

**Southwest Montana**  
**General Board Meeting – Boulder Hot Springs**  
**September 26, 2013 Minutes**

Participants: Dan Thyer, Debbie Carlson, Shawn Peterson, Heidi O'Brien, Pat Doyle, Lynette Kemp, Paul Marsh, Anna Provost, David Williams, Kerry Kumasaka, Pat Hansen, Fay Najjar, Sarah Bannon, Christine Brown

President Julie Shelton called the meeting to order. We went around the room and each of us did a self-introduction.

Paul Marsh moved that the minutes be approved as submitted in electronic form. Anna Provost seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Under public comment Dan Thyer reported on the Tri-Regional Conference for International Living History. The conference went really well and they did get an unprecedented proclamation for having their own Living History Day. The traffic to the Gulch in Nevada City for the year has been 381,000 for a great summer. Their next event is All Hallows Eve on October 26 and 27<sup>th</sup>. An international company has filmed there and hopefully they will see people visit after it airs over in Europe.

Sarah had a handout with all the financial transactions for the first two months of this fiscal year. We have \$96, 146.02 in out checkbook. We had just received a state check at the end of August which has now been transferred to our money market. Our money market as of August 31 was \$51,288.14. Our membership account has \$23,574.53 in it. Some potential projects include: possible statewide birding brochure, photography, helpful professional workshops, a retreat, more design updates on the travel guide, website redesign, international marketing, Lewis and Clark Tours, Crown of Continent Reprint and Greater Yellowstone Reprint.

Sarah reported that the discussion for a statewide regional birding brochure has been tabled for the next regional /convention and visitor bureau meeting. The strategic plan has been finalized and booklets are available for the people who want them. The electronic grant is up on the state's intranet website. The deadline is in December. Curtis Spindler reported that we are almost out of travel guides and will be out by the end of the year. The state has been approached by Jeff Smith regarding a Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail which already is in place in Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota. It would include all the regions and Montana State Parks. They have a brochures, website and want to work on tours within Montana. It would be about \$2000 a region. Victor Bjornberg from the Montana Office of Tourism will help be head of this. We talked about the Calgary Travel Show. Maria Pochervina from the Butte Visitor Center goes and suggested we look into it. After much discussion we decided not to move forward on this.

Julie Shelton reported that the membership will be different this year. It is time to renew and we are trying a simpler process. We will send out letters with a form that fits the business or person and a brochure that helps outline the successful projects that we have done. Julie asked each of us to recruit three new members.

Rebecca Schmitz from MARS STOUT had sent a printout of the activity at the call center. For the last three months we have had 1,388 inquiries and 3,191 guides mailed out. Our sources are *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Audubon*, *Southwest Montana Website*, and *Reader's Digest*. The main interests are history and ghost towns, wildlife watching, hot springs, and rock hounding. The states with the most inquiries are California, Illinois, Florida and Montana.

Suzanne Elfstrom from Partners Creative discussed several different membership and marketing projects with us. The new logo and brand graphics are done. People will be able to get the information as a download. We discussed the new membership set up in depth. We have three tiers and members will belong to one on the tiers which has a corresponding fee. Members can only be in the level that is appropriate for their business or affiliation. Benefits are increased for each of the levels and members will be billed for the level that applies to them. A letter, form and brochure will be sent out in later

October. Fay asked about a potential press release that can be put in the paper. Suzanne said she would do a template and for the main contacts in the communities to send to their perspective newspapers.

The travel guide committee had met prior to the meeting and we have discussed many options for redesigning the guide. It was decided that we want a more experiential guide. We will move the scenic tours and the special interest sections more toward the front. We will get rid of the regions and put the city information toward the back. We will have more maps and smaller print.

Tourism has been up and the travel guides have been moving. Lynette said they are up 10%. The campground has been busier. Anna Provost said that a mining show was filmed in Helena, probably 27 episodes. Sara h will contact Denny at the film office to see if we can get more information. David Williams mentioned that a film crew was also at the Montana Prison Museums over the summer.

Suzanne went through our marketing campaign from the past year. All went well; we were above industry standards on everything. Trip Advisor was way up with page views being up 203% and the click through rate up by 230%. Suzanne then gave us her proposed media plan for 2014 spring and summer. The Montana Co-ops she suggests are with Adara, Madden, iExplore, and History. The other online suggestions are Tube Mogul and Trip Advisor. She suggests pulling off Readers Digest and she explained how reader service is antiquated and not a reliable source of the success of an ad. The magazines that Suzanne has listed are *AAA Living*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, and *Cornell Labs Living Birds*. This would bring the budget to online marketing at \$55,065, print at \$15,376, and Montana Co-ops at \$36,903. We have about \$8000 left with which she is researching a few other options such as Discover America which is targeted to international travelers. Anna moved that we approve the media plan as discussed. Paul seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Shawn Peterson, from Tempest Technologies talked about the website updates and videos. He first discussed the concern about a decrease in traffic to the website due to a switch to a new domain and to the way Google now looks at how a site is obtains its information. Our mobile site is up and keeps our traffic even with last year's. The focus now is on creating unique information particularly in the community pages. Shawn encourages everyone to check out his or her own community sites and to send in information and corrections to Sarah or him. They are updating structures and giving the website a facelift. With the new domain we will need to do more link building. We need places to send a link back to us. Direct links to our new site are better than to our old site which still carries over. Google now looks at more relevant links. A text link is now much better. We talked about a potential electronic grant with a partnership with Central Montana. Shawn also introduced Debbie Carlson who works with our social media. For information to Sarah email to [info@southwestmt.com](mailto:info@southwestmt.com) and for information to Shawn email [moreinfo@southwestmt.com](mailto:moreinfo@southwestmt.com).

We discussed the cooperative marketing application from the Montana Preservation Alliance for marketing of the website and the mobile app for the Sage and Stone. The application was for window clings and postcards to get out awareness of the sites. We have a question on what was going to be done with the postcards. It was decided to table the project until we got more information.

We had no more business and Julie announced that the next meeting will be in Anaconda on October 24<sup>th</sup>. Julie adjourned the meeting at 1:31 p.m.

Christine Brown from the National Preservation arrived at 1:32 p.m. and so we reopened the meeting. Christine explained that the postcards would be at the VIC's and sent out to their contacts and businesses on the website. Christine handed out some information that we all reviewed. Sarah expressed a concern for the new name "Historic Montana Southwest" thinking it could easily get confused with our new name of Southwest Montana. Pat Hansen would like to see more in depth information on the pages in the website and mobile apps. Christine said she would work with this and get information to us at our next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned.