

**Gold West Country**  
**General Board Meeting – Philipsburg**  
**March 22, 2112 Minutes**

Board Members: Mike Mergenthaler, Paul Marsh, Pamela Kimmey, Ellen Baumler, Russ McAfee, Kerri Kumasaka, Richard Krott, Laura Obert, Julia Brewer, Dale Siegford, Shirley Beck, Denison Von Maur, Fay Najjar, Dan Thyer, Dale Carlson, Lynette Kemp, Desiree Shogren, Anna Provost, Mike Strang, Employee Sarah Bannon

Participants: Jason Wood, Cathy Burwell, Brandi Jensen, Rebecca Schmitz, Ashley Hanna, Sheila, Sue Mays, Sandy Shull, David Williams, Diana Young, Mike Young, David Kruse, Heidi Hinkle, Suzanne Elfstrom  
Speaker: Victor Bjornberg, Montana Office of Tourism

President Mike Strang welcomed everyone and had the first time attendees standup and introduce themselves. Then, we went around the room and each person did a self-introduction.

Anna Provost moved that the minutes be approved as submitted. Mike Mergenthaler seconded the move and it passed unanimously.

Under public comment Paul Marsh reported that there are five contenders left for the Cowboy Hall of Fame. Twin Bridges is one of the five and the decision will be made April 21<sup>st</sup> or 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Sarah had handouts for the financial report. We have \$1,317.30 in the state checking account and \$116,911.57 in the money market. The membership fund has \$61,790.53. Mike Mergenthaler moved that the financial report be approved as presented. Fay seconded the move and it passed unanimously.

For the executive director's report, Sarah has been working on the marketing plan and budget with Suzanne from Partner's Creative. She has also been working with Pam on the Branding workshop that will be in the mornings at Fairmont on April 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>. We have a region/convention and visitor's bureau meeting next week. We had a winter press trip that went really well. We have already had two articles out and the Altoona Ridge Lodge was featured in both articles. Denison Von Maur elaborated a bit on the trip for us as his place is quite unique.

Mike Strang reported on the last two executive board meetings. MARS Stout will give us a detailed report once a quarter and a summary during the other meetings. Sarah will get a draft of the minutes out within two weeks of the meeting. We have a committee protocol that Sarah will have for the committee meetings. For the meeting this morning, Mike talked about ordering more racks for the Lima rest area. He talked about the survey monkey that we have access to. Suzanne has an account with survey monkey that offers extra features we can use at a discount. She will get back to us on quotes for using it. We talked about the last Tourism Advisory Council meeting. Sarah said that Custer Country has changed its name to Southeast Montana and Russell Country has changed their name to Central Montana. A little discussion ensued on this and we decided to talk about it later under new business. Mike Strang talked about ITRR doing research for the small communities. He also talked about Chas Van Gendren doing a white paper regarding the restructure of the state parks. The Montana Heritage Commission is opposed to this. He talked about the new strategic plan that the TAC will be working on. It will be based on product, marketing, and respect. The next TAC meeting will be in Dillon on June 4-69.

For Bannack Days 150<sup>th</sup> year celebration, we talked about how Chas wants Gold West Country to get involved. We will get the information up on the website and in social media. Dale Carlson provided some background on the area and that in 1862 gold was discovered there and within a year there were over 3,000 people living there. He handed out a schedule and said they are looking for food vendors. The group youth shelter will have its dedication on April 28<sup>th</sup> and the Lieutenant Governor will be there. On August 11, they will have an old time dance and in September they will have a living history weekend.

Paul reported that the executive board had approved a \$1,000 for the TAC dinner in Dillon in June. The Beaverhead Chamber had asked for \$1500 and the Chamber will be come up with the remainder.

Mike Strang gave a recap of the conference for the Montana Economic Development Association. All the governor candidates were there and the recurring theme was return on investment.

Victor Bjornberg, Tourism Development Coordinator for the Montana Office of Tourism was the speaker for the meeting. He talked about the Governor's Conference on Tourism and Recreation on April 11-13<sup>th</sup>. Everyone is welcome and can get information online. It is a great networking conference and will have some great speakers that will address tourism issues. It will include three different levels of breakout sessions on social media.

He talked about the Tourism Infrastructure Investment Program (TIIP.) It is for nonprofit organizations and the minimum grant is for \$20,000. About \$500,000 will be awarded. The deadline for turning in the grant is August 1<sup>st</sup>. More information will be given out at the Governor's Conference.

Victor talked a little about the branding workshop which is themed "Coming Together to Expand Montana's Story." He talked about the brand pillars that will be covered in the workshop.

The last statewide strategic plan was for 2008-2012. They are working on the framework for the next strategic plan and will report on the outreach and the plan at the June TAC meeting.

He talked about the two geotourism maps: the Crown of the Continent and the greater Yellowstone Geotourism Map. They are stressing sustainable tourism and if you are interested can get listed on the website.

Suzanne Elfstrom from Partners Creative talked about Trip Advisor and our co-op ad and the advertorial in "Better Homes and Gardens." She also discussed the Electronic Newsletter and how they have an open rate of 30%. The most read part is the "meet your board member" section. She talked about the return on Investment for our public relations effort for the first six months. We have had 11.2 million impressions with a value over \$10 million. Gold West Country spent extra for public relations in 2011 in which we generated \$102,000 worth of exposure and had 5.8 million impressions.

We went through a draft of the budget since we didn't have a final budget number to work with from the state at the time of the meeting. We discussed all the different categories which most are roughly in line with last year. Consumer advertising went up almost \$6000 and internet went up \$4000 and public relations went up \$6000 in anticipation of creating an online press room. Mike Strang asked about giving the Dillon Visitor Center money for the summer since they are no longer a state visitor center. We discussed this and would look at getting more information. We will get our final budget number from the state at the end of the month and will need to revamp the plan accordingly. Becky Henne moved that the executive board be given the power to approve the final plan and budget in April when it is completed. There was a second and it passed unanimously.

Cathy Burwell talked about the Montana Lodging and Hospitality Association and how it has expanded to include non-hoteliers. She was elected president of the division and everyone is welcome to join. By joining you will help the council maintain a strong tourism voice at the State Capitol. The cost is \$150 and includes several extra months this year for first time members. Each member gets a monthly Smith Report on tourism progress in Montana and the surrounding region. You will also receive frequent updates of what's happening in the legislature and direction on how and who to contact for legislation impacting tourism.

We talked about the name change again. After much discussion it was decided to revisit the topic in April and Sarah is to talk to Pam Gosink and Mercury about the topic.

Victor Bjornberg talked about a potential webinar the state might be participating in if enough partners are interested. It will be discussed at the region/CVB meeting next week.

The April meeting is in conjunction with the "Coming Together to Expand on the Montana Story" workshop. More details will be sent out when we get the information.

Dan Thyer from the Heritage Commission talked about how there is potential legislation by the EOQ for state parks to take over Virginia City/Nevada City. They are not in support of this change. He also said that the little train will be running this summer. The big train will need \$50,000 to get a final ultra sound because of the dismantling that needs to be done to get the job done. They will be holding the Western North America Conference for the Association for Living History, Farms and Agricultural Museums (ALHFAM) on September 19-22, 2013.

Mike Strang thanked Dale and Shirley for their hospitality and the meeting was adjourned at 2:37 p.m.