

**GATLINBURG DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM
CONVENTION CENTER/GROUP SALES WORK GROUP MINUTES**

December 12, 2008

The Gatlinburg Department of Tourism Convention Center/Group Sales Work Group met on December 12, 2008 at 9:00 a.m. in the Board Room of the Convention Center. **The following members were present:** Ms. Jackelyn Schafer, Mr. Joe Waggoner, Mr. Jim Davis, Ms. Sharon Rinehart, and Mr. David Perella. Business Community Members Included: Ms. Andrea Richey, Mr. David Reed, Mr. Brian Holland, Ms. Vickie Blake, and Ms. Jackie Leatherwood.

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. David Perella called the meeting to order.

READING/ APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion to approve Meeting Minutes was made by Mr. Brian Holland, seconded by Mr. Joe Waggoner.

UPDATE ON WEBSITE

The Update on Website stated by Mr. David Perella is that we are on target. Ms. Sharon Rinehart will e-mail the direct link to view the website. The new website will be more effective for the Gatlinburg Convention Center as well as the community. The website will be from a visitor's perspective. A leisure traveler will be able to go to a site and be where they want to be relatively quickly. The website will have different sites for Meeting Planners, Media, and "Reach Higher Ground". The site will also include: Calendar of events, place to download a RFP, booked events and information on groups, a full listing of contacts with pictures, Food & Beverage information for Gatlinburg Convention Center, City Parks, Golf Course, Trolley System, Fishing Information, National Park Service information, Breakaway activities, and the City Green initiatives. The website will take the visitor on a virtual journey. The website is a very interactive site including: video, flash photos, captions, and at some point a voice-over will be added where one can listen to descriptions based on their interests.

UPDATE ON HOUSING BUREAU

Ms. Sharon Rinehart stated that she is very close to having The Housing Bureau up and running. We are in the final stages of working out terms & conditions as well as making sure the site is secure. Ms. Sharon Rinehart will e-mail a paragraph template for hotel properties to include in their agreements with their clients. This template will help alleviate any confusion and insure continuity throughout the community. Our goal is to make sure the Housing Bureau will work and function the way we want it to. Ms. Sharon Rinehart stated that groups like Ressurrection are interested in utilizing the Housing Bureau. The reservation reports that the hotel properties will download will remain encrypted until they make it unencrypted. She said there is a program we will provide at no charge so hotels can easily un-encrypt the reports once they have them in their system. Once hotel agrees to contract with housing bureau and have a signed agreement from client, they have to notify the Gatlinburg Convention Center to turn on their inventory on the

housing site. Mr. Perella explained that this system is not any different than having a group block in one's regular programs; he urged hotels to simply monitor their inventory, and not double book. The idea behind the Housing Bureau is too keep groups from staying outside of Gatlinburg and to use it as a customer service tool for our large groups. Ms. Sharon Rinehart will inform everyone when the system is set up and ready to begin training businesses on the program. Mr. Perella explained that the only way a cost would incur to the hotels would be because of the labor involved or man power required once the program is established and there are enough groups utilizing the program that would require a full-time employee to oversee the program.

NEW BUSINESS/GROUP DISCUSSION

Everything we are seeing at the Gatlinburg Convention Center is increasing. For the month of November, 2008, although the Smoky Mountain Gift Show was down 6-8% in buyers, Hearts on Fire was up in attendance by 2,000 attendees, and a Cheerleading group was up by 600 attendees. This positive increase will eliminate the surrounding negative affects. We have lost three government and two corporate medium sized groups due to budget cuts. Right now people are looking for a deal.

- New Exhibit Booth Display
 - The new exhibit booth will be ready the beginning of January.

NEXT MEETING DATE

The next meeting is scheduled for **January 30, 2009 at 9:00** am in the **Board Room** at the convention center.