

**Southwest Montana**  
**General Board Meeting – Fairmont Hot Springs**  
**March 13, 2014 Minutes**

Board members: Ellen Baumler, Carol Eichler, Dale Siegford, Anna Provost, Judy Westfall, Richard Krott, Dale Carlson, Lynette Kemp, Mike Strang, Becky Henne, Fay Najjar, Dave Williams, Paul Mash, Pamela Kimmey; Members and guests: Suzanne Elfstrom, Rebecca Schmitz, Debbie Carstrom, Gary Provost, Pat Doyle, Rhea Armstrong, Brandi-Jensen Campbell

President Julie Shelton welcomed everyone and we went around the room and did a self-introduction. We passed around the wonderful taffy that Dale brought from the Sweet Palace.

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

Since there was no public opinion we moved into the financial report. Handouts were available for the two different accounts. As of February 28, 2014, we had \$136,622 in our state account and \$107,897 in our money market. The state deposit came in at the end of the month and is not transferred to the money market account. The membership account has \$15,508 in it. All expenses are on the reports.

For executive director updates, Sarah reported that we will have a new computer system to do our marketing plan and budget on for the next fiscal year. It was determined at the Tourism Advisory Council that all project sales must be applied to the project. We will be discussing the tear off sheets later. The Montana Office of Tourism is having a “Coming together to Expand Montana’s Tourism Story” in Deer Lodge on April 24, and everyone is welcome to attend. Sarah will be going to Ennis to talk about Southwest Montana at the Community Tourism Assessment Program meeting.

Julie Shelton gave some updates and reported that we will be getting together to discuss some things on membership and will also be getting together for the website committee.

Rebecca Schmitz from MARS Stout gave the inquiry report. Since it only covered two months the numbers are low. Most of our inquiries are coming in through our website. We have had 184 inquiries with most coming from California, Montana and Washington. The interests are in history, rock hounding, wildlife viewing, and Lewis and Clark. The phone calls are going down as the website is used more. Typically, it is the older population that doesn’t have computers that usually call. We did get a response back from a lady from Idaho who called to say how much she liked our guide. History is always the main interest for Southwest Montana and the state as a whole.

Debbie Carlstrom from Tempest Technologies gave a website / internet report. We have new videos posted on the website: Winter Adventure and Lincoln Snowmobile, Fun Run. They are also on YouTube. The Ski Joring video got picked up by You-Tube Nation and now has over 50,000 views. For social media, we have Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, You Tube, and a Blog. With twitter people can get a feed and read without clicking through. Debbie almost always has photos ready to go on Facebook. Photos are huge for driving traffic to the website. People are encouraged to turn in photos of interest, of their events, and of anything of interest in their community. For the members, each one on the website gets a badge and it will move them up to the top of the list. There will be a quick summary for each member to use. For the email newsletters, they periodically get some great responses. One lady came out and just loved Butte. The blog is going well. It has a mixture of history and events. We get lots of click-throughs from Facebook to the blog. As for the link building, at the last meeting we requested names of businesses who would like a free link to the website. None were turned in so we will need to work on that again.

Richard Krott talked about website reports and he gets lots of likes whenever we do a boost for Tizer Gardens. He also talked about doing little ads and getting some great responses. He will put a rare plant on the site and he will get lots of response. Our Pinterest is going a little slower. Anyone that has events or anything is to let us know so we can get things out on our social media.

Becky Henne talked about the Big Foot Hunt for the Lawdog Saloon on March 22<sup>nd</sup>. It is a large event and draws people from all over. She did say that although they are a family place, the Bigfoot Hunt is an adult event and no kids are allowed.

Mike Strang asked if anyone has any ideas for membership to please pass on to him or to Sarah.

We talked about the tear-off sheets. Everyone is very interested in this project and has found that the tear-off sheets they are using are helpful when working with travelers. Richard said that we can make it a stand-alone piece. We talked about a few things and decided to form a committee: Dale, Becky, Suzanne, Julie, and Sarah. Carol asked that we don't get the map too cluttered.

Becky Henne talked about the Superhost Program. It is new every year. They do targeted communities and it is free. She just taught two classes in Anaconda. They are looking at alternating communities in the upcoming years. The new program will be rolled out at the Governor's Conference. This program is free to communities and everyone is encouraged to go, especially front line people. Every year programs are held in Butte, Helena, and Philipsburg because of the continuous strong interest. This year she will also be doing Deer Lodge, Ennis and the Ruby Valley. You can reach Becky by email at: [bhenne524@aol.com](mailto:bhenne524@aol.com).

Suzanne Elfstrom talked about Trip Advisor. Our page views increased by 57%, click-through rates increased by 63% and the interaction rate increased by 63%. Sponsorship and newsletter sponsorships are still available and are very good deals.

We went through our budget. Our budget number will not increase this year. Everything was flat except that Suzanne added \$10,000 to the advertising budget and \$1500 to the Public Relations line item and Tempest added \$4,700 to the website line to account for the website redesign and the addition of Google Adwords. We also have a birding brochure reprint to reconsider and tear-off sheets. We will be adding some money back to the travel guide through the rest of the ad sales and we will have \$3500 more for not doing the brand identity materials this year. We are still getting numbers for telemarketing and will see where our numbers will end up in this arena. After some discussion it was suggested that we drop public relations down by \$2000, consumer advertising and internet by \$4000. It was decided to not make any decisions until our next meeting. The website committee will be meeting at the end of the month and will discuss the internet budget at this time. We also discussed the potential of dropping some administration costs. Sarah said will look at this and report back with what the final number might be for this year. We also want to keep in mind this is the one place we have a bit of a buffer to work with.

We had more discussion on the travel guide and membership. It was decided to raise the advertising rates by 10% as they have not been raised in many years. We looked at making the back page a full-page ad as more go in the racks then are mailed out. We would then have our guides put in an envelope and mailed out. We also chose to no longer sponsor the Folk Festival ad and have that money used to go back into the cost of the travel guide.

Since there was no more business Julie adjourned the meeting at 2:28 p.m.