

Town of Blowing Rock

Tourism Development Authority

Minutes – June 14, 2004

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Monday, June 14, 2004 at 2:30 p.m. in a special meeting. Present were Chairperson Bernard Keele, Vice-Chairperson Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Keith Tester, Lynn Drury, and Phil Pickett, and Ex-officio member Scott Hildebran. Ex-officio member Barbara Beach was absent.

Call to Order

Chairperson Keele called the meeting to order and welcomed the members and guests.

Committee Report – Tourism Data Survey

Chairperson Keele asked for an update of the Survey Committee. Member Drury advised the Authority that Mike Evans, of the Appalachian State University Walker School of Business, would have a survey proposal for TDA consideration by the end of the month. The goal is to begin the survey work in July and have all the research data completed by the calendar year-end.

Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Charles Hardin informed the Authority that the Chamber would be conducting a patron survey during the July Art in the Park and suggested that the TDA coordinate their efforts to avoid over-surveying. Vice-Chair Tarbutton stated that the Committee would work with the Chamber on this matter.

Advertising Agencies – Review Proposals

Chairperson Keele stated that the TDA had requested three advertising firms to present proposals to provide a short-term ad plan for the TDA for the remainder of this calendar year. The TDA asked the firms to provide suggestions based a short-term budget of \$20,000 or \$40,000. Firms invited included: Crown Communications (Charlotte, NC), Evergrow, Inc. (Johnson City, TN) and Corporate Marketing Group (Bristol, TN).

Crown Communications – Kathryn Blanchard (President) and Tim Miner (Director of Communications) – conducted the first presentation. (**Attachment #1**)

Crown Communications suggested that in the short-term the Authority advertise in *AAA Go Magazine*. This magazine is geared toward the automobile traveler who is actively planning to take a trip. They also stressed the importance of a web presence, which provides a wealth of information and pictures of the area. Initial taglines included: Mountains of Adventure, Mountains of Beauty, and Mountains of Taste. The \$20,000 proposal would provide logo development, 3 ads in the N.C./S.C. edition, an eight page static website and media relations. The \$40,000 proposal would provide logo development, 4 ads in the N.C./S.C. edition, 2 ads in the FLA edition, a 16 page interactive website, an E-newsletter, and media relations.

Evergrow, Inc. – Robert Baggett conducted the second presentation. (**Attachment #2**)

Evergrow recommended that the branding begin immediately and that the focus be specific marketing opportunities such as the Greater Greensboro Chrysler Classic. He suggested that Blowing Rock be compared to other sophisticated places, i.e. Martha's Vineyard, Aspen and Vail. He also mentioned print ads, maps,

brochures and a website, similar to the Northeast Tennessee Tourism Association. An initial tagline included: Blowing Rock – An original Mountain Village Since 1889. No specific advertising schedule was provided.

Corporate Marketing Group – Jane Arthur (Director of Advertising) conducted the third presentation. (Attachment #3)

Ms. Arthur began with a video introduction of Corporate Marketing Group. She suggested that in the short-term the Authority use a seasonal approach – Summer, Fall and Winter to sell the Town. Initial taglines included: Come on Up! (Summer), Now Showing! (Fall), and Santa Shops the Rock! (Winter). Further, she suggested targeting 25-54 year-old women in N.C./S.C./Eastern TN. The \$20,000 proposal would provide radio advertising with an adult contemporary station in either Charlotte or Knoxville and in the Tri-Cities Market (August 1 – Labor Day), a partnership giving away a weekend in Blowing Rock via a radio contest, and web advertising on SkiBeech.Com. The \$40,000 proposal would provide radio advertising with an adult contemporary station in either Charlotte or Knoxville and in the Tri-Cities Market (August 1 – Labor Day), a partnership giving away a weekend in Blowing Rock via a radio contest, web advertising on SkiBeech.Com, and newspaper advertising in both Charlotte and Knoxville (November 1 – December 1).

She also suggested that the TDA not create a website until the branding effort is completed and possibly the continued use of the Chamber website during the interim period.

Authority Comments of Presentations

Member Drury stated that any advertising would be a tough task due to the limited budget and the short time frame. She suggested that the TDA have more discussion and hear comments from others, especially when considering the long-term advertising approach.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton agreed that it would be smart to talk to other local groups that have used any of these firms. He also recommended that the Authority limit advertising monies until the market research is complete and use the Chamber website until the branding is complete.

Chamber of Commerce – Charles Hardin (Executive Director) conducted the fourth presentation. (Attachment #4)

Mr. Hardin recommended a print ad campaign. He advised that radio advertising was not that effective and television advertising was expensive. Also, he stated that billboards are difficult to acquire in regional markets on a short time frame. He proposed advertising in the *Raleigh News and Observer* - Tourism Theme Inserts (3 ads), *Southern Living* - South Atlantic Edition (3 ads), *Atlanta Magazine* (3 ads), and through direct-mail (2 times). The estimated cost for this program was \$36,830, excluding artwork. He advised that the Chamber would need creative assistance with ad design.

Audience suggestions included:

- direct-mail is very effective
- focus efforts further away, Florida
- Greensboro/Winston-Salem market is good
- radio can be successful (High Country Host)
- hire local talent
- use Heidi Lusk with High Country Host
- ad campaign should run until Valentines Day or WinterFest
- advertise to increase lodging stays during week

Several local marketing representatives in the audience included:

High County Host - Judy Donaghy

Tweetsie Railroad – Kathy Robbins

Chetola Resort – Marcia Field

Grandfather Mountain – Harris Prevost

Harris Prevost of Grandfather Mountain stated that based on surveys most people come to the High Country for cooler weather, sightseeing, Blue Ridge Parkway and shopping.

After much discussion, motion by Member Tester and seconded by Vice-Chair Tarbutton to appoint a short-term advertising committee (Vice-Chair Tarbutton, High County Host Marketing Director Heidi Lusk, and Chamber Director Charles Hardin) to formulate and place advertising for the TDA from now through WinterFest 2005. Motion unanimously approved.

Chairperson Keele advised that Member Drury would continue to work on a long-term advertising approach.

Website/Web Hosting Firms & Brand Firms

Chairperson Keele requested that, since the website design and branding are linked, Member Drury continue to work on these tasks under the long-term approach. He also stated that three potential tourism website firms contact information were included in the Authority packet. (**Attachment #5**)

TDA Director – Position Description

Chairperson Keele advised that a draft job description/announcement for a Consultant to the TDA and/or TDA Director was provided in their packet for review. (**Attachment # 6**) He stated that he had handed out the announcement at the NC Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus this past week to gauge interest. He stated that this item would be on the July agenda for further discussion.

Other

Chairperson Keele asked the Authority to consider participation in the North Carolina Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus. He advised that the NCACVB is an organization of destination cities and counties dedicated to the promotion of travel, tourism and conventions. The organization's mission is to cooperatively market NC, and its member destinations. The NCACVB holds meetings six times a year. Chairperson Keele stated that membership costs are roughly \$3,500 a year and the Authority would discuss the issue at the July meeting.

Follow-up

After a brief discussion regarding a budget for the Advertising Committee, motion by Member Tester and seconded by Member Drury to allocate funding to the Ad Committee not to exceed \$50,000 for the advertising campaign (including any website enhancements) – with current year expenditures coming from the plans/studies category and upcoming year expenditures beginning July 1 coming from the marketing category. Motion unanimously approved.

Chamber Meeting

Member Pickett asked Chamber of Commerce representatives the purpose of the meeting called for June 15 of the Chamber regarding the TDA. Chamber President Michael Button stated the meeting was to provide an update on the TDA to Chamber Lodging/Hotelier members. Member Tester stated he felt like that was the responsibility of the Authority and not the Chamber, and suggested that TDA Hotel Members Tarbutton and Pickett provide the update. President Button stated that all members of the Authority are welcome at the meeting.

Adjourn

There being no further business - motion by Vice-Chair Tarbutton and seconded by Member Pickett to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously approved. Chairperson Keele adjourned the meeting at 6:35 p.m.

Bernard Keele, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

ATTACHMENTS

#1 Crown Communications Presentation

#2 Evergrow, Inc. Presentation

#3 Corporate Marketing Group Presentation

#4 Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce Presentation

#5 Web Design/Web Hosting Firms

#6 Consultant and/or Tourism Director – Job Description

