

Gold West Country
General Board Meeting – Virginia City
Minutes - October 27, 2011

Participants: board members: Mike Strang, Anna Povost, Becky Henne, Dale Carlson, Kerri Kumasaka, Mike Mergenthaler, Fay Najjar, Casey Ferguson, Shirley Beck, Dale Siegford, Pamela Kimmey, Paul Marsh, Julie Shelton, employee – Sarah Bannon Others: Connie Strang, George Everett, Jim McKeon, Lynette Kemp, Tom Lowe, Amy Scoy, Shawn Peterson, Suzanne Elfstrom, Steve Falen, Dan Thayer

President Mike Strang called the meeting to order. Dan Thayer from the Montana Heritage Commission talked about the latest news going on in the Living History Project. A great big regional conference will be going on in 2013 and museum people are encouraged to come. People are coming from Williamsburg, Virginia and more and workshops will be held.

The minutes were sent out with the agenda and Mike Mergenthaler moved that the minutes be approved as submitted. Dale seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Sarah had handouts for the financial report. The membership account has \$34,825. Much of this money will be used for Trip Advisor, help to print the travel guide, photography, and for the membership email newsletter. The state account has \$60603 in checking and \$81,294 in the money market as of September 30th. Sarah reported that state account as of this date really only has \$15,000 in it but won't be reflected until the next bank statement. George moved that the report be approved as presented and Ellen seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

For the executive director report, Sarah has been to the Tourism Advisory Council Meeting and the Montana Lodging and Hospitality Association annual conference. She has been working on getting the information for the travel guide lined up. The annual audit is coming up in November. We have a region/convention and visitors bureau (CVB) meeting in November.

Mike Strang reported that the executive board discussed board members and that a notice will go out for the counties to get their next board member for 2013. Officers will be elected and anyone interested in being an officer please let Sarah know. A nominating committee will be appointed. Mike said that we have the approval to put Gold West travel guides in the Lima rest area. We need to put racks in to hold the guides. Sarah will order three of them from information Mike had supplied at less than \$12 each.

Mike went to the Beaverhead Planning Board and talked about geotourism, the charter and Gold West Country. The information was well received and they will discuss more in November about signing the charter. The newspaper also reported on the information Mike had presented.

Mars Stout sent their inquiry report for the last two months with comparisons from the last two years. Our inquiries are up over last year but not quite up to the 2009 level for the same two months. The top interest is history and ghost towns for this time of year for the last three years. Most of the inquiries for the last two months came from Ohio, New York, Montana, and California. We had 444 inquiries in September and so far in October and 874 guides were mailed out in the two month period. Shawn from Tempest is moving the travel guide order icon back up to the top of the website.

George Everett reported that they are moving ahead with the 2012 Montana Folk Festival. They are hoping for 150,000 people next year. They had great feedback last year and still plan on having entertainers from all over the nation. Gold West Country is going to look into a sponsorship for this after the audit next month.

Mike Mergenthaler explained what the Montana Lodging and Hospitality Association is and how it is connecting with the regions and convention and visitors bureaus (CVB). They have representatives from the regions and the CVBs and Mike Strang would like to have Gold West Country be a part of the board.

Mike Strang is the chair of the Tourism Working Group for the Montana Economic Development Association. They met earlier this month at the MEDA Conference and now have a committee established. They are helping to bring greater awareness of the benefits of tourism to Montana's economy.

We talked about the Tourism Advisory Council Meeting held at the beginning of October. It was held in Ennis and they did a great job of hosting the meeting. Now the TAC wants to go into a small community one time a year to give help and assistance for them to host the TAC meeting. The next meeting is in Billings in February and then in June it will be back in Gold West Country in Dillon.

Jim McKeon, Miscellaneous Tax Program Manager, from the Montana Department of Revenue talked about the accommodations tax. He encouraged facilities to file online as it helps to get information faster and it saves time for both sides. He said it is important that communities keep the department updated on facilities and annexed properties. Vacation rentals are often overlooked but are required to turn in bed tax. They have no authority over the Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID). Jim also said that he can't give out a list of delinquent facilities because of proprietary reasons. He did say however, when a warrant is issued, that information is public. You can see warrants on the website.

Casey Ferguson reported on the marketing committee. He said they went through the travel guide and made some updates and changes. He said for next year we should have a list of general rules and how many words for each entry set up. Casey also talked about the front page of the travel guide. They decided that although the beautiful scenic shots were attractive, they felt we should have more of a picture that depicts something within Gold West Country. Maybe get a picture of a ghost town or something unique to the region. Shirley said that of all the years we have been doing the guide, the cover that moved the most travel guides was the one of an older couple sitting on a bench outside a building in Virginia City. Shirley explained the importance of the top four inches of the travel guide and how that is all that most people will see in the brochure racks.

Steve from Partners Creative had a slide show of several pictures from a photographer for the membership to choose from. He will incorporate the pictures in the guide. We hope to continue to add pictures to a library every year. It is expensive but needed to have photos at our fingertips for the guide, the newsletters, the website, and for advertising.

Suzanne reviewed the click through rates of our Trip Advisor and we are ahead of the industry standard. We need event pictures of all kinds and right now, particularly December through February. Suzanne also had a couple of handouts on the earned media values of our public relations projects. Gold West Country has had stories and notices to a total audience of 530,229,819 people. This is \$30,011,346.60 in publicity value! The direct earned values from Partners creative as of October 24, included \$5,695 in print and \$12,137 in internet. This is a total of \$17,832 and has had a circulation of 1,002,097.

Julie Shelton reported that the website committee has been in communication and they will be getting together in November to discuss and to set up priorities. Anyone wanting to be on the committee is welcome. Shawn Peterson from Tempest Technologies said that they are now hosting the Gold Website and that this helps with some of the restrictions they have had in the past. The MTOT department has been very helpful in this transition. Shawn also reiterated that we need event photos. He talked about how they will contact some people with events in the last 30 – 90 days to see if they will send in photos so they will be available for the next year. The events with the photos get the most hits. Shawn also talked about setting up an Event 101 information sheet that would help us with how to get out the information in a news release and how to send in photos.

Sarah said that cooperative marketing projects are due in December and will be voted upon in January. Anyone interested please call the office at 846-1943.

The location for our next meeting on January 26th is still to be determined. Philipsburg offered to do the March meeting and Ennis would like the next September or October meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 1:45.