

SARASOTA CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

PUBLIC RELATIONS COMMITTEE

January 12, 2011, 9:00 AM
Sarasota Visitor Information Center

Minutes

In attendance:

Committee Members: Martha Wells, Chair; Owen Comora; Holly Johnson; Lucy Nicandri; Sarah Ozgun; Jennifer Ahearn-Koch; Suzanne Willis

SCVB Staff: Erin Duggan, Anne Zavorskas, Virginia Haley

Vendor Staff: Gray Lawry, atLarge, Inc.

Excused Absence: Gretchen Walker; Patricia Horwell; Erin Bryce

Martha Wells, Chair of the SCVB's Public Relations Committee, opened the meeting; Erin Duggan introduced Gray Lawry from atLarge, Inc., our vendor who assists the SCVB with the website.

Ms. Duggan handed out the outline for the upcoming Sara Campaign, including:

- the description of the project – to find four Sara(h)s to win prizes representing four of the general areas of things to do in Sarasota, e.g., Eco/Adventure/Sports; Arts/Culture/Romance; Family/Attractions/Beaches; and Culinary;
- the concept of initially finding a local Sara to be filmed doing most of the activities;
- how the contests would be handled – the SCVB-selected panel narrows down entrants to a few finalists and then the finalists are voted for by way of social media;
- the timeline, including possible launch in May for the local Sara in connection with National Tourism Week, with the local Sara being selected in June; filming in June/July; launch national campaign in August/September; select winners in October/November; with prizes for winter/spring 2012;
- once the types/themes are solidified, then the prizes will be defined;
- the desired results of video footage and images of Sara, publicity buzz for the campaign, increasing consumer newsletter opt-ins, increasing social media followers, and increasing awareness of the different things to do in Sarasota.

Ms. Duggan then asked for input on ways to include non-Saras, or if they should be included. There was a suggestion for non-Saras to send electronic postcards to friends named Sara, thus capturing more email addresses. Sara(h) is the 56th most popular name. Alternate spellings will be allowed.

Martha Wells asked the SCVB to give all partners a “to do” list of what the SCVB would want partners to do to promote this campaign. Examples: post on Facebook, put out a press release about the partner's involvement, etc.

Mr. Lawry talked about the possibility of involving Travelocity in this promotion, including having the gnome pose as a Sara here in Sarasota. The committee seemed to like this idea. SCVB staff is reviewing cost of this program with Travelocity to determine if it is feasible.

Ms. Duggan pointed out that we need to finalize the name of the promotion. She also noted some of the “fun” PR ideas that are included in the plan, such as the intention to prepare hard press kits (paper) only for media named Sara, with the balance of media receiving information electronically as usual, and via other normally used activities to pitch our PR programs/efforts.

Chair Wells took a moment to wish everyone a successful new year. Lucy Nicandri was asked about Thunder by the Bay, and she reported that it appeared to be very successful. There was German press reporting on the event, the Hyatt was at capacity, there were 1,800 participants on the Sunday ride, and overall it appeared that there were approximately 30,000 attendees. She had to turn away vendors for lack of space.

The next agenda item was the Public Relations Plan for FY 2012 which starts October 1, 2011. This will be discussed at the April 13 meeting. The schedule essentially will be brainstorming ideas in April, complete the financial plan in May, present it to the Board of Directors in June and present it to the Board of County Commissioners in July. Ms. Duggan asked for suggestions of any particular promotions or PR themes that should be considered for 2012; ideas can be emailed to her.

The next agenda item was updates on the following:

1. Festival Steering Committee (FSC) – Chair Wells gave a brief history of that committee and its assigned task, to formulate a business plan for creating an arts and culture event. There was consensus in the arts/culture community in 2009 that a festival should be the product, and the product under discussion is a Festival of Firsts – premieres or first showings in Sarasota. She noted that Sunshine Law complicates discussion among participants, and that if anyone has ideas or recommendations, they should pass them on to her, Mark Becker, Chairman of the SCVB and also a member of the Festival Steering Committee, or to Virginia Haley. Holly Johnson made the recommendation that whatever the FSC decides to do, it should be pro-active in its communication.
2. Eco – Discover Natural Sarasota – Anne Zavorskas gave the update of this project, mentioning John McCarthy’s new role with the County in focusing on parks and sports, dealing with the obstacles to use of existing facilities and managing the facilities throughout the county. Ms. Zavorskas said the Discover Natural Sarasota website was launched last year and the SCVB has \$10,000 budgeted to update and upgrade this website. There will be a planning meeting with John McCarthy on Friday and a stakeholders meeting on January 21; she noted that stakeholders supply a large amount of content for the website. A committee member asked what defines eco-tourism, and it was defined as relating to outdoor activities and involving nature-based human or animal-powered activities. The Public Relations aspect of eco-tourism is to provide the stories to tell on Discover Natural Sarasota. The Sarasota County Science and Environment Council has applied for a SWFWMD

grant to fund promotion including videos with/for local residents, because the SCVB is not allowed to use its funds for promotion to local residents, and local residents need information on the eco-nature amenities the County offers.

3. Tourism Marketing Grants – Erin Duggan described the function of the tourism marketing grants to drive visitation to Sarasota during non-peak season, noting that the total annual budget for marketing grants is \$60,000. She briefly described the situation with the Vinyl Festival awarded a \$10,000 grant for an event in July, and then the Vinyl Festival organizers changed the date to April, which rendered the event ineligible for a grant. That grant money will be rolled over to next fiscal year for the tourism grant budget. She noted that the SCVB is considering a process to actually facilitate the marketing and public relations for the events which receive tourism marketing grants, since some smaller events and festivals may need the assistance. The committee supported this concept.