

## **TDC MEETING MINUTES, September 5, 2008**

Commissioner Judah called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

Council Members in attendance were: Commissioner Judah, Fran Myers, Roxie Smith, Colleen DePasquale, René Affourtit, Dolores Bertolini and Tony Lapi. Pamela Cronin, Martha Simons and Rob Wells asked to be excused.

- ➔ René Affourtit made a motion, seconded by Roxie Smith to approve TDC Meeting Minutes of July 11, 2008. The motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Judah recognized John Yarbrough, Director Parks & Recreation as a pillar of this community in terms of development and expansion of sports venues in Lee County.

Mr. Yarbrough accepted Lee County's recent buyout offer. Don Stilwell praised John as being the epitome of what one could expect from a County employee and a leader. He stated that John had the foresight to leave green spaces where constructions would be prohibited. Both Commissioner Judah and Don Stilwell offered deep gratitude for what Mr. Yarbrough has accomplished and wished him well on behalf of the Board of County Commissioners and Lee County Citizens. Council presented Mr. Yarbrough with a framed picture of both stadiums.

Mr. Yarbrough reminisced about a time when Lee County did not yet have a Visitor & Convention Bureau. He referred to Bud Nocera, the first Bureau Chief and commented that if local citizens do not always grasp what the Bureau does and how tourism impacts them, the tourism industry, on the other hand, does understand what the VCB has achieved; John added that the VCB has done an excellent job. He concluded by saying that during his tenure he surrounded himself with great people who are doing very well.

### **Public to be Heard**

➔ Ric Base, Sanibel-Captiva Chamber congratulated Commissioner Judah on his recent re-election. Mr. Base reported that Sanibel is experiencing an excellent summer with tremendous number of visitors for which he thanked the TDC and the Bureau. Ric advised that most businesses on the islands are expecting a strong fall as well.

➔ John Albion, Fort Myers Beach Chamber congratulated Commissioner Judah on his re-election; he reported that Fort Myers Beach accommodations are working hard to promote the destination and thanked Council and the Bureau for their promotional efforts. Mr. Albion advised that boats are getting stuck at Matanzas Pass and that everyone needs to get behind the dredging efforts. Mr. Albion praised outgoing John Yarbrough; he stated that what John has accomplished is truly legendary. Finally he praised Rosamé Piret who also accepted the Lee County buyout; he stated that Ms. Piret is a friend of tourism as well as a personal friend who has always been available to provide assistance during his past positions in Lee County.

Commissioner Judah informed Mr. Albion that the dredging permit is being pushed forward and permit should be issued within the next couple of weeks.

### **Municipalities to be Heard**

➔ Mick Denham, Mayor of Sanibel reported that he has been involved with water issues, especially urban water pollution. He advised that the City of Sanibel has completed five resolutions in just two years to address urban pollution.

### **Director's Report**

- ⇒ Ms. Davenport recognized Christy SanCartier and Rosamé Piret for their tenure and service to the VCB; both staff members are accepting the buyout.
- ⇒ Suya Davenport reported that bed tax collections for June 2008 was at \$1,521,858 a minimal decrease of 0.1%. In July collections were at \$1, 445,387, a decrease of 2% versus July last year. Ms. Davenport reminded Council that June saw an increase of 11.7%, while July experienced an increase of 10.3%. Suya added that when we look at other Florida destinations we are holding our own.
- ⇒ Presenting the July STR report Ms. Davenport advised that occupancy in Lee County was at 55.4% versus 57.8% a year ago, which represents a 4.2% decrease. ADR continues to grow: \$119.16 this July versus \$116.90 last July. Suya stated that only Monroe and Palm Beach Counties are in the positive in terms of occupancy.
- ⇒ During the month of June 488,266 passengers traveled through the airport versus 525,258 in June 2007, which represents a 7% decrease. A 6.1% drop was noted in July 2008 with 502,594 passengers compared with 535,264 passengers in 2007.
- ⇒ The Administration Activity Report is included for Council's review.

Ms. Davenport reported that staff attended Governor's Conference on Tourism in Orlando. Although the conference was shortened due to Tropical Storm Fay, we did receive a Flagler Award. We were also recognized in six other categories, including our PR efforts.

Finally, Suya advised that the ESTO conference was held at the Hyatt Coconut Pointe; she stated that our destination hosted the conference along with Visit Florida and that the Hyatt went above and beyond, partnering with the Bureau and State, to keep costs down. Suya stated that The Calusa Nature Center, Leoma Lovegrove, Eve Haverfield from Turtle Time, Babcock Wilderness and others were great partners who came together to represent our destination. She also praised the Bureau team's hard work.

### **⇒ Sales Report**

Prior to presenting the July and August 2008 Sales Activity report, Pamela Johnson offered a clarification regarding new policies concerning the Visa Waiver program. She advised that during a recent TDC Workshop, Germany was mentioned as being exempt under the Electronic System to Travel Authorization (ESTA) program; however, Germany is included as well as all Visa Waiver countries. She informed Council that the new policy under this program requires travelers to register online before traveling to the United States.

Ms. Johnson reported that staff made sales calls to 34 agencies in Connecticut and Rhode Island. In addition staff participated in several conferences: FSAE in Palm Beach, FL; MPI WEC in Las Vegas; ASAE in San Diego and MPA SEC in Ponte Vedra Beach, FL. Staff came back with approximately 90 leads and assisted with some bookings. Ms. Johnson advised that the international reports are included for Council's review.

⇒ **Communications Report**

Nancy Hamilton presented the Communications Activity report for the month of July and August. She reported that Communications staff held a special promotion with the Boston Red Sox at Fenway Park in Boston. Staff also hosted journalists from the United Kingdom, Denmark and Germany. Ms. Hamilton provided a progress report regarding Art of the Olympians, the new art gallery/museum soon to open in Lee County and the attention it is getting worldwide. Nancy advised that so far Arts of the Olympians has been in the news 90 times: 29 times in newspapers, 12 times on television, 14 times on radio, 33 times in online articles, nine times in wires and three times in magazines. Finally Nancy showed an Inside Travel & Tourism video segment featuring the Arts of the Olympians and a segment of Kathy Oerter being interviewed by the Chinese Travel Channel, which is the equivalent of the Travel Channel in the U.S.

⇒ **Visitor Services Report**

Ms. Durant presented the July activity report. Judi stated that 4,000 more inquiries were received during August 2008 versus August 2007 and that over 37,000 inquiries were received during the last two months. Judi advised that Visitor Services continues to work with partners such as Springhill Suites; however, non traditional partners such as Costco or Miromar have expressed an interest in working with the Bureau. Also, volunteers took three additional familiarizations trips to Naples in view of increased demand for Collier County information. Ms. Durant informed Council that 12 Guests First classes have taken place over the past two months and that as of today, 352 E-Awards nominations have been received. She announced that the Annual E-Awards event is scheduled for October 15, 2008 at Harborside.

⇒ **Beach & Shoreline Report**

As Tamara Pigott re-introduced Nancy MacPhee, who was recently hired by the Bureau, she stated that this is the last month that she will be presenting the Beach & Shoreline report. Ms. Pigott reminded Council that Nancy MacPhee will be responsible for the Beach & Shoreline program, the Events Marketing and Attraction programs as well as the Capital Improvement program. Tam added that Nancy is currently busy with sites visits. Tam announced that she attended the Orlando 2009 Annual Marketing meeting and provided Council with an update of Orlando's next year's plan. She stated that Orlando is making an international push for countries such as Canada, U.K., Germany as well as South and Central America.

Fran Myers inquired if there has been an assessment made regarding Tropical Storm Fay's damage to our beaches. Ms. Pigott deferred to Steve Boutelle who stated that the initial assessment was not deemed severe. He agreed that Cabbage Key is a concern. Ms. Myers stated that she appreciated Mr. Boutelle's response; however Council needs more technical information. Steve stated that funding is not available to do a full assessment. A lengthy conversation ensued and Ms. Pigott asked about the cost of such a survey; Steve Boutelle responded that it could amount to approximately \$300,000. Commissioner Judah suggested that a presentation regarding this issue at the October TDC Meeting would be important.

⇒ **Sports Authority Report**

Jeff Mielke presented the July and August department reports. Mr. Mielke reported that 7,765 rooms were generated during the month of June with a total economic impact of \$3.8 million. Sports generated 12,731 rooms in July with a total economic impact of over \$8 million. Jeff stated that this was the best July ever in Lee County and this was during a month without NARCh. He added that the Perfect Games event has emerged as the single most important event at this time and the event is expected to run for three weeks next year. Mr. Mielke praised outgoing John Yarbrough; he reminisced about Mr. Yarbrough taking him under his wing as a new County employee and showed him how to build relationships in the community. Jeff also stated that the customer service provided by John's staff is a reflection on him and that Lee County is losing its biggest champion in sports tourism.

Commissioner Judah requested an update regarding the Red Sox to which Mr. Mielke responded that a dialogue between Mike Dee and John Yarbrough is still ongoing. Don Stilwell, County Manager commented that employees who accepted the buyout cannot come back to work as a county employee in the future; however, John Yarbrough may be an exception as negotiations with the Red Sox team is critical.

**CONSULTANTS' REPORTS**  
**ADVERTISING REPORT**

⇒ Annie Ecken, BVK presented the June and July, 2008 advertising report. Ms. Ecken reported that 16,919 inquiries were received during the month of June, while July saw a decrease in inquiries at 10,993. Regarding Internet activity, 75,366 visitors visited our site in June 80,642 in July. Annie advised that Treasuryourtrip.com continues to do better than anticipated.

**RESEARCH REPORT**

⇒ Nicole Devine, Davidson Peterson Associates (DPA) presented the July and August, 2008 Visitor Profile report. Ms. Devine informed Council that we now have a full year of data collection and she provided a July 2007 versus July 2008 comparison report. Occupancy in July 2008 averaged 47.1%; Average daily Rates were down from July 2007 at \$119.49.

**Old Business**

None

**New Business**

a) Anita Pinder, Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife, CROW introduced Paul Douglas, new Director at the organization and deferred to him to provide an update of how Council's Award of \$500,000 to the organization was expanded. After his presentation, Mr. Douglas invited all to the grand opening on January 24 and 25, 2009 and he also encouraged Council to schedule a private preview of the facility.

b) Steve Boutelle made a presentation requesting that Council consider advancing the federal portion of the Fort Myers Beach renourishment project in the amount of \$6.6 million. After a lengthy discussion and due to reserves constraints, the TDC recommended funding half the project, or \$3.3 million from Beach & Shoreline reserves and half from the Lee County general reserves.

- ➔ Mr. Affourtit made a motion, seconded by Fran Myers to allocate \$3 million with the understanding that the funds would come back to TDC Beach & Shoreline reserves upon reimbursement from the federal government.

During further discussions, Ms. DePasquale expressed concern about average daily rates and occupancy dropping and she stated that it is possible that we will see changes in bed tax collections. Ms. Pigott responded that funds are allocated on a yearly basis, based on conservative revenue estimates and that staff will continue to keep a sharp eye on this issue.

With no further discussions, the motion passed unanimously.

Tamara Pigott invited Council to attend the dedication of Allison Haggerup Park on Captiva at 1 p.m. on September 11.

c) Barbara Manzo, Parks & Recreation presented a funding request for \$1.5 million to construct the Sanibel Causeway fishing pier. Ms. Manzo reminded Council that 18 months ago the Board allocated \$200,000 for the design of the fishing pier and was asked to come back to Council for additional funding when design is complete. Discussions ensued regarding the timeline of the project, who would use the fishing pier, TDC source of funding and whether Parks & Recreation had explored other funding sources to which Ms. Manzo indicated that the department has no other sources.

- ➔ As \$200,000 has already been invested and the piling cannot be left as is, Mr. Affourtit made a motion, seconded by Roxie Smith to approve \$1.5 million for the construction of the Sanibel Causeway Pier.

With no further discussions, the motion passed unanimously.

d) Jim Griffith, Sydney & Berne Davis Art Center made a funding request for \$38,000 for the art center's air conditioning and flooring. Mr. Griffith advised that \$3 million has already been invested in the restoration of the Art Center to bring it to an international caliber.

Suya Davenport reviewed the Facility Development program that Council had requested to be put in place in an effort to discourage funding requests to be made throughout the year. This year, as only \$47,303 remained available, unveiling the program was postponed. Council made the decision to roll the program next year, making \$2 million available for reserves.

Ms. Davenport informed Council to date, three other requests had been received from: The Calusa Nature Center, the City of Bonita Springs and the Town of Fort Myers Beach and that they were all informed that the program will kick off next year. Suyu stated that the Davis Art Center is the first request that has come in front of Council and that should Council decide to fund the project, it would set a precedent. Ms. Myers inquired when the Art Center would require the funding; Mr. Griffith responded that it is needed immediately as it is contingent on obtaining other funding. Ms. Myers also inquired if Ms. Davenport was concerned about setting a precedent or about the funding itself, to which Suyu responded that her concern is related to both issues.

Commissioner Judah stated that this would be a wonderful partnership and that the request needs to be seriously considered especially in view of the River District revitalization efforts. He added that the enrichment to the community is immeasurable.

- ➔ Fran Myers stated that she does not like to set precedents; however, in view of the small funding request and the value of the project, she moved to allocated \$38,000 to the Sydney and Berne Davis Art Center. Roxie Smith seconded the motion.

Roxie Smith stated that Council has allocated significant funding for coastal issues; this is inland and the building is a treasure. Colleen DePasquale commented that the three other organizations will be unhappy; Ms. DePasquale stated that there are a lot of ongoing great projects in the County and if asked, all TDC funding could be given away. She added that she is not sure that Council should fund this project at this time and that saying 'no' to other organizations in the future will be more difficult. Commissioner Judah agreed that Ms. DePasquale made a good point; he commented that Council will continue to be equitable throughout the community and that once the program rolls out next year, all requests will be reviewed seriously.

With no further discussions, the motioned passed three to two, with René Affourtit and Colleen DePasquale objecting.

#### **For Council Information**

Ms. Davenport informed Council that:

- The Annual Marketing Meeting (Team Tourism) scheduled for October 10, 2008 at Sanibel Harbour Resort & Spa will have a new concept; Bud Nocera, Visit Florida will attend and there will be a representative from TIA and a Keynote speaker. The meeting will include a State of the Union addressing national and international issues rather than just Lee County issues. In addition there will be breakout sessions and lunch will be included.
- E-Awards is scheduled for October 15, 2008 at Harborside Event Center.

#### **TDC Member Items**

- As several Bureau staff members are leaving, Roxie Smith stated that she is amazed at VCB staff productivity;
- René Affourtit stated that DPA might present a yearly report that would provide Council with the number of units available, by categories and with some historical data.
- Fran Myers circulated the Airport's News & Notes and advised that the airport has added some new air service. Ms. Myers reported that several hoteliers have inquired whether we will advertise year round and that she did not have an answer for them. Suva stated that Team Tourism will provide these answers at the October meeting.

**All reports are included with the Minutes and are on file at the Visitor & Convention Bureau. The Minutes may also be found on [www.Leevcb.com](http://www.Leevcb.com)**

The next Tourist Development Council meeting is scheduled for October 3, 2008 at the Visitor & Convention Bureau.

The meeting adjourned at noon.