



Allegan County Parks, Recreation, & Tourism

3255 122nd Avenue, Suite 102

Allegan, MI 49010

Phone: (269) 686-9088 • Fax: (269) 673-0454

Parks Web: www.allegancounty.org/Parks

Tourism Web: www.visitallegancounty.com

E-mail: parks@allegancounty.org



April 21, 2009

Spartan Conference Room

10:00am

Minutes of a Scheduled Meeting of the Allegan County Tourist Council

A scheduled meeting of the Allegan County Tourist Council was called to order by Chairman Norm Smith on Tuesday, April 21, 2009 at 9:58am in the Human Services Building, Spartan Room, Allegan, Michigan.

Roll Call showed the following members:

PRESENT:	Norm Smith	R.J. Peterson
	Dianna Stampfler	Al Weener
	Luetta Crane	Larry Johnson
	Stephanie Peterson	Betsy Hill
	Jan Cushman	

ABSENT: Terry Bonnell

Also Present:

Kevin Ricco, Director
Ronda Foreman, Parks and Tourism Clerk
Vicki Knuckles, City of Allegan Arts and Entertainment Director
Rob Hillard, Allegan City Manager

ADDITIONS/DELETIONS TO AGENDA

None.

APPROVAL OF MARCH MINUTES

A motion was made by R.J. Peterson, seconded by Stephanie Peterson to approve the March 24, 2009 meeting minutes as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

TOURISM CONTACTS REPORT – RONDA

Reporting on the March contacts, Ronda said there were 326 inquiries concerning 1875 items; the items showing the highest percentage of inquiries were 24% for all forms of lodging and 17% for both food and visitor information/attractions categories. Of the 326 inquiries, 58 were out of state and 139 were from another county within the state. A total of 203 tourist packets were mailed and Heritage Trail sales included ten books and one C.D. She stated March was a busy month; contacts more than doubled over last month and year which had 149 and 159 total inquiries respectively.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Kevin stated there is no real change from last month's financial statements; just a couple of minor bills were paid. One exception was he canceled one of three yellow page listings simply because it was redundant and he did not believe it was worth the cost which was approximately \$420 per year.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Vicki Knuckles, City of Allegan Arts and Entertainment Director, and Rob Hillard, Allegan City Manager, were both in attendance. Vicki stated they are interested in obtaining information on how they can be more effective in drawing more tourists to Allegan and asked who controls the Pure Michigan Travel website. Rob stated the City of Allegan would like to add their site link (www.cityofallegan.org) to Pure Michigan's website since a lot of money is going into the Pure Michigan ad campaign to promote Michigan travel. Although the Allegan County Tourist Council has no control over the website, Dianna Stampfler is familiar with Pure Michigan and explained who is able to be linked. She stated Tourist Councils (TC) or Convention & Visitors Bureaus (CVB) are the most likely candidates, although if neither exists in a community the Chamber of Commerce (COC) may have a link to their website. Only in rare cases would a city be allowed to add their link on the site in instances where there is no TC, CVB, or COC. Kevin added that since Pure Michigan is all about tourism, they do not view cities or COCs websites as promoting tourism, therefore do not pursue their connections. He stated that links to city Web sites are already listed on our Tourist Council Web site, www.visitallegancounty.com. Rob stated it would be great for the City of Allegan to come together with Allegan County and be able to work with Kevin and Dianna, and he thanked the Council for their time and cooperation.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

2010 VISITORS GUIDE – CELESTE STATLER FROM TMS

Norm introduced Celeste Statler from Total Market Strategies, the marketing firm who assists with the Allegan County Visitor's Guide and is in attendance to discuss the upcoming 2010 guide. She began by thanking the Tourist Council for approving the guide's name change to, "INSIDE ALLEGAN COUNTY, *The Official Guide to Allegan County*" during the Council's March meeting; she believes the change will open up more opportunities for the advertisers in the guide. Celeste reiterated the cover will continue to be printed on 60# Gloss Text No. 3 paper and the inside pages would be changed to 50# Uncoated Offset 84 Brite paper. The center map will also be printed on 60# Gloss but will be No. 4 paper instead of the No. 3 used for the cover. The price for advertising will remain the same as last year if the map remains the same; if a 6-page gate-folded map is chosen, the cost to print the guide will increase by less than \$1000. Celeste would like to plan on the map change, although not make it a part of her sales presentation until she can determine whether the revenue will be there to support it. The next topic for discussion pertained to a blog for Allegan County that Celeste is checking into. She suggested we continue to go through the Kalamazoo Gazette for the time being, although it is difficult to locate. Until she is able to find a way to link right to a blog and it can be proven to be easily found by users, she does not believe it is worth the time and effort.

Celeste passed out a rough draft of a flyer she has prepared that has the advertising rates, deadlines, etc. and explained that she put bullet points of what people are looking for in Allegan County, including health and education; she believes this will help her sales-pitch when reaching out to advertisers. Dianna commented that the Tourist Council's name and logo is no where on the flyer and asked if a phrase could be added that states "This is the official publication of the Allegan County Tourist Council". Celeste agreed and stated adding the name and logo will be easily done. Celeste informed Kevin she would like a letter to go with the flyer as has been done in years past, and she plans to approach advertisers differently this year. Normally she would send out a mass-mailer to everyone prior to the 4th of July and begin approaching advertisers immediately after the holiday. This year she is dividing the County into four areas and will systematically send out the mailers and contact business's one area at a time, each area having their own deadline. This is not to say she will ignore contacts outside of the area she is currently working or not return to an area after the deadline has passed. She

hopes this new approach will help save wasted time of continually contacting the same business over and over while awaiting their decision to advertise.

Norm posed a couple of questions, asking Celeste about the sales staff available to pursue advertisers and also, what responses has she gotten from advertisers and how many are repeat advertisers. Currently there is only one other sales person working with Celeste and as far as the advertisers, most do not renew citing they either can no longer afford it or do not feel the ad helped their business. Some companies say they will not advertise in the guide because they are not looking to draw tourist which Celeste says is an example of why changing the name to "INSIDE ALLEGAN COUNTY, *The Official Guide to Allegan County*" will broaden the scope to more than just tourists. In regard to the articles in the guide, she believes they should show a wide variety of interests to folks of all ages that include local residents and tourists. Kevin referred to the top 20 inquiries of 2008 compiled by Ronda and stated they should be considered when deciding the content of the articles. R.J. was in disagreement, stating some of the top inquiries were for lodging or food; in his opinion these are not the deciding factors when people plan their vacations. The attractions in an area are what travelers base their decision on and necessities such as lodging or food come after the fact. Celeste suggested that if it's decided we go forward with the 6-page gate-folded map, a grid could be incorporated on one of those pages that list the area's attractions and their details. Celeste concluded her presentation stating she is obtaining quotes from other printers; she is looking for the best product for the best price. Norm stated he would like to find a printer in Michigan to which Celeste replied out-of-state printers would still have to pay taxes to the State of Michigan. Kevin added if there is a huge price disparity, we would have to go with the best quote, even if they are out-of-state.

KALAMAZOO RIVER HERITAGE WATER TRAIL – SITE SELECTION

Kevin stated there seems to be two sites along the Kalamazoo River Heritage Water Trail that have generated the most interest from the Council to sponsor; the site located on the bridge at Blue Star Highway or the Lake Allegan site located at Echo Point. Out of 60 sites that are located in Allegan County, about 10 have been sold and the Parks Commission has decided to sponsor the site at New Richmond Bridge Park. Kevin reiterated the need to make a decision of which site to sponsor at today's meeting. After discussion among the Council, a motion was made by Larry Johnson, seconded by Dianna Stampfler to approve the site located at Echo Point in Lake Allegan for a three year sponsorship for \$500. The motion carried unanimously.

SOCIAL MEDIA DISCUSSION – DIANNA

Picking up on a discussion from the February meeting, Dianna asked, "What is social media and how do we use them?" She explained social media basically means using the internet for communication and connections with other people and have become quite popular. The use of social networking sites, such as MySpace and Facebook, are not just for the younger generation; people of all ages are jumping on the band-wagon, including many businesses. After doing some research, Dianna believes Facebook is the way to go and says the opportunities to reach out to many people with a click of a button are endless. She would like to create a community page for both the Tourist Council and Heritage Trail. These pages would not replace the websites but would be another marketing tool used to reach out and promote everything we do and would be accessible for users to post their own comments or suggestions. Dianna is making sure all of her clients are creating their own page for their business and encouraged the Council members to do the same. First, she plans to master Facebook and from there will go on to other sites such as YouTube, Twitter or Flickr.

NEW BUSINESS

WINTER PHOTO CONTEST JUDGING

Although there were no entries in the youth division, seven adult entries were received for the Allegan County 2009 Winter Photo Contest. Kevin displayed each photo on the computer for the Council to view, and then replayed each one as the vote was tallied. Marsha Behm's photo of ice that was left on some trees after the water had receded was chosen as the winner of the contest. Marsha, who resides in Allegan and was also the 2008 Fall Photo Contest winner, had taken her winning photo on A37 just south of 140th Avenue. She will

receive a prize package worth approximately \$90.00 as follows: an Allegan County Parks 2009 season pass, donated by the Tourist Council; two tickets to the Regent Theatre in Allegan, donated by the City of Allegan; and two tickets to attend the Jet Warz show on June 20th at US131 Motorsports Park in Martin; donated by US131 Motorsports Park. Congratulations Marsha!

NEXT MEETING – MAY 19 @ 10:00AM IN THE SPARTAN CONFERENCE ROOM

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

Kevin Ricco reminded everyone of the Economic Development Workshop today at the Silo beginning at 2pm.

Al Weener invited everyone to an open house at New Richmond House on Saturday, April 26th from 2 – 5pm.

R.J. Peterson stated that in his opinion, the articles that are written for the 2010 guide should concentrate on tourist attractions since the attractions are what bring travelers to the area. Each area has a few things to draw people and R.J. feels there needs to be a mechanism within the County to bring people together to make things happen. If you have the attractions that people enjoy, with that comes free advertising through word-of-mouth.

Larry Johnson stated the Allegan County United Way fund drive is already at 101%, exceeding their goal for the year. Also, Camp Kidwell turns 60 this year and Larry says they are a nice organization to be involved with.

Stephanie Peterson informed everyone that the first major event of the season for US131 Motorsports Park will be the National City Thunder Nationals on May 9th. She stated there are a lot of folks who come to these events and would be curious to know how much additional revenue is coming into the County because of them.

Norm Smith reported that he visited Springfield, Illinois recently and stated the new Abraham Lincoln Museum is incredible.

Lue Crane reported Crane's Pie Pantry and Orchard is gearing up for the season; their hours of operation are set to expand on May 1st.

Jan Cushman stated the information for the Heritage Trail interpretive sign for the Hamilton site has been sent to Christie and she is working on the layout, and Wayland should be sending the information for their sign sometime in the next month.

Betsy Hill reported Plainwell is redoing two buildings to their original façade; the work will be funded by the building's owners and a grant obtained by the City.

Dianna Stampfler stated she sent a press release to Kevin for his review regarding geocaching on Heritage Trail titled "History Goes Hi-Tech". She hopes to submit it within the next week or so.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business a motion was made by R.J. Peterson, seconded by Al Weener to adjourn the meeting at 11:49am. The motion carried by all present.

By: _____
Ronda Foreman, Parks and Tourism Clerk