

River Parishes Tourist Commission
Meeting Minutes
October 11, 2011

Meeting Attendance

Present: Paul Aucoin, Betty Haydel, Angie Matherne, Judy Songy,
Nicolle Veillon

Absent: Peter Jasper, Dolores Florent

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

Stakeholders/Guests: Kim Fontenot (San Francisco Plantation), Jane Heltz
(Quality Inn), Kevin Kelly (Houmas House), Jesse Lambert
(Houmas House), Norman Marmillion (Laura Plantation),
Cathy Matherne (Airboat Tours by Arthur), Rita Perriloux
(Our Lady of Grace Church), 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 August Minutes

- Paul asked for a motion to approve the August minutes
- Paul noted that we did not have a meeting last month due to a lack of a quorum due in large part to the funeral of Henry Smith which board members attended

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

III. Monthly Financial Reports- August

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- Paul asked Jay to address some of the figures because of the large jump in the assets
- Assets went from \$673,00 from the end of July to \$780,000 at the end of August
- Jay stated that a couple of things caused the increase one being we received the funds from the BP Grant which was just shy of \$80,000 and the other was we received our sales tax rebate from the state which came in at \$34,000 over budget
- Jay explained that the sales tax rebate is a hard thing to predict therefore we would rather underestimate than overestimate
- Paul stated that we have been trying for years to determine how the state comes up with the figures but have not been successful
- Total assets are \$780,000 which includes a \$500,000 in a CD
- Paul mentioned later in the meeting the remaining \$280,000 that's in the checking account may be separated to take into account the BP funds
- Under *Public Support* we're positive in all areas except for the month of August St. John Parish was a little on the down side however with the \$40,000 that came in were above budget
- Under *Expenses – Program Services* we budgeted \$17,683 for the month and actual was positive \$52,548
- Jay explained that figure is due to the funds from the BP Grant that went into those various accounts that the money was allocated to
- Jay mentioned that he and Paul discussed putting those funds into a special account line item like we did with the Katrina funds we received a few years back where everything comes and goes into that one account where it will be a little easier to keep up with than it is right now
- Paul added that it will also be accountable as to how we spend it as well
- Under *Salaries & Benefits* there was very little variance of \$9.23 above budget
- Under *General & Administrative*, total expenses for the month was \$3,838 with the budget at \$4,478 therefore we're \$639 under budget
- Total expenses was a positive of \$70,000 due to the extra funds
- Change in Net Assets was \$107,000 and \$110,00 for the month

A motion was made by Nicole Veillon and seconded by Betty Haydel to approve the August 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
- Chart shows St. James is steady and St. John and St. Charles track each other during the month of March showing they both went up and then both almost meet in the middle in June

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

- Paul reviewed the General Ledger

A motion was made by Nicole Veillon and seconded by Betty Haydel to approve the General Ledger for August. The motion was unanimously approved.

- Paul reviewed the bank statement ending August 31st
- There were 12 deposits totaling \$180,226.09
- Ending balance per bank was \$297,170.27 with the ending balance per book at \$280,025.06 with 15 outstanding checks totaling \$17,145.21

A motion was made by Judy Songy and seconded by Betty Haydel to approve the bank statement for August. 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 Angie Matherne to approve the invoices paid for August. The motion was unanimously approved.

Monthly Financial Reports- September

- Assets decreasing this month from \$780,000 at the end of August to \$740,000 at the end of September
- The \$40,000 decrease was due to paying for our new promotional video
- Total *Public Support* for the month was \$27,000; budgeted was \$28,000
- For *Expenses - Program Services* we budgeted \$32,000 and we spent \$64,000 which is due to some of the items we discussed from last month for the BP Grant
- Jay pointed out for the line item of *Printing & Production* we were under budget last month and this month it is showing we are over budget
- For *Salaries & Benefits* we are right on budget with \$1,335
- Total for *General & Administrative* we were \$596 under budget
- Total *Expenses* we're \$30,000 over budget for the same reason as *Program Services*
- Change in Net Asset was negative \$31,000

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

- Paul reviewed the charts for the three parishes showing the monthly income

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- 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 Angie Matherne to approve the hotel occupancy tax for September. The motion was unanimously approved.

- Paul reviewed the General Ledger

A motion was made by Judy Songy and seconded by Nicole Veillon to approve the General Ledger for September. The motion was unanimously approved.

- Paul reviewed the Bank Statement ending October 2
- There were 6 deposits totaling 29,467.54
- Expenses totaled \$77,411.34
- Ending balance per bank was \$249,228.76 with the ending balance per book at \$240,434.49 with 12 outstanding checks totaling \$8,794.27

A motion was made by Angie Matherne and seconded by Nicole Veillon to approve the bank statement for September. 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 Betty Haydel to approve the invoices paid for September. The motion was unanimously approved.

The regular portion of the meeting resumed without a recess and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Opening Comments

- Paul welcomed our newest board member, Angela Matherne
- Paul asked Angela to tell everyone a little about herself
- Angela introduced herself as Angie
- She is the Education Coordinator for Destrehan Plantation replacing Nancy on the board
- Angie mentioned that she is happy and excited to be working with the Tourist Commission as a Commissioner and appreciates the opportunity
- Paul asked everyone to share with him in a moment of silence for an Economic Development Board member from St. James Parish who recently passed away, Mr. Lloyd Becnel

IV. Director's Report- Jay Tusa

Insurance Policy Renewal

- Jay asked for approval to sign the renewal of our liability insurance policy
- Jay noted this is a policy we've had for several years since we've been in the Community Center which is a requirement of the parish
- It's in the budget for \$1,800 a year

A motion was made by Judy Songy and seconded by Betty Haydel to approve the renewal of the liability insurance policy. The motion was unanimously approved.

Meeting Reschedule

- Jay mentioned that since our next board meeting falls on a holiday he would like to reschedule it for another day
- After a brief discussion, it was decided to reschedule the meeting to Monday, November 7th
- Paul noted that if financials aren't ready for the November meeting then they will get approved at the following December meeting

A motion was made by Angie Matherne and seconded by Nicole Veillon to move the November meeting up one day to November 7th due to the Election Day holiday. The motion was unanimously approved.

Advertising & PR Update

- Wynne Waltman from Graham Group passed around a full page Tour Guide ad
- One headline is *History Class Serves Mint Juleps* with additional headlines for groups is *It's About Time* and *What are You Waiting For, Plan a Group Tour Today*
- Jay mentioned that we have been using both MS tags and QR codes quite a bit in all our ads which take people directly to certain pages of our website such as *Specials and Deals* where they can download our discount card
- Copies of the updated brochure was passed around for everyone to review
- Jay asked if everyone to look over it and email him for any errors or feedback
- Jay expects the brochure to go to press by the end of the week

- Wynne mentioned the Fall e-newsletter was just sent out, if anyone isn't receiving it please let us know
- It's doing very well for a Tourism newsletter
- Open rate is 21% with a 22% click thru rate

Website – August & September

- Site visits for August was 3,964 and 4,125 for September
- Page views for August was 17,254 and 19,466 for September
- Unique visitors for August was 3,405 and 3,539 for September
- Click thru rate was .41% for both August and September
- More than 57% of traffic came from Search Engines for August and September
- Top page viewed for August was *Activities-Swamp/Eco-Tours* and for September it was *Weddings-Wedding Venues*
- Top referring site for August was My WebSearch.com and Experience New Orleans, for September it was Google and Ask
- Brochure requests for August was 88 with a download savings of \$66
- Brochure requests for September was 122 with a download savings of \$69.99
- Top visitation city for August was New Orleans, Houston, Baton Rouge, Atlanta
- Top visitation city for September was New Orleans, Houston, Baton Rouge, Metairie
- Jay announced that LTPA has decided to eliminate the field rep positions and will create a new membership coordinator position based out of the Baton Rouge office, the position is expected to be filled in January
- Everyone will still have a person they can contact but instead of having two people throughout the whole state they are going to have one person centralized in Baton Rouge
- There were some concerns about having only one person being able to cover everyone so LTPA is planning on having the Co-Directors and staff interact with LTPA members
- They will see how that goes in the next year or so and evaluate it
- Jay mentioned we started a Facebook promotion about a week ago where we're going to give away a trip to the area
- As part of that, we're asking people to 'like us' on Facebook and post comments about Plantation Country
- Just in the past week we're up 62% in our likes
- We went from 861 when we started to 1392 as of this morning
- Jay knew we could have gotten many more likes had the contest only required them to like us but by asking for comments about why they like the area we will get a more qualified person who is interested in the area

- Jay mentioned he rather have 5,000 good qualified people then 10,000 people who aren't interested
- The contest ends in the middle of November
- Paul asked if that meant the best comment would win
- Jay confirmed that was correct and that our fans would vote on it and select the winner
- We will pick the finalist and our fans will pick the winner
- Jay thanked everyone that is participating with us in the contest by donating tour tickets or meals which helps create a nice package to give away
- Jay asked for the stakeholder's feelings on FAM tours
- With the BP Grant we have three things we were planning to do as part of the grant- three FAM Tours: a concierge FAM, a media FAM and a tour operator FAM
- Jay stated that we have decided to do the tour operator FAM and the media FAM in the spring since we have a lot going on right now plus spring is a nice pleasant time to host such an event
- Jay asked for everyone's opinion on having the concierge FAM or take those dollars and apply it to the media FAM and the tour operator FAM
- Jay stated he personally feels we should do the latter because the concierges are local and he and Kimmie and any stakeholder that would like to join them can make personal calls on those concierges any day of the week
- Jay feels if we have the opportunity to invite in an extra tour operator or media person that might get us further along
- Jesse Lambert with Houmas House mentioned they are hosting a Where Magazine/concierge Christmas Party this year that everyone is invited to which will act as a FAM for the concierges
- Kevin Kelly with Houmas House mentioned that the Christmas Party would be the best place to get all the concierges together because he is providing buses to get them there
- Paul asked if we have given any thought about doing either a radio or TV ad with the BP grant
- Paul thought we would do something special with the BP grant and use our own money to do the FAMs we normally have
- Paul would like to look into seeing how much something like a radio or TV ad would cost
- Paul would like the general public to know we took these funds and tried to promote our area with a radio, TV or billboard instead of doing a FAM that no one knows what that is
- Paul stated he would like those dollars to be used for something special that we normally couldn't do due to cost
- Jay explained that the funds we received have already been allocated between the three parishes for certain projects that we are currently working on
- Norman Marmillion suggested not getting rid of the FAM tours

- Norman stated that as a private company, he does not advertise to the local market
- Jay noted that with the BP funds we are doing the Scenic Byways Way Finding signs, new promotional videos and FAM Tour
- Jay suggested using the extra sales tax rebate funds that came in over budget to do additional advertising on the area since the BP funds have already been dedicated and the projects have started
- Jay mentioned he would look into some programs that the state offers in regards to co-ops for TV and radio advertisements
- Kevin Kelly suggested looking into the possibility of advertising on the TV Series 'Swamp People' since it is so popular

Community Center Report – Coy St. Pierre

- Coy reported there were three soundstage inquiries, seven private event inquiries, one location request and one ad placement for the second half of August
- For the month of September there were five soundstage requests, no private event requests, one location request and one ad placement
- There was only one private event request for the first half of October

Show Update – Kimmie Carlos

- **August 1-3: Military Blitz – Florida Panhandle**
- Bases included Hulbert, Eglin and Pensacola NAS
- Kimmie gave out information at travel fairs at each base
- People were very receptive
- Kimmie got a chance to meet with the IT travel department counselors who promote and sell the destinations to the military
- **August 18-24: SYTA (Student Youth Travel Association) NYC**
- Had 34 scheduled appointments with most being a mutually matched appointment
- Great response and feedback especially to the plantations offering student programs and having places to perform
- Clients are wanting all inclusive pricing for meals to go along with the tours
- **September 10-14: VMA (Virginia Motorcoach) Chesapeake, VA**
- Kimmie reported that the response wasn't as she would have liked but had 5 really good appointments
- The distance is just a little too far for our area
- **September 25-28: SCMA (South Central Motorcoach) Forth Worth, TX**

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- This show encompassed operator members from Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas
- Had good appointments with some tour operators from our own state and Texas that are coming to the area frequently
- Next year they are looking to combine this conference with Alabama Motorcoach and Georgia which would make it a much bigger show

Upcoming Schedule for RPTC

- **November 4-11:** World Travel Market – London, England
- **November 8:** Election Day – Office Closed
- **November 8-10:** Southeast Tourism Society Fall Meeting – New Orleans, LA
- If anyone is interested in participating in this, they are offering a discount to Louisiana residents as an incentive to join as a member
- Jay mentioned that we are sponsoring a tour section of the meeting and will be sending out an email about 2 weeks beforehand saying to come visit the area when in town
- We will have signage at the event and our brochures will be distributed
- **November 11:** Veterans Day – Office Closed
- **November 13-16:** Toronto Sales Mission w/LOT – Toronto, Canada
- **November 14-16:** Destination Marketing Association International, CDME class – Charlotte, NC
- Jay announced he received a scholarship from DMAI so the tuition is waived of the CDME class
- **November 17-21:** Culinary Consumer Show, Toronto, Canada. Participating with LOT and Louisiana Seafood Marketing and Promotion Board
- There will be 40,000 attendees and will have Louisiana cooking demonstrations

V. Chairman's Monthly Report- Paul Aucoin

General Comments

- Angie Matherne mentioned she is gearing up for her Heritage Day at Destrehan Plantation
- It will be held October 25 & 26 for children grades Kindergarten through 4th Grade
- She is expecting 600 -700 students on Tuesday and 800 on Wednesday
- They have added a lot of hands on activities for the kids
- Angie offered the stakeholders to come out and promote their sites
- Paul wished everyone a Happy Halloween and a Happy All Saints Day

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

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.