

Southwest Montana (Gold West Country)
General Board Meeting - Ennis
September 27, 2012

Participants: Board Members: Fay Najjar, Pat Hanson, Julie Shelton, Ellen Baumler, Pamela Kimmey, Becky Henne, Amber Wood-Jensen, Maria Pochervina, Kerri Kumasaka, Paul Marsh, Dale Siegford, Desiree Shogren, Mike Mergenthaler, Mike Strang, Rebecca Ramsey, employee: Sarah Bannon, Suzanne Elfstrom from Partners Creative, and Shawn Peterson from Tempest Technologies
Members and guests: Patrick Doyle, Leona Rodreich, Trina Peterson, Kris Hauck, Debra McNeill, Kim Miller

President Mike Strang called the meeting to order and Pamela Kimmey from the Ennis Chamber gave us a warm welcome. Stephanie Hagle welcomed us to the Public Library.

Mike Strang asked the new guests to introduce themselves. They were Kim Miller from the Virginia City 150th year celebration, Pat Doyle from the Helena TBID, and Leona Roderick from the Beaverhead – Deer Lodge National Forest.

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

Sarah had handout for the financial report. As of August 31, 2012 we have \$6,872 in the state checking account and \$119074.52 in the money market account. We also have \$26,962.81 in the membership account. Amber moved that the financial report be accepted as submitted. Fay seconded the report and it passed unanimously.

Sarah gave the executive director report. We have been working on the copy and listings for the travel guide. The American Indian and Alaska Native Tourism Alliance (AIANTA) Conference was held in Billings. The Sweet Palace provided taffy for the registration table. Tourism Matters has received some funds from Glacier Country and Missouri River so far. We will get more information and discuss this at our next meeting. The Explore channel has approached us for potential filming of the area. We discussed this and Suzanne is going to show a clip later in the meeting. We have had a few fam tours including a gentleman from New Zealand who was reporting on a variety of places. Cooperative marketing applications will be due the first part of January. Anyone interested please contact Sarah. There will be the Montana Office of Tourism (MTOT) strategic planning meeting in Butte on October 8th at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. Everyone is encouraged to go and give input.

Mike Strang gave the executive board report. He reported that Dale was on a nominating committee and asked for two more volunteers. Becky Henne and Mike Mergenthaler both offered to serve on the committee. The executive director review committee had done a performance review and recommended to the board that Sarah get a 4% raise and a \$1500 bonus depending on the audit. Julie moved and Ellen seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.
Open Wind Consulting.

Shawn Peterson from Tempest Technologies gave us an update on the website. We have just recently been able to secure the Southwestmt.com website thanks to Thurston Elfstrom's work with the Department of Commerce. He was a huge advocate for us. We will also be getting a new email account. He showed us the work they have been doing on gather information for bike trails and maps for the website. They are looking for people to help get additional information and are offering \$50 for bikers to ride more trails, Bikers will ride with an attached electronic device that helps to obtain the information needed for the website. Please contact Shawn or Perry if you are interested. They are doing more work on our mobile apps as well. They are tracking the site with Google Analytics. The mobile site has easy search functions such as attractions and accommodations. They are going to double check the longitudes as google has some information crossing over into other areas. Business owners should check in with their county to make sure they are in the right location. Shawn showed a draft of video done at the Grant Khors Ranch, a fishing video and rodeo action. Julie will set up a website meeting to help prioritize our next activities.

Rebecca Schmitz from MARS Stout had sent an inquiry report for the call center. Our inquiries are up over the past two years. Our major source for inquiries comes from "Better Homes & Gardens", the Gold West Country website, "Reader's Digest" and "AAA Living." Interests were in history and ghost towns, wildlife watching, Lewis & Clark and Hot Springs. The states with the most inquiries were Illinois, Michigan, California, and Wisconsin.

Mike thanked Pamela for the wonderful job of hosting the meeting.

Suzanne showed a sample of the Explore TV program based in Spokane. Three communities did it in Glacier Country. The people come from Spokane and do all the filming and the attraction gets all the raw footage. Much discussion took place and we will obtain more information.

Suzanne Elfstrom from Partners Creative reported on Trip Advisor. Trip Advisor had changed the layout and all is working surprisingly well. Our click through rates are at 8.1 which is way above industry standards. The banner ads are working well and our page views are up 15%. The links are up 126%, events are up the most at 330%. We have sold several signature programs, there are a few spaces left and in our newsletter which goes out to people who have asked for our information is one of our most affordable programs. Please see Suzanne for more information if you are interested.

Suzanne showed three front cover options of Virginia City. Much discussion took place and we chose a cover with a few minor changes that Partners Creative will do. We discussed how we ran out of travel guides and should consider buying more. Suzanne is going to check into the costs for this. We also talked about the event schedule and possibly eliminating to create more room for other content. The marketing committee can discuss this and report back.

Pat Hansen talked about the Gold West Country name and how it was indicative of our mining and our western heritage. She asked that we keep that in mind when we are doing our marketing.

Rebecca Ramsey also talked about Gold West Country and Virginia City. They are planning for a 150th year celebration. Our cooperative marketing program is an option to help with the advertising.

Our next meeting is on October 25th at the Lewis and Clark Caverns.