



**Humboldt County Visitors Bureau
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
MINUTES**

Thursday, January 18, 2024

Present: Ken Hamik, Ara Pachmayer, Molly Blakemore, Jenny Early, Shannon Hughes, Justin Legge, Carlton Nielsen, Lisa Sundberg, Jason Baxter, *Marketing Consultant*, Dianna Rios, *County Liaison*
Absent Sam Wedll, Lowell Daniels, Supervisor Michelle Bushnell

- I. The meeting was called to order at 11:34 am.
Role call was taken. Directors checked in.
Guest Welcome: Yvonne Hendrix, ED, SoHum Chamber of Commerce
- II. Public Comment: There were no public comments.
- III. Approval of Minutes of November 16, 2023, meeting
Lisa made the motion to approve the minutes as submitted.
Carlton seconded the motion.
The motion to approve the minutes as submitted passed unanimously.

IV. Board Committee Reports

- Executive Committee

Ken thanked everyone who turned up in support of the Bureau for the Report & Recommendations by the Tourism & Travel Ad Hoc Committee to the Board of Supervisors. It is especially important emphasize how HCVB is coordinating and working with regions in the County.

Lisa commented that, as she travels nationally and internationally, she is an active ambassador for Humboldt, but does see that there are regional and information silos that need to be addressed. Requires more funds and alignment from the different stakeholders.

- Financial Report

The Bureau received the second of two annual TOT payments from the County and immediately dispersed the funds to the Gateways and SHBVB. The Bureau's portion was \$150K.
Julie addressed the comment made in the Staff Report & Recommendations about the increase in rent and the unnecessary move to the larger site. This information formed part of the narrative regarding the Bureau's operating and staff costs seeming excessive and negatively impacting the available marketing dollars. Not mentioned was that six months rent-free had been negotiated and the Ink People do pay for the Brenda Tuxford Gallery space.

- Advocacy & Funding

Julie: Working on the annual report that highlights marketing successes and achievements and will address some of the concerns raised by the Ad Hoc Committee. The goal is to meet with the supervisors and Ad Hoc Committee to present the report and review it with him. It is important that HCVB has control over the message and data delivery.

- Marketing

Jason presented 30-day and 90-day analytics comparison to show the steady increase in numbers.

- Almost 60K Facebook followers, 207K reach in one month. 90-day reach 849K – up 97% over previous 90 days. Engagement over 66K (clicking, liking, sharing posts).
- Instagram numbers are at 17.3K, reach of 10K in last 28 days – 90 day reach 33.3K up 84% Means the end of summer could not compete with our winter numbers.
- Website over 1M unique users a year. New Google analytics system and have lost some data. An IT person will come and resolve the issue.

Due to the prohibitive cost to design a new site, Julie and team are working to update, edit and rewrite content and refresh images using local photographers, with goal of completing as many pages as possible before FY year-end (June 30th).

In response to Molly's question about the Facebook & Instagram names (RedwoodCoast & RedwoodCoaster), Julie reminded the Board that they had been chosen when the Bureau and the HLA were closely aligned and "Humboldt – California's Redwood Coast" was the name designation used. HCVB does not have the name Humboldt in any tags, rather emphasizing the redwoods as the primary visitor attraction.

Julie proposed looking into contracting with a company to get tourism data by the Memorial Day when the tourism season really starts. There is no one entity in the County that collects – or has access to – comprehensive tourism-related demographics, spending, and behavior that can be shared and used to refine marketing strategies. This would be especially useful for the Oyster Festival, Bigfoot Daze, Reggae on the River and Cannifest etc., to understand if they go to other places and events as well. Current information is anecdotal or via lodging owners.

Jason attended a presentation from Placer AI (www.placer.ai) – interesting analytics company who can provide information on who is coming here and why. The Bureau needs to leverage some of these data technologies – can go back 6 months to trace campaigns and see popularity of tourist locations. This information is important as a tool to assess the impact of marketing and make adjustments etc. See spending patterns – where did they spend? No one global set of visitor data in the County – really missing out on access to accurate data that can help focus campaigns and evaluate the ROI.

Dianna noted that the County had purchased Placer AI for the airport for one year. Ran reports to see data for visitors centering the county from north, south, and east. but the cost was considered too high for its data value.

Jason – data more useful when used from an agency perspective and are targeting specific demographic groups. Find out their influences, favorite TV shows etc. really narrow it down and focus it to get the best ROI.

Julie, following up on Carlton's insight, suggested connecting with HLA and with Misfit regarding any geo fencing app and reports that they may use and ask to share data.

Cannabis Trail Campaign:

Julie reported that the Bureau recently entered into a partnership with Visit Mendocino County and Visit Oakland to hire Brian Applegarth to develop and promote the Cannabis Trail Campaign. Trail will have destinations in all three counties with places to stay, farms to visit, plaques and monument designations. Brain will be visiting Humboldt to meet prospective stakeholders and review destinations. Cannabis tourism is a huge, untapped market and the Trail will highlight the history, culture, and stories of cannabis in Humboldt, Mendocino, and the Bay Area.

Ken commented that over 3,000 people attended Cannifest in 2023, so this marketing collaboration is a great step forward for Humboldt to get in front of prospective cannabis-interested visitors.

Julie:

- The Map & Guide is being developed. Connected with four local photographers whose work we have used successfully on Facebook, Instagram and in the eNewsletter. Have large prints to display in 422.
- The NCTC will be advertising nationally in USA Today with a full-page ad and California Road Trip article. This will include a raffle, which is a very successful way of capturing email addresses. A raffle will also be featured at the Bay Area Travel & Adventure Show. The emails will be added to the database for the eNewsletter and other communications.

eNewsletter:

- December: Holiday Greetings (29,504 recipients): Open rate – 40%, 15,550:
Top Locations by Opens:
USA – 87.5%; Sweden – 10.3%; Canada – 1%; UK – 0.2%; Germany – 0.2%
- January: Happy New Year! (29,348 recipients): Open rate – 34.7%, 11,729:
Top Locations by Opens:
USA – 89.3%; Sweden – 8%; Canada – 1.4%; UK – 0.2%; Australia – 0.1%

V. County Update

Dianna: County Staff have been directed by BOS to reach out to municipalities re partnerships and funding for the Bureau; work with ED on contract and bring it into compliance; staff to engage with the communities to get feedback regarding Gateways and DMO's. Bring back evaluations and make more recommendations in May. Julie asked that the Bureau be a part of the conversations with the municipalities.

There will be a special event in August at Airport.

VI. Other Business

Justin told the Board that his guide services have been very popular with many couples and groups from all over the US. Looking forward to a busy season. Working with Pacific Outfitters providing Guide & Naturalist services. Lots of interest from outside the area.

Shannon shared that Willow Creek Museum is doing well, and plans are well underway for 2024 Bigfoot Daze which will be on July 13th.

Jenny & Yvonne: After a hiatus, Reggae on the River will be back in August. Organized by the Mateel community. The SoHum Chamber and Bureau are supporting the event with marketing, and it is an exciting event to bring visitors to Southern Humboldt.

Lisa reported that she has established the Indigenous Habitat Institute and, with partners, is in line to receive a sizable grant to support three initiatives: ensuring the transfer of knowledge about hempcrete building from European partners into Humboldt; furthering partnerships with universities, tribes, municipalities, and private industry. Getting a lot of interest. Workforce development with local college. Building with hempcrete is the future as it is fire retardant, mold resistant and 100% energy efficient. Opportunity to reduce costs of energy, and fire insurance.

Next Board Meeting March 21st.

Spring reception when new exhibits are in place.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:55 p.m.