

River Parishes Tourist Commission
Meeting Minutes
February 23, 2010

Meeting Attendance

Present: Paul Aucoin, Betty Haydel, Peter Jasper, Mike Norton,
Nancy Robert, Judy Songy, Nicole Veillon

Absent: Delores Florent

Staff: Coy St. Pierre

Stakeholders/Guests: Jo Banner (Jo's Creole T-Cakes), Shane Carter (Ramada
N.O. Airport), Sherry Constance (LTPA), Kathy Harton
(Ramada N.O. Airport), Craig Howat (Satellite Center),
Jesse Lambert (Houmas House), Cathy Matherne (Airboat
Tours by Arthur), Renee' Natell (Evergreen Plantation),
Catherine Schons (Pleasure Bend Nature Tours), Janet
Spitler (Evergreen Plantation)

I. Call to order

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

II. Approval of January Minutes

- Paul asked for a motion to approve the January minutes

A motion was made by Nancy Robert and seconded by Peter Jasper to approve the January minutes. The motion was unanimously approved.

III. Monthly Financial Reports

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- Paul mentioned that Jay's comment to him on the financials were some of the monthly budget items were off because they were paid in months different than we expected but for the year everything is fine
- Last month we were very close to budget
- Paul called attention to the income for the month of January was \$20,000 and we budgeted \$28,000
- We're about \$7,700 below on income which we are monitoring
- For the year, actual is \$302,000 and budgeted was \$355,000 but Paul reminded the board that the sales rebate check from the state came in lower than normal
- We have been told that by the end of the year we should get the full \$200,000
- Paul has asked Jay to be prepared to cut the budget should we not get the full amount from the state
- For *Total Program Services* we are off by \$15,000 for the year
- We budgeted \$218,000 and we spent \$202,000
- For *Salaries*, we're right on budget with a \$1,300 difference
- For *Total and Administrative Services*, actual was \$31,500 and budgeted \$31,400

A motion was made by Mike Norton and seconded by Nicole Veillon to approve the January financials. The motion was unanimously approved.

- Paul reviewed the charts
- Paul reminded everyone that we are looking for \$23,800 every month in income
- October was holding up at \$24,900 but November was below budget
- Paul pointed out that we waived Houmas House's membership fees for the last two months because we didn't have them listed on our website or brochure for that time frame

A motion was made by Betty Haydel and seconded by Nicole Veillon to approve the hotel occupancy tax for January. 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
- Mike questioned the late fees on the Visas and asked to started making note of the time frame they are giving us to pay it
- If they are starting to cut back to the amount of time, we may want to look into getting another card

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A motion was made by Judy Songy and seconded by Peter Jasper to approve the invoices paid for January. The motion was unanimously approved.

- Paul reviewed the bank statement, invoices paid and transaction listing
- Bank statement shows a balance as of January 31st of \$193,940
- This is a \$6,000 increase from last month's ending balance

A motion was made by Mike Norton and seconded by Betty Haydel to approve the bank statement for January. The motion was unanimously approved.

CD Renewal

- Our CD at Omni Bank for \$500,000 is up for renewal
- Paul mentioned that he got a quote from Sharon Kell with Omni Bank for one year at 1.75; for 9 months it was 1.25
- Paul asked Jay to check it out and he reported that it was better than he could find on the internet
- Paul asked for a motion to renew the CD
- Mike asked if it's was up for renewal and if we needed approval today
- Paul recommended that we approve it for now at 1.75 and we'll let everyone know ahead of time next time
- Paul feels we do have a good relationship with Omni and most know Sharon Kell personally and she does work hard for us

A motion was made by Judy Songy and seconded by Betty Haydel to approve the CD renewal with Omni Bank. The motion was unanimously approved.

Audit Approval

- Last month everyone was given a copy of the audit
- Paul noted that he looked at it and you can't ask for a better report

A motion was made by Nancy Robert and seconded by Mike Norton to approve the audit report. The motion was unanimously approved.

A motion was made by Mike Norton and seconded by Peter Jasper to go into recess. The motion was unanimously approved.

Break 1:20 - 1:30

A motion was made by Judy Songy and seconded by Betty Haydel 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 everyone and hoped everyone had a Happy Mardi Gras
- Paul introduced one of our new interns, Megan Callahan
- Megan is a student at UNO, she graduates in May
- She's graduating in the field of Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism and would like to go into Event Planning
- Paul mentioned that she will be graduating in May and looking for a job so anyone that is interested in hiring Megan can give her a call
- Paul mentioned that Jay and Kimmie are currently attending DMAI in Washington DC which is an annual class they attend each year therefore he will be doing the Director's Report

IV. Director's Report

Website

- Website was launched January 22
- Paul asked if anyone had a chance to look at or use it
- Jesse mentioned that she was very impressed with it
- Paul encouraged everyone to share their comments and suggestions about the website
- Craig Howat with the Satellite Center mentioned that he is currently having his students go through the website and grading it
- As they complete it, he mentioned that he will forward it on to us

Visitor Guide

- Expected delivery date is March 5
- A final mock up was passed around for all to see

Social Media Approval

- It was decided to defer until next meeting
- At the last meeting there was a lot of questions and since Jay cannot be present at this meeting Paul asked that it be deferred
- One of the applicants, Jennifer Barbee, would like to make a presentation and Paul felt it would be better to have her make the presentation on the day they intend to vote on it then having to remember what was said
- Paul mentioned that he will discuss with Jay about getting the website committee to meet on the social media business so we can have a committee's input on it instead of just the two or three people making the presentation
- There is another person that is willing to give her advice on social marketing that Mike, Jay and Paul would like to meet with before asking the board to make a decision

PR & Advertising

- The Public Relations Selection Committee met, reviewed proposals, set up meetings and should have a recommendation for the next board meeting
- Jesse Lambert, who is on the committee, mentioned that they looked at 5 proposals, narrowed them down to 3
- The committee did have some questions for them
- Would like to bring the three back for an interview with the committee
- The committee will then make a recommendation to the board

Sales

- A written report from Kimmie was provided in the meeting packets
- Jesse commented that Kimmie's leads have been really good
- Jesse stated that she has been following up on them and people have actually responded

Show Update

- **American Bus Association (ABA)**- Washington, D.C.
- ABA was a great show; met with 40 tour operators with 5 of them already planning to come to New Orleans in April
- Leads were sent by email
- Tour operators are looking for interactive tours and something different
- Agra-tours are a big draw as well
- People are interested in seeing how things are made and processed
- Kimmie took a seminar on Group Connect which we have signed up for which a lead is generating system
- This system is where tour operators through ABA and OMCA can go directly to submit an RFQ for services
- The RFQ would be sent to Kimmie and she would forward to the appropriate stakeholder
- Laine with LTPA suggests we do a school group committee because there is a lot of focus on student travel and it is a big market
- **LTPA Travel & Tourism Summit** – Monroe, LA
- Kimmie attended Stu Barash's seminar on packaging culinary tours and learned we need to go out and create our tours
- People want different and interactive tours like Agra-tours
- Kimmie would like to see if she can do something with Imperial Sugar or a place that makes Andouille
- Kimmie participated in Travel breakfast and handed out new profile sheets for Travel Counselors across the state
- Jesse Lambert announced that Houmas House received the '*Attraction of the Year*'
- **Tennessee Motor Coach** – Chattanooga, TN
- Kimmie was one of only 4 people there from Louisiana which was great because they all partner together to sell the region
- Attending were: Lafourche, Houma, Audubon Institute and New Orleans Plantation Country
- First time attending this show
- All feedback was very positive
- Tour operators have traveled to our area and are hungry for information
- The main thing they want is for us to plan trips for them and have itineraries
- Kimmie met with 20 tour operators during the show with leads that will soon follow

Upcoming Schedule for RPTC:

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- *February 21-24: DMAI Sales Academy I & II- Washington, D.C.*
- This is a sales class to learn how to sell destinations more effectively
- The course is designed to help achieve sales goals, win new group customers and increase sales
- Both Kimmie and Jay are both currently attending this show
- *March 2-5: Military Reunions Show – Pensacola, FL*

V. Chairman's Monthly Report- Paul Aucoin

Houmas House

- Awarded the State's top award of Attraction of the Year for 2009
- Paul mentioned that it's another honor we're glad to have and also glad that Houmas House is apart of our Tourist Commission
- Paul congratulated Kevin Kelly and all the staff at Houmas House

Tax Collection

- Still work to collect back taxes from the RV parks
- St. Charles Parish is doing a complete audit on everyone so in 3 months we'll know who is paying and who is not paying
- Nathan Stein called for Paul last week but he hasn't had a chance to return his call

RPTC Office/Visitor Center Update

- Paul stated we've been looking at property where Chris Smits has his swamp tours as a possible location for an office building for the Tourist Commission
- We were asked to get the cost of two appraisals
- One of the costs came in at around \$3,700 to do that appraisal
- The other has not come in although it has been promised a long time ago
- Paul mentioned that he called Chris Smits and urged him to call that appraiser and inform them of the urgency of us getting the price
- Until we get the two prices, we can't ask the parish to pay for either one of them because they are going to want to bids to compare

Show Update: DC Mardi Gras- Washington, D.C.

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- Paul has been attending this event for about 15 years and every year he has been noticing more and more tourist commissions attending
- Paul is not quite sure of the value of them attending
- The group, Gumbo invited Jay to join them this year
- Paul thinks that he and Jay came to the same conclusion that it's really not worth attending
- Next year the king will be from the River Parishes and we will probably have to play a role there because the area where the king is from usually plays a role
- Normally you host a lot of functions while there
- We will probably have some way to participate in the next Washington Mardi Gras
- The Kings use it as an opportunity to showcase their area
- We are going to use it to showcase the River Parishes
- The three parishes will probably get involved in some way in contributing to make it a River Parishes function
- Probably the Chamber and the Tourist Commission will be involved
- One particular night, the Thursday night function is a sponsorship function sponsored by industries and hopefully it will be sponsored by all the River Parish industries that we can showcase all the chemical and petro chemical businesses here
- Hopefully it will be a large River Parishes showcase
- After next year, Paul isn't sure what degree of participation we should have in the future
- Judy Songy echoed Paul's thoughts of participation in the future but thought that since the area will be showcased next year if we could have some type of give away such as refrigerator magnets with New Orleans Plantation County it would be of some value then
- Both Paul and Judy also noted that if we had our own booth it would have been more beneficial instead of being in the booth called 'Southeast Gumbo' where we weren't well represented

Closing Comments

- Jesse Lambert mentioned that she sits on a Resource CAP committee with LTPA
- The purpose of this committee is like a match.com for tourism CVBs and stakeholders and educational institutions that have something that they can offer
- For example, if the tourist commission was looking for some type of research done but doesn't have the money to do it and Craig's (Satellite Center) class

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offers a program like that then LTPA takes these two programs and tries to matches them up

- They are in the process of working with mainly universities but Jesse told them not to rule out the Satellite Center because they do have a hospitality program
- In the process of speaking with UNO, and all the different universities throughout the state to see what type of resources they have that can help stakeholders like Houmas House, Destrehan, or swamp tours or tourist commissions
- Jesse asked if anyone knows of a project from either end that would be useful for someone else to let her know
- Jesse will be collecting the information and has been charged with the River Parishes area since she's familiar with it
- This will be an added service that they will provide to their members
- Sherry Constance with LTPA announced that the new 2010 La Tour Guides are out and she put some out on the tables
- They are smaller in size to be easier to handle
- Sherry asked for feedback on it by either email or at the next meeting
- They will be starting to plan the 2011 guide and would like to use the feedback to move forward
- Paul mentioned that LTPA will be sponsoring or promoting some type of Legislative Update Week coming up soon
- Paul stated that he asked Jay to collect all the information that we are supposed to promote from everyone, which he isn't sure quite what that is yet
- Paul asked Sherry if they got that info out
- Sherry wasn't sure if it had gone out yet but will make sure that we receive it
- Paul mentioned that we are going to do one of two things; either we're going to invite all the legislators here to have lunch with Jay and Paul and whoever wants to attend and tell them what our legislative agenda is or maybe just send them a letter
- Craig Howat asked when deciding on the Social Media to make sure there is an opportunity for people to interact with that such as guest bloggers
- Craig gave an example that if some of his students attend festivals, they would have the opportunity as part of their project to go and write about it or submitting pictures such as with the Alligator Festival they posted pictures of the festival and included a link of the economic impact analysis
- This way it's showing it's more of an interactive type thing that people have input on instead of strictly a media campaign
- Paul noted to Craig that he will put him on the website committee and asked if anyone else wanted to be on the committee
- Mike mentioned that he wanted to be there
- Paul asked who served on that committee

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- Jesse mentioned that the committee consisted of Debra, Zeb, Norman, Sheilah and herself
- Paul mentioned that he will also add Craig's name to the list and would like him to share those thoughts with the committee
- Paul reminded everyone that next month we will be discussing the Social Media and encouraged everyone to give their input before the final approval

A motion was made by Peter Jasper and seconded by Mike Norton to adjourn the meeting. The motion was unanimously approved.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.