

**Town of Blowing Rock  
Tourism Development Authority  
Minutes – March 9, 2009**

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Monday, March 9, 2009 at 3:00 p.m. in a special meeting held at Town Hall. Present were Vice-Chair Lynn Drury, Authority members Phil Pickett, Keith Tester and Rob Dyer, Ex-officio members Scott Hildebran and Nicole Norman, Executive Director Tracy Brown and Assistant Director Amanda Lugenbell.

Chairperson Kent Tarbutton was out of the country.

Heidi Lusk of the Meridian Agency was also present.

**Call to Order**

Vice Chairperson Lynn Drury called the meeting to order and welcomed those in attendance.

**Approval of Minutes – February 9, 2009**

Vice-Chair Drury entertained the approval of the February 9, 2009 meeting minutes. Motion by Member Tester and seconded by Member Pickett to approve the February 9, 2009 meeting minutes. Unanimously approved.

**Financial Report**

Ex-Officio Member Norman briefly reviewed the monthly financial statement and the FY 2008-09 Occupancy Tax collections year-to-date through January 2009. She stated that revenues were down approximately 11.77% (or \$66,000) compared to the same six-month period of 2008. For the month of January 2009, revenues were down approximately 6.42% (or \$3,310) compared to January of 2008 (following an almost 30% increase in January 2008 as compared to January 2007).

She advised that revenue and expenditures for the year were in line with projections, except for interest revenue which is down due to economic market conditions.

Executive Director Brown stated that based on comments received last week at the NC Governors Conference on Tourism, Blowing Rock was weathering the economic downturn as well as could be expected and faring better than many competitors.

**Marketing Strategy Proposal – Meridian Agency**

Vice-Chair Drury introduced Heidi Lusk, of the Meridian Agency. Ms. Lusk presented a proposed Creative & Media Plan for TDA consideration. (Attachment # 1)

She reviewed recent research/travel trends and what affluent travelers want in a destination, such as physical surroundings and experiences. Ms. Lusk suggested a signature campaign that features a celebrity endorsement of Blowing Rock based on their experiences in the town, etc and a signature campaign that features a 40-something

female on their exclusive experience in Blowing Rock. The campaign should include larger quality print ads that are quality and not cookie cutter. The print ads should be easily interchangeable – season, holidays, green vacation, family focus, girl getaways, etc. Also, the use of web travel sites such Expedia, Travelocity and Orbitz were recommended.

Items discussed:

Audience Profile – affluent – over \$100,000, female, median age of 47, travel domestically, lives in NC/Southeast

Proposed Media – Upscale magazines and websites, featuring wine, cooking and lifestyle such as Blue Ridge Parkway Directory, *Bon Appétit*, *Cary Magazine*, *Charlotte Taste*, *Cooking Light*, *Our State*, *Southern Living*, *Winston-Salem Living*, *WNC Magazine*, VisitNC.com, Google.com, targeted Raleigh/Charlotte ads, and value-added internet. In addition, utilize co-op and event marketing.

Other Media Options include – *Atlanta Magazine*, *Jezebel*, *New York Times*, *Oprah*, *Veranda Magazine*, *Garden & Gun*, *Travel + Leisure*, *AAA Go*, *Greensboro Monthly Magazine* and cable TV ads.

Measurement – google analytics, unique pagenames for web ads, categorical pagenames for print ads, call & visitor tracking in the Visitor Center, surveys with prize incentives, web tracking, and reader request follow-up.

At the conclusion of Ms. Lusk’s presentation, Mr. Tester asked if ad placement in the Charleston, SC or the Fort Myers, FL markets would be advantageous as a focus on resort visitors versus tourist visitors. Ms. Lusk stated that targeting the upscale visitor would be worth investigating and she would follow-up on the matter and pricing.

Mr. Tester also suggested that additional celebrities could be recruited to visit the area and by offering/creating the great experience.

Mr. Dyer recommended including some targeted cable TV ads in selected markets. Ms. Lusk agreed and stated that would be a possibility. She also suggested that the joint Blowing Rock, Boone, Watauga County TDA’s continued cooperation especially on out of NC ads would be a great partnership to explore.

With no further comments, the Authority thanked Ms. Lusk for her presentation and advised that they would discuss the proposal in the near future. Mr. Lusk departed the meeting.

### **Downtown Retail Strategy Report**

Mr. Hildebran gave a brief update on the status of the Downtown Retail Strategy. He stated that the steering committee had their initial organizational meeting and discussed the various components of the strategy. Those present included Mayor J.B. Lawrence,

Mayor Pro-tem Keith Tester, Town Manager Scott Hildebran, TDA Chair Kent Tarbutton, TDA Vice-Chair Lynn Drury, TDA Executive Director Tracy Brown, Planning Board Chair Jim West, Chamber President Rita Davis, Chamber Vice-President Nancy Santay, and Chamber Executive Director Charles Hardin. He informed the group that Rita Davis was elected chairperson and Jim West Vice-Chairperson.

Vice-Chair Drury, Member Tester and Mr. Brown all expressed positive comments regarding the initial meeting. Additional meetings have been scheduled monthly to encourage action. Also, other community leaders will be added to implement the strategy as the process moves forward.

### **Adjournment**

With no further business, Vice-Chair Drury adjourned the regular portion of the meeting at 4:00 p.m. and convened the joint TDA-Town Council meeting.

### **Joint Meeting**

A joint meeting of the Town of Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners and the Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority was held on Monday, March 9, 2009 at 4:00 p.m. at Town Hall. Attending were Mayor J.B. Lawrence, Mayor Pro-tem Keith Tester, Commissioners Bobby Ball, Albert Yount, Phillip Pickett and Tommy Klutz. TDA members included Vice Chairperson Lynn Drury, Keith Tester, Phillip Pickett and Rob Dyer. Others in attendance were Town Manager Scott Hildebran, Finance Director Nicole Norman, TDA Director Tracey Brown, Assistant TDA Director Amanda Lugenbell and Town Clerk Sharon Greene.

TDA Chairperson Kent Tarbutton was out of the country.

### **Call to Order**

Mayor J.B. Lawrence called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and welcomed both boards to the joint meeting.

### **Tourism Development Authority**

Vice-Chair Drury thanked the Council for the invitation to discuss the 2008 TDA efforts and update the Town Council on future plans and introduced TDA Executive Director Brown.

Mr. Brown then reviewed the 2008 TDA accomplishments and upcoming issues of the Authority.

Mr. Brown began by handing out notebooks with Blowing Rock articles and advertisements produced or coordinated by the TDA in 2008. He then reviewed a power point presentation outlining TDA activities and issues. The following areas were discussed -

- economic development assistance that the TDA offered through retaining Hyett Palma (downtown consultants). The TDA assisted the group Hyett Palma in the

background and leg work before starting the focus groups, interviews and consulting work.

- key markets that the TDA has been targeting with media. The Triad, Triangle and Charlotte markets have always proven to be the core markets for Blowing Rock.
- parking and the funds provided by the TDA for the improvements.
- Co-operative efforts in 2008 with the Watauga County TDA, Boone CVB and Blowing Rock TDA. The three worked quickly to achieve a unified voice and message to the Triangle market.
- new creative and website design that the TDA took on during 2008 and showed examples of art and function.
- provided examples of the walking map and visitor guide that has been distributed throughout the year.
- earned media such as the Weather Channel, RFD Network, UNC TV, Southern Living, Our State and others for a total worth of over \$750,000.
- the importance of relationship marketing with the state and others which leads to earned media and things like the Visit NC Sweepstakes.
- the importance of continuing education such as the NC Governors Conference on Tourism and the Sustainable Tourism Summit which helps keep Blowing Rock ahead of the curve.
- the different events supported by the TDA such as Winterfest, Winefest, the parades and the BRAHM Antique Show for a total of \$19k+.
- the different mediums used in paid advertising such as radio, TV, print and web for a total of \$146,850 in paid placement.
- the total numbers in visitor center inquiries. It was noted that some numbers such as walk-in traffic were down while others like web traffic were up substantially.

Mr. Brown closed with a an optimistic look at the future and that Blowing Rock stands to fare better than many other like sized and minded communities.

Town Council commended Mr. Brown and the TDA Board on their 2008 accomplishments and all of their efforts in making Blowing Rock a resort destination.

### **Adjournment**

With no further business to discuss, the joint meeting between Council and the TDA adjourned at 5:05 p.m.

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Lynn Drury, Vice-Chairperson

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Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

### **Attachments**

**#1 – Proposed Media Strategy**