

VISIT ROWAN COUNTY

SALISBURY, NORTH CAROLINA

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ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

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Name: Destination Marketing Committee

Date of Meeting: January 4, 2018

Committee Chair: To Be Appointed

Date of Next Meeting: February 1, 2018

Committee Members Attending: Annette Privette Keller, James Harvey, Darrell Blackwelder, Vivian Hopkins, Krista Osterweil, Gretchen Witt, Michelle Patterson, Amie Baudoin, Aaron Kepley, Kelly Alexander

Tourism Staff: James Meacham, Allyson Teague, Mollie Ruf

James Meacham called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. and welcomed everyone to the Destination Marketing Committee Meeting for January 2017, which would primarily consist of strategic planning.

Meeting Minutes:

After minutes were reviewed, Meacham called for a motion to approve the minutes as presented:

Motion: Krista Osterweil made a motion to approve the minutes.
Second: Kelly Alexander
Motion: Approved

Destination Marketing Report

Meacham touched on the highlights of the December 2017 destination marketing report. Overall, the Polar Express package generated approximately 1,500 room nights. Kelly Alexander stated the total tickets sold were 52,118 and the economic impact was tremendous for the community as a whole. Another 10,000-15,000 could have been sold if there was enough capacity. The NC Transportation Museum is already preparing for next year's Polar Express event. In addition, the NCTM had the highest paid visitation yet in 2017, with over 143,000 guests.

With regard to tourism support investments, the total room nights will be close to 3,000, which is a new record for the TDA. The total economic impact will be between 12 ½ to 13 million for the year.

Meacham stated the TDA is working with Husqvarna to host a regional sales meeting this month and the Main Street Managers meeting took place last month. Also, public relations had three additional media assists at the end of the year, which were mostly Polar Express related.

At next month's meeting there will be a more in-depth presentation about the upcoming Arts & Ag events. Meacham shared an overall schedule with the group, including dates and locations for each event.

Strategic Planning

Meacham invited the committee members to have a general conversation about the DMC's direction, new ideas for projects, as well as roles and responsibilities. Three areas touched on were an overview of the current program, goals and objectives, and future programs.

The current program includes:

- 1) General Storytelling: Mostly executed digitally through social media and website updates
- 2) Incentive-Based Travel: This uses resources to partner with groups for incentivizing people to travel. These are generally the largest volume of transactions the TDA does.
- 3) Manage Visitor Activities, Services & Programs: Historic Trolley Tours, Scrooge Trolley Tours, Arts & Ag, general visitor services
- 4) Tourism Partner Support: Grants approved to support partner programming, which encourages overnight stays and overall visitation

Mike Miller stated the expansion of incentivized travel for groups would be a good step, with a focus on the summer months. James Harvey feels bringing multiple parties together across multiple segments is a positive way to promote the county as a whole. Michelle Patterson suggested to focus on multi-site incentivized travel so guests are encouraged to extend their stay, possibly through travel rewards. The group agreed the Historic Trolley program has been a great success and should continue into the future. Krista Osterweil stated trolley package tours would be a good way to incentivize travel as well. In addition, brewery and winery trolley tours could bring increased visitation, especially through the summer months.

With regard to tourism partner support, the committee agreed to continue the grant program with possible expansions to encourage groups to try new things. Currently, a partner can receive a grant up to \$3,000 within 3 areas, including incentivized overnight package, hospitality support and lodging support. Kelly Alexander stated the DMC needs to find a way to include smaller and/or local organizations that don't necessarily fit into the overall criteria. Meacham suggested

the implementation of a subset visitor event development grant to launch or expand events, which will focus on growth versus maintaining current events.

Storytelling is reaching a lot of people through social media and the new website, but a lot of bigger paid advertisements are left out due to funds being used in other areas. Harvey suggested securing ad space by way of editorials in magazines. Putting efforts into public relations and publicity as opposed to paid marketing might help get the word out. Meacham suggested to explore general destination-based storytelling through cooperative publications with the state. Aaron Kepley stated an outreach to partners with information on how to participate in free advertisement listings would be beneficial.

Patterson inquired about mobile apps for general community travel. Meacham stated apps are only successful when people need them, want them and use them. General community travel apps have died down because websites usually have everything a visitor needs. Osterweil recommended including experience-based itineraries on the website, such as a romantic weekend or a family-friendly weekend. Also, a multi-day trolley tour may appeal to visitors where a 2 or 3 day pass can be purchased to ride the trolley to various locations around the county during their stay.

With regard to storytelling and partner communication, Mollie Ruf proposed an increase in the digital asset library, including high quality and high resolution photos and videos. Updated material from current holidays and events throughout the year will appeal to a wider audience on a regular basis.

Meacham stated the success of destination marketing is largely based on the current trend of interest-based visitation and travel. It is important to pair the goals and objectives of the DMC with the specific interests of visitors in order to be successful.

Adjourn

With no additional business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:20 a.m.

Respectfully submitted by: Allyson Teague, RCTDA