



LONGBOAT KEY | SARASOTA | LIDO KEY | SIESTA KEY | VENICE
CASEY KEY | MANASOTA KEY | ENGLEWOOD | NORTH PORT

PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE
July 13, 2011, 9:00 AM
Sarasota Visitor Information Center

Minutes

In attendance:

Committee Members: Martha Wells, Chair; Owen Comora; Erin Bryce; Suzanne Willis; Lucy Nicandri; Jennifer Ahearn-Koch.

SCVB Staff: Erin Duggan, Virginia Haley; Anne Zavorskas, Janis Holland

Excused absence: Sarah Ozgun; Holly Johnson. Crystal Pruitt, Sarasota County advisory member, did not attend.

Martha Wells, Chair, opened the meeting, noting that we had a lot to do and thanking the SCVB staff for its work.

Erin Duggan presented the proposed FY 2012 Public Relations Plan, noting the objectives, strategies, tactics by fiscal year quarter, and new product development projects. She pointed out that the public relations plan is the prediction of known projects to pitch, such as baseball spring training, circus heritage, architecture. Other pitching opportunities cannot be anticipated and sometimes yield greater results (for example, the movie *Water for Elephants* and the Syesha Mercado/American Idol event).

Ms. Duggan discussed the upcoming year's two new product development concepts:

- Agri-tourism, including things to do at local farms/dairies; local farms providing food to local restaurants; and local farmers markets. The SCVB has been compiling this information and is working on a plan to put it together to create a new product.
- Insider Program, where the SCVB will hire "freelancer writers/bloggers/vloggers" to write about specific niche subjects that represent the various aspects of the county. Examples of topics include culture, eco, culinary, etc. Each topic will be focused on for one to three months. The "insider" writer will provide editorial content for the web and will post to social media outlets as well.

Some comments from the committee included:

- North Port is launching a Twitter account and has a Tweet Ups meeting planned in the future.

- The Celery Fields are now teeming with rare birds, and when rare birds appear, it is an opportunity to feature them. Currently there is a black skimmer nest on Lido Beach that is drawing media attention.

Ms. Duggan encouraged all committee members to contact her with additional ideas and suggestions that could be pitched for the Insider's Program.

The next item on the Agenda is Savor Sarasota Restaurant Week. The Board of Directors would like to see Savor Sarasota elevated to a higher level. Some ideas discussed were:

- a festival, such as Taste of Sarasota, which was met with general support from the committee with the caveat that it should be held indoors given the time of year
- multiple price points for dinner (allowing more expensive restaurants to offer full portions without losing money while still offering a good value)
- offer package discount deals, such as buy five dinner certificates for \$100
- bring back the lunch menu and reconsider the price point
- establish business rules so restaurants know the parameters in advance of signing up
- possibly create the alternative of non-partner restaurants buying in to the Savor Sarasota Restaurant Week, but would it devalue the event?
- create a kick-off event, but keep it simple, such as a mini-Taste of Sarasota with Savor Sarasota menus available to be handed out; keep the price of attendance low; have drawings for prizes; schedule the kick-off approximately a week before the beginning of restaurant week
- create packages for dinner and a show with theater partners, or dinner and a movie (Burns Court)

Ms. Duggan said the Marketing Committee also would be providing input on this subject, and all of these ideas would be presented to the Board of Directors.

The next Agenda item is upcoming public relations programs. The Sara campaign will launch at the end of August. The SCVB is working through the Facebook rules; submissions will be via Facebook; people will 'like' the contestants, and the SCVB will pick the final four winners to take trips to Sarasota from January through June, depending on the four categories: Eco-Sara; Arts-Sara; Foodie-Sara; and Family-Sara. When each winner visits will depend on when her area of interest is in season (for example, Foodie-Sara would visit during Savor Sarasota; Arts-Sara would visit in season when orchestra/opera/ballet are presenting shows).

Ms. Duggan talked about the ongoing familiarization (FAM) trips that the SCVB has been hosting – four days with German writers just completed, a family-oriented press trip in underway right now, and an upcoming press trip with five UK journalists. She described the Dr. Beach announcement and the SCVB's actions to secure a satellite truck to enable national press coverage, as well as local coverage. And she gave details on the upcoming trip to the UK with Dr. Beach to promote Siesta Key Beach being named number one in the US. Dr. Beach will be doing numerous media events, including radio, and will do a photo opportunity event with a

backdrop of Siesta Key, so Londoners can have their pictures taken 'on Siesta Key' with Dr. Beach.

Committee members asked why the UK push, and Ms. Duggan responded that British Airways has direct service to SRQ, UK is the second largest international market (behind Canada), and there is bad publicity to overcome regarding the Newtown murders of British tourists. Also, London is a big media center. Committee members also asked why Siesta Key. Ms. Duggan explained that it is an authentic story, bolstered by Dr. Beach/Dr. Leatherman's credentials as a scientist studying beaches, and it generates interest in the larger area surrounding Siesta Key.

Virginia Haley spoke about the June tourism numbers, noting:

- 11% increase in visitation
- 13.8% increase in visitor spending
- 10% increase in RevPAR
- 9% increase in occupancy

She said that the selection of Siesta Key as number one beach has wiped out any question of oil contamination. VISIT FLORIDA is paying for half of Dr. Beach's trip to the UK and he will promote all of Florida's beaches, as well as Siesta Key Beach. She further said that Dr. Beach strongly supports the smoking ban on the beach. The sand sculptors at the Crystal Classic also noted and supported the absence of smoking on the beach.

Chair Wells asked Ms. Haley to describe the situation with the festival funding. Ms. Haley said the one-time funding will be used to enhance arts grants for the next three years and \$200,000 of the festival funding will be used for specific arts tourism marketing. Essentially, there will be no changes to the Arts Alliance process, and the Arts Alliance will set the rules for eligibility. Having gone through this process, collaboration between the arts and the SCVB is improved, with the arts groups understanding more about what the SCVB does. We are now creating an arts website micro-site. Also, it was noted we are creating a UK micro-site.

Finally, committee members were reminded if they wish to serve on an SCVB Advisory Committee for the upcoming fiscal year 2012, they should submit an application.

The meeting was adjourned.