

Gold West Country General Board Meeting – Fairmont October 22, 2009 Minutes

Participants:

Board Members: Carol Eichler, Ellen Baumler, Paul Marsh, Pat Hansen, Fay Najjar, Julie Shelton, Mike Strang, Desiree Shongren, Sara Rowe, John O'Donnell, Patty Cowan, Mike Mergenthaler, and employee Sarah Bannon

Connie Daniels, Casey Ferguson, Adam Vauthier, Melissa Bolton, George Everett, Greg Beaudalee, Bob Allen, Shawn Peterson, Judy Westfall, Emily McParland, Dianne Carey, Paul Reichert, Michael Gray, Gerald Gray, Sarah Lawlor,

President Mike Mergenthaler called the meeting to order and had us each do a self-introduction.

The minutes were sent out with the agenda and Patty moved that the minutes be approved as submitted. Sara seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Sarah had worksheets for the financial report. We have \$60,742 in our state checkbook for the first quarter and \$29,002 in the money market. We have \$38,820 in our membership checkbook and \$62,263 in our money market account. Carol moved that the financial report be approved as submitted and Fay seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Sarah passes around the lodging tax revenue report from Travel Montana. The numbers show that for the January – March of 2009, Gold West was down 1% and the state was down 13%. Arnd for spring of 09, Gold West was down 7% and the state was down 10%. These numbers represent a small amount of the total for the year. The big summer months have not been reported as of yet by the Department of Revenue. Please go to travelmontana.org and under News and Updates go to Lodging Tax Revenue for the latest figures by state, region, and county.

Sarah gave the call center report from MARS STOUT. We had 405 inquiries in September. Last year at this time there were only 184 inquiries. The *Audubon* magazine that features our birding brochure brought up the inquiries. Most of the inquirers found us through *Audubon*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Midwest Vacation Guide*, and the Gold West Country website. They were interested in regional history and ghost towns, area lodging, wildlife watching, and rock hounding. Most of the inquiries came from California, Florida, Montana and Illinois.

After our discussion on bike trails at the last meeting, Mike Strang had invited Bob Allen from the Montana Bike Alliance to do a presentation. The Alliance formed in 2006 as an advocacy organization. They built up the Tour De Colorado in a city with a population of 9000. Bob said that we have right in Gold West Country world class trails for biking. He discussed having a standard rack care for mountain biking. We would need to identify our resources, make the information relevant and inspiring. He said that bikers want to camp, be near a trail head, want to buy a shower, have access to a bike shop, and a hardware store. Loop rides are preferred. Bob also said that word of mouth is important. Missoula has an Adventure Cycling group. Connie Daniels asked about safety issues and more was discussed on this topic. Mike appointed Mike Strang to be chairman for getting more information on bike paths for Gold West Country.

Shawn Peterson from Tempest Technologies gave us an update on the Gold West website. They have completed their work with Montana Office of Tourism and went live with our site. The trip planner is ready but after some initial practice runs they are looking at making changes to make the program more user friendly. He had a handout for "Plan your Trip in Montana." Shawn has received some good feedback from some of the members and welcomes more feedback to help make the site as helpful as possible.

Sarah presented a list of potential projects for this fiscal year. Included were \$12,800 for the National Folk Festival that we gave last year – they are asking for double this year, print travel guide \$40,000, additional TV ads at \$15,000 est., cooperative marketing - \$12,000 est., quote for more photos and a photo library would be between \$3570 and \$7500. The subtotal of potential projects was \$112,088 and the total membership funds were \$101,083.

George Everett gave a report on the National Folk Festival. We had much discussion on Gold West Country as a sponsor. In the end, Mike Strange moved that we put a total of \$15,000 of membership money toward the festival. Patty seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Paul Marsh gave us a cultural heritage update. We will have a new brochure out in the first quarter of next year with at least 25 new entries on it. Through AAA and VIA mentioning the book, we have had steady online sales of the Sage and Stone book. The next book will come out in 2011.

Travel Montana (now called Montana Office of Tourism) has done three podcasts for Gold West Country. They are on the visitmt.com website. The podcasts are of the Pinler Scenic Loop, the Virginia City area, and a tour of Butte. Please check them out.

We discussed the Billings Recreation Travel Expo. After some discussion on this it was decided to wait and see how things are progressing in January.

Gerald and Mike Gray from G&G Advertising passed around drafts of three advertising ideas. Several comments were made and they will incorporate this information into ads for us to review. They handed out some proofs of the travel guide. Gerald also handed out a preliminary draft for consumer advertising. We are waiting on information from Montana Office of Tourism to help get things finalized.

Under public comment some discussion came about on a new trail from Virginia City to Nevada City.

Mike adjourned the meeting at 2:05 p.m.