

TOURISM PROFESSIONALS EXTEND EDUCATION WITH ANNUAL PROGRAM ON GEORGIA CAMPUS

Kelly Defebo, Sales Manager and Jason Puckett, Sports Manager, both of the Sarasota Convention & Visitors Bureau, have completed the second portion of a three-year professional development program that will lead to certification as a Tourism Marketing Professional (TMP).



Defebo and Puckett were two of 232 tourism professionals enrolled at the Southeast Tourism Society Marketing College last month. The week-long program turns the facilities of North Georgia College and State University in Dahlonega, Ga., into a laboratory to teach tourism marketing each summer.

There is no other professional development program like STS Marketing College, and it is recognized nationally for its training of tourism leaders. 564 people have earned TMP certification.

“In the tourism industry, TMP certification carries a lot of weight,” said Bill Hardman, president and CEO of the Southeast Tourism Society, a 12-state organization that promotes travel and tourism in the Southeast.

The STS Marketing College began in 1992 to provide continuing education for tourism professionals. Tourism ranks as the first-, second- or third-largest industry in each STS member state. Students come from convention and visitors bureaus, chambers of commerce, attractions, hotels and other segments of the tourism industry.

The curriculum covers topics such as family vacation research, special events marketing, media relations and creative advertising. Heritage tourism and community / rural tourism are courses that have attracted special interest in recent years.

“The fundamental concept of STS Marketing College is that the curriculum is practical. What students learn can be put to practice as soon as they get back to their workplaces,” Hardman said.

Twenty-three senior executives in the travel and tourism industry were the volunteer faculty.

The marketing college attracts students from throughout the Southeast and occasionally from other states. This year’s program included students from Texas and Arizona.

“The Southeast Tourism Society is recognized nationwide for the cohesiveness and camaraderie it fosters in the region. No other region has a similar

organization. Our marketing college is a major project to build skills and professionalism in the tourism industry,” Hardman said.

STS, created in 1983, is headquartered in Atlanta and has approximately 800 members who represent travel industry businesses, state tourism departments, chambers of commerce, convention and visitors bureaus and travel media. Its activities include cooperative marketing programs, continuing education, professional development and travel industry policy advocacy.

The 12 STS states are Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

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