

Gold West Country
General Board Meeting – Butte Comfort Inn
June 20, 2012

Participants: Lynette Kemp, Dale Carlson, Kelly Smith, Brandi Jensen, Melissa Bolton, Dorea Wilmoth, Desiree Shogren, George Everett, David Williams, Fay Najjar, Julie Shelton, Amber Wood-Jensen, Mike Mergenthaler, Ellen Baumler, Dale Siegford, Pamela Kimmey, Paul Marsh, Suzanne Elfstrom, Jason Wood, Connie Kenney, Rebecca Ramsey, Mike Strang, and employee Sarah Bannon

At 11:01 President Mike Strang called the meeting to order. We went around the room and everyone did a self-introduction.

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

Since we had no public comment we moved right into the financial report. Sarah had handouts for the report. As of 5/31/12 we have \$3200.67 in the state checkbook and \$29,945.73 in the money market. We have \$60,224.88 in the membership checkbook. Amber moved that we approve the financial report as submitted. Fay seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Director's report – Sarah said that our marketing plan was approved by the Tourism Advisory Council. One member of the TAC would like us to do more online advertising and another member is not in favor of travel guides. The Rocky Mountain International Roundup (RMI) went well. Shawn Peterson from Tempest Technologies and printed up some itineraries that Sarah quickly made up to give to the international tour operators. They were a huge hit. Gold West Country had the Branding Workshop and the Visitor Center Workshop. Sarah helped interview for a convention and visitor's bureau employee for Butte. No formal announcements have been made at this time. Sarah had applied for nonprofit status with the post office for bulk mailing. We just got the refusal because we didn't qualify under education and because we are a 502 C6 and not a C3. We had a marketing committee conference call and emails regarding the travel guide that will be discussed later in the meeting. We are working with Shawn and Mike from Tempest Technologies on getting set up for video taping. A small reprint of the birding brochure is underway and should carry us through to next year.

Executive Board – Mike Strang formed a committee to do the executive director job performance. The committee is made up of Amber Wood-Jensen, Fay Najjar, and Julie Shelton. Other items discussed were the "Coming Together to Expand the Montana Story" workshop, the visitor services workshop and "The Path Less Traveled" workshop put on by the Montana Preservation Alliance (MPA). Mike Strang has talked to Webb Brown about improving relations with the chambers in Gold West Country. Mike Strang said the Montana Preservation Alliance has given up on the "Sage and Stone" and said that the executive board does not want Gold West to carry it on because of money, time and the effort needed to maintain it. Paul said if anyone wants to request a book they should get it from the MPA.

Mike is talking with Mary Paoli, Executive Director of Voices of Tourism. They are going to work on getting a forum in Gold West Country to help educate the legislators before the election in the fall.

We talked about the "American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes of America," AIANTA Conference coming to Billings in September. Sarah is to check on how many are expected to attend. Gold West Country can join up with Sweet Palace and have a piece of candy or something at the tables at lunch time.

Inquiry report – Rebecca Schmitz submitted a report for the meeting. She included comparisons from the last four years. Our inquiries are up from 2011 and 2010 but still a little down from 2009. The 2012 number is only up to June 15th so we still have two more weeks of inquiries coming in from the call center. The interests are in history and ghost towns, rock hounding, wildlife watching, and Lewis & Clark. The states with the most inquiries are California, Texas, Florida, and Illinois.

Potential Name Change –Mike opened the discussion on the Gold West Country possible name change. To get discussion started Amber moved and Paul seconded that we change the name to Southwestern Montana. Much discussion ensued regarding the name. Suzanne helped check on the domain names. Southwest Montana .com and swmt.com were taken but not used. The Montana Office of Tourism has the rights to Southwestmt.com which we should be able to get from

them. After some more discussion Amber changed her motion to change the Gold West Country name to Southwest Montana. Paul seconded the motion again. Some more discussion ensued. Mike called for a vote and it passed with two people dissenting.

Tourism Advisory Council Meeting – We talked about some of the highlights at the meeting. The Get Lost Program is underway and Butte is one of four places that has a television ad. Be on the look for big Get Lost signs in out of the way places. Dillon did a great job in hosting the meeting. Mike brought up the return on investment and how do we document how we grow. More discussion took place on this.

Bannack Days – Dale Carlson said that they are expecting many tourists for the 150th Bannack Days celebration on July 21st and 22nd. They have many activities planned for people of all ages. Dale brought posters for us all to take back and post.

Folk Festival – George Everett reported that things are coming along for the Montana Folk Festival. The marketing efforts are in full swing. They are hoping to bring the percent of out-of-staters up to 235 – 50% over 24% last year. All performances are book. They work well with 700 volunteers and if anyone is interested please let them know. George expressed how appreciative they are of Gold West Country's support.

Marketing, Travel Guide – Suzanne Elfstrom from Partners Creative went through the changes and updates to the travel guide. Dale moved to approve the photo shoot list. Fay seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. The marketing committee wanted to add a mountain biking and hiking section, birding, and more Native American. An all-inclusive map of the activities would be added and this would all bring about four more pages in the travel guide. Kelly Moved and Desiree seconded the motion to let the executive board make the decision after more information is obtained. It passed unanimously. Amber moved and Dale seconded the motion to eliminate the first page copy, eliminate Sage and Stone, shape up loop tours, and move some content around. Dale seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

The Gold West Country Prospector membership newsletter readership is improving. Meet the Gold West Member is the most popular page in the newsletter. We also talked about Trip Advisor and adding Butte to the mix. We will look into charging the communities to help pay for the exposure. Currently, Gold West Country covers the cost but they will rise significantly for next year.

Website Committee - Julie Shelton reported on the website progress. Gold West Country needs a new domain name and with the potential name change we will wait and see how that turns out. This change would initially create a decrease in traffic but from a long term view it would be a positive one for traffic and ranking. Many backend upgrades have been made to use the new Office of Tourism feeds. New code has been built to allow easier link creations to particular business types and to serve in conjunction with specific communities or areas. Updates have been made to the landing pages and improvements on the search engine optimization. The community pages are being updated to give users ability to navigate directly to relevant listing categories directly from these pages. The Montana Folk Festival video has been put together and will be uploaded to the website. They are also in the process of obtaining a variety of footage this summer. They are looking at Bannack State Park, wildlife footage, rodeo footage and fishing opportunities. They are also hoping to get farmers market type footage. They have people gathering routes and map codes for the biking section. The mobile website is getting some upgrades that include a flexible search function and development of a businesses near me enhancement. They are looking from a search engine purpose to find ways to differentiate Gold West Country's listing date from the Office of Tourism website. Overtime this will help with the rankings.

Cooperative Marketing -we had a cooperative marketing application from the Clark Fork River Celebration. They were asking for \$1950 for the event on September 28 and 29th. Dale Siegford moved and Julie seconded the motion to approve the cooperative funding for the event. It passed unanimously.

Under new business Rebecca Ramsey from the Virginia City Chamber introduced herself and gave updates and information about Virginia City/ Nevada City. Next year is their 150th celebration.

Before adjourning, Mike Strang expressed appreciation for everyone's efforts in making the name change. Next general board /membership meeting is scheduled for September 27th in Ennis.