

**Southwest Montana
General Board Meeting – Townsend
March 27, 2019**

Participants: Julie Shelton, Mike Mergenthaler, Stacy Sommer, Sher Loomis, Katya Peterson, Linda Brown, Ross Johnson, Diane Johnson, Melanie Sanchez, Julie Schroder, Mary Johnston, Kari Gagner, Vic Sample, Laura Obert, Mary Ellen Schnur, Michael Harvey, Patrick Plantnberk, Debi Randolph, Becky DiGiovanna, Gay Rossow, Halley Perry, Richard Krott, Andre Opitz, Bruce Binkowski, Debbie Carlstrom, Fay Najjar, Mike Delger, Nichole Brown, LaRinda Spencer, Jenni Bonser, Pam Sample Crystal Glueckert, Shawn Peterson, Sarah Bannon

Acting President Julie Shelton called the meeting to order. She thanked Townsend and the Missouri Valley Marketing for hosting the meeting and having everything set up so nicely for our meeting. We went around the room and everyone did a self-introduction.

Minutes - Becky DiGiovanna moved that the minutes be approved. Mike Mergenthaler seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Public Comment - none

Executive Director Report – Sarah said she was mostly working on request for proposals (rfp) for a call center and for a website agency. The rules and regulations say that the agencies can be approved annually for up to seven years. We have started our marketing plans for next year. Legislatively, we have been busy and many bills are of great concern. We will discuss later in the meeting.

Inquiry Report – Rebecca Schmitz from MARS Stout, a division of Corporate Cost Control, had submitted a call center report. For 2019 they have handled 5,990 inquires: most people found us through *Yellowstone Journal* (5100), *Midwest Living*, southwestmt.com, and in-house referrals from the Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development. Visitors are interested in history and ghost towns, wildlife watching opportunities, Lewis and Clark Trail, and family activities. Most inquiries came from California, Florida, Texas, and Illinois.

Lima Rest Area Update – We are getting a smaller monitor for the rest area to fit in a space above the literature racks. Shawn Peterson, Tempest Technologies has a flash drive formatted for the smaller monitor. Mike Strang is having the Department of Transportation installing the monitor as soon as it works.

Governor’s Conference on Tourism and Business Development – This takes place on April 14-16. We will have a booth at the welcome reception on Sunday.

Calgary Travel Show – The show was well attended. The map on our new booth was the biggest attraction to our booth. People were interested in a variety of our attractions. The dollar exchange was a concern to many. Much discussion ensued on this. One comment was for us all to consider flying the Canadian flag in our areas and along the corridor. Many Canadians travel to Boulder and then take the highway south of there to avoid two mountain passes.

Legislative Information – Mike Mergenthaler reported on HB 411 which wants to take 4.4% of the bed tax to help ap the Invasive Species Program. We are opposed to this and we use money to educate people on all of this on a widespread effort. The money would come out of promotions. That would drop the \$82 it earns on every dollar spent. Other bills to monitor are the SB332 which would combine the lodging facility tax with the general fund tax. SB 338 provides for construction of the Montana

Heritage Center. SB 24 has to do with optional light motor vehicle registration fee for parks and recreation.

Marketing update – Crystal Glueckert from Windfall Studios gave a presentation. The Sojern Banners have started running March through April. For Trip Advisor: in the last six months, the most activity came in September, October, and February. The banners are now picking up for the travel season. She had the information broken out by month. Crystal also displayed online potential swag items. These included bags, reusable metal straws, camera cover for the computer, small metal pail, cell phone plug in for the car, attachment for the back of the phone; screen cleaner and key chains; one with a shovel to fit with the Dig Deeper theme. We will discuss this more at our next meeting. Crystal also showed some photos of Garret Smith for a potential influencer. We had some discussion on having him to Southwest Montana in between his work for Meat Eaters and Nat Geo. His average rate is \$1200 per day but is open to negotiations. Becky DiGiovanna moved that we research available dates and have Crystal work with Garret on some potential trips. Halley seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Website, Internet, Stats, Event Program and Video Updates – Shawn Peterson from Tempest Technologies gave the update. Our monthly newsletters are sent to over 16,000 people. We have a 15% open rate and an 8% click through rate. Our website has blog posts and their growth has done well. We had 1300 visits in March. This is a 16% growth in blog visits. We have had a light growth on the website. Our demographics are 55% male and 45% female. Most of our visitors are 55 and older. We have had an increase of 10% time on the website. The largest interest areas are ghosts, ghost stories, ghost towns, state parks, rock hounding, mags and travel guide orders.

The event program will be running in about 10 days. Make sure to send your events to updates@southwestmt.com for now. We are eliminating the Lively Times Events. We have about 25-30 annual events set up so far. For the Ultra HD Video project, the monitors have been delivered. The custom video loops are done. AS soon as the properties get the videos installed the flash drives will be delivered. The next phase will be getting itineraries set up on the video project. Everyone is encouraged to like our Facebook pages.

Preliminary Marketing Plan and Budget – We looked at a rough draft of potential budget line items for next year. Our total budget is \$488,608. With minimal increases in our line items and some reduced costs we looked at some potential new projects. Four projects that were listed as potential were the tear-off map redesign and print; website redesign, motorcycle trails, and bicycle trails. It was decided that each of the areas handle their own bicycling promotions as so many are already in operation.

We talked extensively about the tear-off map. We are looking at potentially increasing the size and seeing what we can do for partners. It was asked if we should do GPS coordinates. Fay Najjar also asked if we could add the chambers. We also talked about motorcycle trails. Mary Ellen said many of them come on Highway 12. It was mentioned that many motorcyclists from Sturgis come through the area. Ross Johnson is going to talk to Red Lodge for more information. It was also suggested to put the POW-MIA Route and other motorcycle routes on our websites. After our next meeting and the funds are voted on, we will set up a couple of committees for this.

Next Meeting is on Wednesday, April 24 in Anaconda. We will decide if we have a June meeting at our next meeting. If we do, Boulder Creek Lodge, between Drummond and Philipsburg, would like us to go there.

At 1:30 p.m. Mike Mergenthaler moved that we adjourn the meeting. Mary Johnson seconded the motion and Julie adjourned the meeting.

We went to Goose Bay Glass Blowing for a tour.