Wynne mentioned at this point we are transferring the site over from Jennifer Barbee Inc. and reassembling the pieces into the new format that Jay showed at the last meeting
- Search engine referrals were down a little over February but total brand impressions were up as well as direct visits to the site
- This shows people are finding us on their own and not necessarily through a search engine or referrals which is a good thing
- Total visits was up from 3,647 to 4,326
- Unique visitors up a little
- Total page views stayed about the same, up about 1,000
- Total pay per click impressions was up from 375,622 to 410,119
- Pay per clicks was about the same from last month
- Brochure requests was close to the same with 67 this month and 70 last month

#### Website Marketing Proposal

- Jay mentioned that we talked at the last meeting about transitioning the website over from Jennifer Barbee to the Graham Group and as part of that we deferred from the last meeting of Graham Group actually taking over the search engine optimization and the key word management
- Jay directed the board to Graham Group's proposal that was included in the board packets
- Wynne briefly went over the proposal which will be the same work Jennifer Barbee is currently doing for us but obviously since they will be taking over the website it makes sense that they handle this as well
- Jay mentioned that it is a little less expensive that what Jennifer Barbee is charging us

- We're currently paying \$2,000 a month for Jennifer Barbee and for Graham Group it will be \$1,750 a month which is a savings of \$250 a month
- Jay also noted that Wynne attends the meetings every month so if there are any questions she can answer them

*A motion was made by Nicole Veillon and seconded by Judy Songy to approve the transfer of the marketing of the website over to Graham Group. The motion was unanimously approved.*

#### Show Update

- **South by Southwest Music Festival – Austin, TX**
- Kimmie reported that she didn't think it was very organized
- It was put on by the LACVB
- Kimmie didn't feel it was very conducive in what we were trying to do because of the venue it was in and having a band playing made it difficult to talk to people about our destinations
- **STS (Southeast Tourism Society) Spring Conference – Destin, FL**
- Jay attended the three day conference and thought it was good
- They had some break-out sessions on mobile phone marketing, smart phone apps and a couple of sessions on training hiring staff
- STS will have their Fall meeting in New Orleans so everyone will be here in November which will be nice

#### Upcoming Schedule for RPTC

- **May 19-26:** US Travel Association's International Pow Wow – San Francisco, CA
- Kimmie will be giving out a disk that will include images of our area to the media along with our plantation chips
- Kimmie mentioned she will be going with the state therefore they will be talking about the entire state
- This always proves to be a good show for us since many of our visitors are international

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

##### Nancy Robert's Resignation

- Paul once again announced that Nancy Robert has resigned from the board and a copy of her letter of resignation was placed in everyone's meeting binder

- Paul stated that he did compliment Nancy for her work here on the Tourist Commission
- Nancy stated in her letter that she was getting more and more busy at Destrehan Plantation which Paul mentioned to her was due in large part to her efforts that they were busy
- Paul thought she was an exemplary commissioner whom we'll miss and was sorry to see her leave
- Paul informed her that we look forward to her coming to the meetings as a tourist attraction since we take input from our attractions

#### Board Disclosure Form

- Paul noted that this is the Tier 2 form
- Deadline is May 15<sup>th</sup>
- It states anyone that sits on a board in the state of Louisiana has to file with the Ethics Office
- Paul mentioned if you need your old files Coy keeps a copy of those and can contact her
- Coy mentioned that she will be emailing out a link where commissioners can retrieve their last year's files along with a blank form

#### General Comments

- Jesse Lambert with Houmas House mentioned for all those that are on Four Square they started something new
- When you check in at Houmas House they now offer a \$4.00 discount on your mansion and garden ticket
- Jane Heltz with Quality Inn reported that their occupancy is up
- Jay mentioned that LTPA is having their annual meeting at Houmas House this year on June 24<sup>th</sup>
- Jay thought it would be nice if everyone from our area would attend in support of our area
- This is their annual membership and is open to LTPA members

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

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.