

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

*April 11, 2008*

The Gatlinburg Department of Tourism Convention Center/Group Tour Work Group met on April 11, 2008 at 9:00 a.m. in the Board Room of the Convention Center. **The following members were present:** Mr. Joe Waggoner, Ms. Sharon Sutton, and Mr. David Perella. Business Community Members Included: Ms. Jackie Leatherwood, Mr. Brian Holland, and Ms. Andrea Richey.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Ms. Sharon Sutton called the meeting to order.

**READING/ APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**Motion to approve April 11, 2008 Meeting Minutes was made by Jackie Leatherwood, seconded by Joe Waggoner.**

**UPDATES ON CHALLENGES WITH RESURRECTION HOUSING**

Ms. Kathy Evans and Ms. Sharon Sutton spoke with Mr. Dan Gray he is aware of the Resurrection situation and they are trying to work together to fix the problem and finding a solution. A conference call is setup with Ms. Kathy Evans, Ms. Sharon Sutton and Mr. Dan Gray the latter part of next week.

**HOUSING BUREAU RESEARCH**

Mr. David Perella stated that The San Diego Visitor Bureau & Convention Center utilizes the same Concentrics Software Program that we use with their entire Convention Center. They are going to rebuild our Concentrics System with a Housing Bureau Included at no additional cost so that we are able to utilize the program as well. Mr. Perella asked that all Lodging Properties share their thoughts and to please provide their feedback regarding the Housing Bureau.

**SALES LEAD SIGN UP/ LODGING USAGE MEETING**

We would like preferably Both General Managers and Director of Sales to attend this meeting. This meeting is for any Dining, Lodging and Attraction Properties interested in participating in the Leads Program as well as issues regarding the lack of feedback regarding Lodging Usage. The following items will be discussed; How the Lodging Usage Form provided to the Lodging Properties works, Sales Leads, The Rebate Programs and the Rules, Regulations and Guidelines. They will have to sign a formal agreement that If they do not follow these Rules and/or guidelines with proper participation they will not be allowed to participate in the program. The programs aren't being as successful as they could be because we aren't getting the support from all the Properties to make it work. In discussion there was the consideration of certain actions of penalties when Rules and/or Guidelines are broken. First - Ms. Sharon Sutton would write a letter to the Both General Managers and Directors of Sales letting them know their Properties will be removed from the list due to lack of Participation; and should that plan of action not

cause a response - Mr. David Perella would then write the owner(s) of the property letting them know their Property(ies) will be removed from the list due to lack of Participation.

## **NEW BUSINESS/ GROUP DISCUSSION**

Our new Marketing Group BCF plan is on spending \$650,000 beginning July 1, 2008 which will include; Media Placement, Tradeshows, Travel, Miscellaneous, Leisure (\$250,000 fees), Expenses (\$100,000-150,000), Public Relations (\$190,000), and Promotional (\$50,000-60,000). For Example it will take a big effort to take our Convention Center from a four state to a forty state area. Right now there is 10-12 States that aren't our competition. The reality of changing this is if the funding is available; we have support from the City Manager as well as the Commissioners. Every dollar we take in we have less than 10 % expenses. In this case means we have 90% of a dollar to spend on our Marketing efforts. This is a huge movement for the Convention Center and there will be less of an emphasis on the traditional Group Tour Market and an increase in marketing efforts of Associations, Corporate Groups, SYTA and other similar market segments of that nature.

In order for this to happen it is imperative we fix issues in regards to the Convention Center's Challenges for example; parking issues, transportation, etc. The transportation issue can be corrected by providing extended hours of operation and redefining the Gatlinburg Trolley Routes. This will open new opportunity to new tradeshows. We are in the process of teaming up with the website VDFun.com to enable us to have our website provide access of clicking on direct hotel sites from the Convention Center website. Mr. David Perella requested a list from Lodging Properties what they need from the city. And the City of Gatlinburg will provide a list of what we need from them so we can all work together to being a more successful City as a whole.

In our efforts to promote the nearest Airports – emphasis should be placed on pointing out to the client the benefits it has to offer for being a smaller airport. For example; it is smaller so the car rental is easier and quicker, shorter wait in security and it is simply easier to maneuver throughout the facility. We discussed creating a map to provide clients will various options of directions to the airport. Also starting and/or putting together a Volunteer program to help with facilitating these groups. One of the funding options considered for the program is approaching the Lodging Association with the idea of a sponsorship.

Mr. David Perella mentioned the following facts regarding our website. For the first seven days of April this year vs. the first seven days of April last year - our PDF downloads are up 350 % and we have had an additional 1,400 hits per day on our website. From the first of the month to the seventh we have already had 14,000 Vacation Guide Downloads.

Also it was discussed to possibly put together a packet and/or "Gatlinburg Facts" notebook to provide to the front desk employees of the lodging properties. This would include all of the Gatlinburg dining facilities, attractions and shopping information so that they could easily provide information to their guests. It was also discussed to put together a class or City Site Tour a few times per year where employees at the area businesses could participate and become more customer service oriented – benefiting everyone while making a great impression on our visitors.

### **NEXT MEETING AGENDA**

The May 19, 2008 meetings agenda will be discussion on The Marketing Plan, Mass Media Convention Center

### **NEXT MEETING DATE**

The next scheduled meeting for the Convention/Group Sales Work Group is **Monday, May 19, 2008 time TBD** in the **Board Room** of the convention center.

### **TABLED ITEMS**

- Sister City
- Trolley Pass