

Gold West Country
General Board Meeting – Deer Lodge
March 24, 2010 Minutes

Board Members – Julie Shelton, Patty Cowan, Mary Ellen Schnur, Fay Najjar, Casey Ferguson, Ellen Baumler, Pat Hansen, Julia Brewer, Anna Provost, Carol Eichler, Paul Marsh, Becky Henney, Mike Mergenthaler, Mike Strang, and employee Sarah Bannon

Participants – Marlene Holayter, Lauren McEldery, David Williams, Crystal Kelly, Tenlee Atchison, Julie Johnson, Bruce Anfinson, Connie Strang, Sandy Shull, Jeff Laverdiere, Partners Creative Suzanne Elfstrom, Tempest Technologies – Shawn Peterson and Jolynn Genzlinger

President Mike Strang called the meeting to order and we each did a self-introduction. Mayor Mary Ann Fraley welcomed everyone to Deer Lodge and expressed her gratitude to the tourism industry.

The minutes were sent out with the agenda and Patty moved that they be approved as submitted. Anna Provost seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Sarah had a handout for the financial report. We have \$59,709.12 in the state fund and \$163,127 in the money market fund. We have \$41,660.65 in the membership fund. We have several large bills coming up for advertising and distributions. Pat moved and Becky seconded the motion that the financial report be approved. It passed unanimously.

MARS Stout turned in a report for the call center. So far in 2011, 1,132 guides were mailed out. Of those, 400 came from email requests from the website, 116 were telephone calls and 30 were reader service leads. Most inquiries came from the Gold West website, and from the Montana Office of Tourism referrals. Most inquiries came from Montanan, Washington, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Texas. The interests were in history and ghost towns, wildlife viewing, rock hounding, family activities, and hot springs.

We all talked a bit about the Tourism Advisory Council meeting. Sandy Shull and Richard Krott had put together wonderful gift bags for everyone at the meeting. We had four left and gave them out at the meeting to some of the members. Mike Mergenthaler talked about how wonderful the social event went and that everyone really appreciated the opportunity to sit down and visit. The entertainment was wonderful as well.

President Mike Strang said that he is looking to implement some new ideas with the board. He will continue gathering information and we will discuss some options at a forthcoming meeting.

Shawn Peterson from Tempest Technologies had a power point on what is going on with the website. They are working on a new biking section, monthly newsletters, Gold West Facebook, Blog and You Tube. They have updated the community pages. People are asked to send in photos- people shots, event photos, winter photos, anything that would attract visitors. Shawn had lots of information and many different things going on. The monthly newsletter includes a variety of locations and events going on in the area. Anyone with story ideas or interesting information is welcome to submit to Sarah or Tempest Technologies.

Shawn went through some statistics and pointed out that people were really interested in the driving tours. We will be looking at doing giveaways and contests to attract more traffic. Each person is encouraged to ask two-to three people to “like” the Gold West Facebook. A You Tube Channel is now developed for Gold West Country. This will be another way to disseminate information.

Mobile sites are becoming more popular and MTOT is getting theirs set up. They are starting to look at the foundation for the Gold West mobile site. It would include events, attractions and listings. Much information was given and discussion took place as well.

Sarah reported that the Rocky Mountain International (RMI) Roundup was a success. Mike Mergenthaler talked about the great experience of meeting the European tour operators and encouraging them to come to Gold West Country. Sarah explained how important the Familiarization Tours we give when the show comes to Montana. We had several operators that remembered the area and like it very much. Carol said we had about 35 operators discussed the importance of keeping our connection through RMI. Julie Shelton had gone to the Go West Summit and said that so many of the operators that were there talked about their tours in the many different areas in Gold West Country and this tour took place five years ago.

Pat Hansen talked about the Yellowstone Trail. It is the first transcontinental road and went from Plymouth Rock to Seattle in 1915. It used to be short roads and prairie. In 1912, 356,000 autos were sold and in 1915, a million cars were sold. The route goes through Whitehall, Butte, Anaconda, Deer Lodge and Drummond.

Suzanne Elfstrom from Partners Creative said that all media has been placed. For Trip Advisor we still need photos, especially of events. She'll be checking numbers monthly. So far the industry standard is .1% and we are at .18% which is good. For public relations, they sent information to several magazines in hopes of picking up some articles.

The "Get Lost" program is looking for local Montanans to share their stories, for their community-based – social media website. We were working on the "Get Lost" program and getting all the partners set up. The partners are Sheridan, Twin Bridges, Ennis and, and Boulder, Deer Lodge and Drummond. The program will have banner ads and ads in the neighboring areas of the surrounding states. Photos, loop trip and contest from stories, what to do and where to eat will all be included. The campaign starts in July. The Consumer Direct E Newsletter will be coming out again. It comes out quarterly. You can advertise on it in 3-6-12 month rates.

The membership newsletters have an open rate of 35% and a click through rate of 24%. It has meet your board member and information on the travel planner and trip advisor.

Mike Strang is going to set up some sign-up sheets for members to join committees. Think about what committee would be interesting to you.

There was no old business.

We talked about the the legislature and that House Bill 316 will take 10% out of the bed tax. We are all encouraged to talk to our legislators and ask them to vote no. HB 628 will put state parks into Commerce and turn Virginia City into a state park.

There was no public comment.

Mary Ellen talked about the historic silos by the lake in Townsend. The community want to buy the property and have already had fundraisers to help renovate the silos. Carol moved and Mike seconded the motion that we do a letter of support for Townsend. Fay gave an example of the Anaconda Stack and how it worked well as an attraction for them. The motion passed unanimously.

Carol said that the "Range Magazine" was looking for stories on people in ranching and farming. She submitted her parents name and they came out and interviewed her 92-year old parents. We can look for Arnold and Joyce N. of Milligan Canyon.

Tenlee from the Montana Heritage Commission said that the Virginia City is getting cleaned up and that the excess property that doesn't fit in is what is for sale.

The next meeting is changed to Wednesday, April 27th and will be in Anaconda. The June 23rd meeting is in Dillon.

Meeting adjourned at 1:40 p.m.