

River Parishes Tourist Commission
Meeting Minutes
March 15, 2011

Meeting Attendance

Present: Paul Aucoin, Betty Haydel, Nancy Robert, Judy Songy,
Nicolle Veillon

Absent: Dolores Florent, Peter Jasper

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

Stakeholders/Guests: Tom Binon (Hampton Inn), Jane Heltz (Quality Inn), Craig
Howart (St. Charles Satellite Center), Cathy Matherne
(Airboat Tours by Arthur), 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.

II. Approval of February Minutes

- Paul asked for a motion to approve the February minutes

A motion was made by Nicole Veillon and seconded by Betty Haydel to approve the February minutes. The motion was unanimously approved.

III. Monthly Financial Reports

- Current assets as of February 28 are \$617,00 which is \$25,000 less than last month due to paying St. James Parish for salaries
- Paul reviewed the Statement of Revenues & Expenses
- St. John and St. James Parish hotel tax was down and St. Charles Parish hotel tax was up for the month
- The sales tax rebate we received was what we had expected
- For the year we are \$8,000 above budget in collections
- *Expenses - Program Services* were reviewed
- For *Total Programs Services* we're \$861.00 above budget for the year
- For *Salaries & Benefits* we budgeted \$142,000 and actual was \$138,000
- For *General & Administrative* we budgeted \$35,000 and actual was \$27,000
- For *Total Expenses* we budgeted \$382,000 and actual was \$370,000

A motion was made by Betty Haydel and seconded by Nicole Veillon to approve the February 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 Nancy Robert and seconded by Nicole Veillon to approve the hotel occupancy tax for February. The motion was unanimously approved.

- Paul reviewed the General Ledger and Bank Statement
- Ending balance per bank was \$148,000 and ending balance per book was \$117,000 with \$31,146 in outstanding checks
- Paul reviewed all the deposits for the month
- Paul reviewed the transaction listing
- Paul asked Jay if he had a chance to review with our auditors our credit card policy to make sure we are following the guidelines
- Jay stated he emailed our auditor, Pernell Pellegrin at Martin & Pellegrin and his response was that the credit card policy we currently have in place is very comprehensive and one of the better ones he has reviewed
- Pernell advised that there are limitations placed on employers by the U.S. Department of Labor when it comes to withholding amounts from the employee's payroll checks for items such as personal expenses paid via company credit card. The withholding cannot reduce the employee's net pay to less than what have been received had the employee been receiving the minimum legal wage
- Jay said he will have to investigate in further and see how we can reword that portion of the policy

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- Paul noted that would like to establish a zero tolerance policy

A motion was made by Nancy Robert and seconded by Betty Haydel to approve the invoices paid for February. The motion was unanimously approved.

- Paul asked for a motion to approve the bank statement for February

A motion was made by Nicole Veillon and seconded by Betty Haydel to approve the bank statement for February. The motion was unanimously approved.

- Jay reviewed the amended budget
- Jay mentioned that he entered the actuals year to date, updated the tax collections through March and updated all of the salaries with the insurance premiums factored in
- *General & Administrative* stayed the same
- *Program Services* increased about 4% due to adjustments in advertising, printing and production and trade show attendance
- Paul noted that as a practice, we have always taken the budgets home to review and then approve them at the next meeting
- Paul mentioned that if anyone had any questions about the budget to contact Jay so that he can explain it in detail

A motion was made by Nicole Veillon and seconded by Betty Haydel to differ approving the budget until next month. The motion was unanimously approved.

- Paul stated that next month he would like to amend the budget in the regular portion of the meeting instead of the financial portion

A motion was made by Betty Haydel and seconded by Nancy Robert to go into recess. The motion was unanimously approved.

Break 10:20 - 10:30

A motion was made by Nicole Veillon and seconded by Nancy Robert 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 to the March meeting and wished everyone a Happy St. Patrick's and St. Joseph Day
- Paul thanked Nancy Robert and Destrehan Plantation for hosting our meeting
- Paul congratulated Nancy for being named the Tourist Attraction of the Year by LTPA
- Nancy mentioned she and her staff worked very hard and were honored to receive the award
- Nancy thanked the many organizations including the Tourist Commission in helping support Destrehan Plantation
- Nancy reminded everyone of the different events going on throughout the year to commemorate the 1811 Slave Revolt
- Paul mentioned that he would like to write a letter to Destrehan's two major contributors to acknowledge and thank them for their assistance in helping bring Destrehan to the point where they were chosen Attraction of the Year

IV. Director's Report- Jay Tusa

Advertising & PR Update

- Jay reported that we sent out our first eNewsletter, and updated our facebook page with some image branding
- Jay showed the updated facebook page which looks like a mini website
- It includes information of our area, a section to request a visitors guide, watch YouTube videos and share stories and photos
- The eNewsletter had information about Mardi Gras in the River Parishes, our area being represented at the Washington Mardi Gras, the Louey Awards and the awards that our area received, the River Road being designated as the National Scenic Byway and a list of some of our upcoming events
- Wynne reported that we had a 20% open rate on the newsletter which the average for tourism is about 10%
- About 14 % clicked through the stories
- The top stories they wanted information on was Mardi Gras and the parade routes
- 10% clicked through the story on Destrehan winning the Attraction of the Year
- 7% requested a visitor's guide and 6% clicked through to our facebook page
- Wynne mentioned that on our facebook page visitors can now sign up for the newsletter
- Consumer Trade ads are running in a number of different publications through the Spring
- Currently working on a new folder and a press kit

- Wynne mentioned that we've had several requests for 'Momcations' for Mom's going on vacations and Paranormal Vacations for those that are interested in hauntings
- Working on getting some of the seasonal copy updated for press releases and on the website for Mardi Gras and Lenten Season since there is a lot of interest in our history and culture because it's different from other places
- Wynne noted that we've got a lot of hits on facebook and twitter from some of those items

Website

- Jay reviewed the website stats for February
- Search engine referrals were the same from last month
- Total brand impressions were down a little from 406,544 to 387,731
- Direct visits to the site was 375
- Total visits were up a little from 3,427 to 3,647
- Unique visitors were up as well from 3,082 to 3,217
- Total page views were 28,343
- Website brochure requests for February was 70

BP Grant

- Jay put together a chart showing what each parish will be doing separately and what projects the three parishes and the Tourist Commission will be doing jointly
- Funds will be going directly to the parishes with the Tourist Commission partnering on some projects
- The Tourist Commission will be doing a media FAM with all three parishes as well as a tour operator FAM, a Concierge FAM, wayfinding highway signage (6 signs), 5 Promotional videos, video podcast and a mobile website
- Jay mentioned the Commission is also in the process of applying for a Project Enhancement Initiative (PEI) Grant offered through the Louisiana Office of Tourism in order to secure funds for additional wayfinding signage not covered by the BP grant, a smartphone app and some general leisure advertising
- The smartphone app information will be included on the wayfinding signs
- We are waiting for resolutions to be signed by St. John and St. James Parishes giving the Tourist Commission authority to sign and receive the money on their behalf, the resolutions are on their agendas for their next council meetings
- St. Charles Parish submitted their own application but has agreed to work collaboratively with the Tourist Commission on multiple projects
- Paul asked Nancy Robert if there was a reason why St. Charles Parish decided not to have the Tourist Commission handle their projects like St. James and St. John Parishes

- Nancy stated that a committee was formed once the grant was established and the committee felt the St. Charles Parish stakeholders needed to pull together their efforts therefore it was decided that the Economic Development Department would handle certain projects but still partner with the Tourist Commission on many other projects
- Paul stated that the idea for this grant was to dispel the notion that our area was covered in oil as was the case with people thinking we were covered in water for Hurricane Katrina therefore he feels the sooner we spend the money the better and we need to have a plan ready
- Jay mentioned the plan is written in quarters, there are 6 quarters in the plan. Our plan starts April of 2011 and runs through April of 2012.
- Approximately 85% of funds are being spent in the first half of the Tourist Commission's 2011/2012 budget year
- Funds are expected to start going out in April
- The state will pay us directly and we're going to do the projects for the parishes
- Paul asked if there was a determination or consensus on how the money was to be spent in regards to talking about the oil spill and how it's not affecting us or just promote the area and not mention the spill as a factor
- Jay thinks it's to do both; to promote the area and also to mention that we're not affected by the oil
- Paul questioned if mentioning the oil spill will only remind people of the spill and do more harm than good and suggested we consider it very carefully if we want to talk about the oil spill or simply what we have here to offer

Review and approve website proposal

- Jay mentioned he would like to make some adjustments to our website
- Currently we use Jennifer Barbee and she's been handling our website for about a year and a half now
- Jay mentioned that he would like the website to have the same look as the brochure and newsletter
- Jay passed around comps of what he would like the website to look like
- Jay received a quote from Jennifer Barbee for \$6,000 - \$7,000 which he thought was a little high
- Jay is looking to do a couple of other things on the website such as being able to download the brochure and having the foreign language translator on our site
- Jennifer Barbee quoted another \$3,000 to add those features to the current website
- Jay reminded everyone that we paid them \$10,000 to build us a new website a year and a half ago
- Jay has found them to be high on a number of projects such as the facebook tab
- Jennifer Barbee quoted a price of \$3,000 to update the facebook page
- Coy got a quote from a company she knew which was between \$450 - \$650 and Graham Group gave a quote of \$550

- Jay thought there was a big difference in the prices
- Jay would like to move the website over from Jennifer Barbee to Graham Group and let them handle it
- Jay feels there is some synergy there with Graham doing our other marketing efforts
- Graham Group quoted a price to do the updates at \$5,000 which is half the price of Jennifer Barbee
- Paul asked what are the other services that Jennifer Barbee provides
- Jay mentioned that they also prepare reports and buy and manage the key word searches for us which he would like to transition that as well over to Graham Group
- Currently we pay Jennifer Barbee \$2,000 a month but with Graham Group it will be \$1,750 a month to handle
- Paul suggested getting approval today for the three upgrades: the downloadable brochure, the foreign translator and to freshen up the look of the site and next month vote on the proposal of Graham Group taking over the rest of the website in order to give everyone time to see what we're getting into

A motion was made by Judy Songy and seconded by Betty Haydel to approve the three upgrades to the website. The motion was unanimously approved.

Show Update

- **DC Mardi Gras – Washington, D.C.**
- Jay thought it was a great and successful event
- The battle of the bands this year was Grambling and Southern and everyone thought they did a great job
- Paul thought the mission of highlighting the River Parishes was accomplished over and over again
- Paul noted that every time Senator Landrieu spoke she highlighted our area
- Paul mentioned that he isn't sure of the value in attending the event but he keeps seeing other CVBs there every year and asked Jay and the board to think about what the value might be for us to attend next year
- **Military Base shows – Florida Panhandle**
- Kimmie visited Hulbert, Eglin and Pensacola NAS
- She gave out information at the travel fairs at each base
- People were very receptive
- Kimmie got to meet with the IT travel department counselors who promote and sell the destinations to the military
- **TravelSouth – Atlanta, GA**
- Kimmie met with 35 tour operators

- Very positive feedback especially from the international appointments

Upcoming Schedule for RPTC

- **March 16-21:** South by Southwest Music Festival – Austin, TX
- We will be showcasing our area along with 8 other CVBs from the State
- Kimmie noted that Austin is our second drive market

V. Chairman's Monthly Report- Paul Aucoin

- Paul mentioned that he and Jay will be attending the Lt. Governor's speech tomorrow at the Convention Center
- Paul made a suggestion for the BP grant money which would be to invite the concierges to lunch in the city and try to impress them in sending customers to our attractions like we did some years ago when we didn't have all the awards we have today

General Comments

- Nancy invited everyone to stay after the meeting to view the Legacy Room, the Education Center that will hold a demonstration and the 1811 Slave Revolt Exhibit
- Nancy mentioned Heritage Day will be held on May 4th
- Nancy noted that Destrehan will have a new event starting in the Spring of 2012 which will focus more on music and food by bringing in some celebrity chiefs
- Betty Haydel mentioned about the cruise travel again, she noted it was in the newspaper over the weekend about new ships coming to the area
- Paul asked Wynne and Jay to think about how we can tap into that market
- Jay announced he recently found out that he was nominated to the board of LTPA and asked when the ballots are sent out in May, he would appreciate their support
- Jay invited everyone to stay after the meeting to sample Donald Becnel's wines from his winery in Vacherie
- The wine is called Pierre Clidamont Becnel and it can be purchased from Matherene's Supermarkets in LaPlace, Paulina and Baton Rouge
- The wines come in four varieties; Black Currant, Red Raspberry, Blackberry and Sugarcane
- Becnel's wines are also being picked up by the prestigious Emeril's Restaurant in New Orleans, as well as its sister eatery, Emeril's NOLA
- Several River Road Plantations are also serving the wines in their restaurants
- Donald is looking to offer tours of his winery with wine tastings and local cooking demonstrations
- For more information the website is www.BecnelPlantation.com

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

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.