

Southwest Montana
General Board Meeting – Lewis and Clark Caverns
Minutes: October 25, 2012

Attendees: Board members: Julie Shelton, Mike Mergenthaler, Pamela Kimmey, Anna Provost, Lynette Kemp, Dale Carlson, Ellen Baumler, Kerri Kumasaka, Dale Siegford, Paul Marsh, Jason Wood, Rebecca Ramsey, Mike Strang and employee Sarah Bannon

Members and Guests: Stephanie Monk, Rebecca Schmitz, Gary Provost, Brandi Jensen, Pat Doyle, Leona Rodreick,

Agencies: Partners Creative - Suzanne Elfstrom, Tempest Technologies: Shawn Peterson

Welcome: President Mike Strang opened the meeting and had our host Lynette Kemp give us a welcome. She explained that the cabins and camping are open year round. They have 10 miles of hiking in the area. They will have candlelight tours for six days in the caverns and are pre-selling tickets for the event.

Mike Strang had a new guest, Stephanie Monk introduce herself. She is from the Comfort Suites in Helena. Then, we went around the room and did a self-introduction.

Approval of Minutes: Mike Mergenthaler moved to approve the minutes. A second was made and it passed unanimously.

Public Comment: None

Financial Reports: Sarah had handouts for the financial report. We have \$8,643.30 in the checkbook and \$109,089.42 in the money market. We have \$27,691.56 in the membership account. Dale Siegford moved that the financial report be approved as submitted. Julie seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Executive Director Report: Sarah reported that we had a letter of request for funds for the Montana Folk Festival. After some brief discussion it was decided to put this on the agenda for our next meeting.

Executive Board Report: Mike Strang had Sarah give an update on the membership status. We have 54 members that have paid. We have \$6035 so far from membership and listings. This does not include the full page advertising in the travel guide. Dale Carlson said that we can invoice the state agencies now for membership.

Mike talked about Cycle Greater Yellowstone in August 8 – 24, 2013. Pat Doyle from Helena is going to check into the ride. Pamela said that they are expecting 1500 tents in Ennis for the event. They will be setting up a welcome station. More discussion ensued on this. We will keep it on the radar and talk about it at our next meeting.

Tourism Advisory Council (TAC) – Suzanne explained that the Montana Office of Tourism (MTOT) has reorganized internally and will have more outreach. Pam Gosink and Victor Bjornberg are heading it up. Sarah reported that for the Tourism Infrastructure grants Whitehall received \$60,000 for the grandstand at the rodeo grounds. The Helena Myrna Loy Center received \$65,000 for their capital equipment campaign. Mike Strang announced that Amber Wood-Jensen is now vice-chairman of the TAC.

Inquiry Report: Rebecca Schmitz from MARS Stout had a report on the call center activities for the last four years. Our inquiries are up significantly. We had an extra bonus ad in the History Channel Magazine that gave us almost 500 more inquiries. History and ghost towns are the biggest interest followed closely by family activities, rock hounding, and wildlife watching. Most inquiries came from California, Texas, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

Voices of Tourism: Mike said that they are doing fine financially for now. Sarah had typed up a little fact sheet for people to share with their legislators. It was passed around for comments and changes.

Tourism Matters: Sarah said that this is our lobbying group and we work with the other regions, cvb's, and other tourism entities to keep us up to date on issues and be an advocate for us. They will need money for this year. We gave \$1500 two years ago. Mike Mergenthaler moved that we give \$1500 out of membership for Tourism Matters and our lobbyist. Dale Carlson seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Visitor Information Centers: Sarah reported that the MTOT information for this funding comes out in January. It will be on a first come first serve basis. Attending a training put on by MTOT will be mandatory in May in order to secure the funds.

Mike Strang said that Dillon will not have a VIC. MTOT has a trial kiosk in Conrad. He requested and received approval at the executive board meeting that we write a letter to MTOT and ask for Lima to be the next place they put up a kiosk. Dale Siegford moved that we write a letter to MTOT with the request. Anna Provost seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Marketing and Travel Guide: Suzanne Elfstrom from Partners Creative talked about the travel guide. She had a handout that gave the updates on the travel guide and what still needed to be addressed as far as sections. She went through the costs for printing extra guides which basically came to \$324 for every extra 1000 guides we print. After much discussion, Mike Mergenthaler moved that we commit to printing up to 15,000 extra guides depending on the income from ad sales. We can put up to \$15,000 from membership funds if needed. A second was made and the motion passed unanimously.

Suzanne talked about Trip Advisor and gave us a handout on page views and click through rates. Trip Advisor is going gang busters for us and they are raising the price which was expected. Butte also, now wants to be a part of the sponsorship. The Trip Advisor costs will increase by \$6000 which is a \$3000 increase in sponsorship and a \$3000 increase in placement. Rebecca moved that we add Butte and that the executive board have the power to make the decision where the money comes from. Anna seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Website: Shawn Peterson from Tempest Technologies talked about the website. The southwestmt.com domain has just been switched over to us. They will do an experimental change to make sure the changeover will run without any interruption and then switch it over to the new domain. They will have the names passed over to our server. They will also change the email accounts for us. It will be about a two week transition with the testing required on the backend. They will work to get the new Southwest Montana name up and have it support our advertising and marketing that Partners is doing.

They are also working with the state on the latitude and longitude points on the maps. There are some issues with the state data base and anything that we see that needs to get changed they will let Jan know. The data feeds are working well. Thurston is talking about plans to work on the listing addresses. Jan has to hand correct them and does a great job for the state.

We talked about growing membership with the website. We can sort the member listings to go to the top of the page.

Strategic Plan Update: Helena will have a strategic plan information gathering on November 7th at the Helena Chamber. Dillon will have one on November 9th. We discussed this a bit and Sarah is to send the online survey out to the membership.

Other Business: We talked about the Montana Lodging and Hospitality Association (MLHA) and their conference. A keynote speaker talked about computers and google analytics. Other guests were John Tester, a spokesperson for Denny Rehberg, Rick Hill and Steve Bullock.

Sarah reported for Leona Rodreick that the forest service will sell \$5 permits for people to get their Christmas trees starting next month. They also will have new and updated forest service maps available for \$10. Paul said that the map person is really thorough and that it will be nice to have the updates. Leona had also said they would be willing to have a meeting there.

Rebecca Ramsey said at the Tourism Conference it was stated that what draws people are people, lifestyles, and natural resources. She talked about the economic benefits of a healthy watershed. She said that Mark Haggerty out of Bozeman will talk for free on the subject. It is the number one growing industry and we are growing at the twice the rate of the national growth.

Julie Shelton said that at the MLHA conference they said that tourism was up 12%. Next year the conference will be in Helena at Jason and Carol's place.

Mike Strang thanked Lynette for hosting our meeting. He also thanked Dale Siegford for bringing the box of chocolates for everyone.

Meeting adjourned at 12:55 p.m.