

GRAND JUNCTION VISITOR & CONVENTION BUREAU
MINUTES OF THE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
FEBRUARY 10, 2004

PRESIDING: Linda Smith, Chair

MEMBERS PRESENT: Kevin Reimer, Jill Eckardt, Michael Somma, Steve Meyer, Lynne Sorlye, Jane Fine Foster, Alan Friedman

MEMBERS ABSENT: Peggy Page, Kay Berry

STAFF PRESENT: Debbie Kovalik, Barbara Bowman, Irene Carlow, Layne Whyman, Erin Chapman

The meeting was called to order at 3:07 pm.

MINUTES OF JANUARY 13, 2004: Lynne Sorlye moved the minutes be approved as written, Michael Somma seconded; approved unanimously.

HOST REMARKS: Kevin Reimer welcomed the Board and staff to the Hampton Inn, which has been open for one year. The hotel, which caters mainly to corporate travelers, offers 80 rooms, including 3 jacuzzi suites. Kevin is very pleased at the synergy that has developed between employees of the Hampton Inn and Hawthorn Suites. Both properties work closely with Two Rivers Convention Center.

BOARD BUSINESS: The Director presented City Council's thank-you gifts to those Board members who were unable to attend the February 4 luncheon.

Annual Retreat – Tuesday, April 13 was selected as the date for the annual retreat. Review of the website audit will be an integral part of the retreat, along with developing a strategic plan for Internet marketing. Staff is directed to investigate locations that can provide Internet access, such as UTEC, hotels and Two Rivers Convention Center.

Special Events – The Chair read a letter from Mike Perry, Executive Director of the Museum of Western Colorado, notifying the Board that the Grand River Indian Artists Gathering has been cancelled. In October-November 2003, the event committee mailed over 2,400 applications to artists and received only 2 responses as of January 31. The committee is examining why there were so few returns and is hopeful that this event can be brought back in the future. The Board is disappointed that the event had to be cancelled, but appreciates the Museum's early notification.

HILL & CO.: Representatives were unable to attend because of illness.

Website Audit – The Director discussed some of the recommendations made by USDM. Hill & Co. is also reviewing the audit and will recommend which changes can be made in the near term. We are looking specifically at those items that could be implemented quickly to:

- boost traffic
- acquire more email addresses (within the next 4-6 months)
- change the opt-in form from the Visitor Guide only to other information
- increase rankings on search engines

Other Board Business – Kevin Reimer asked about the possibility of advertising in Skywest Airlines' January 2005 in-flight magazine which will include a feature article on Grand Junction. The director discussed co-op advertising in various publications. The VCB takes responsibility for a one-half or full page ad, then the publication's representative tries to sell ads to local properties, which potentially cuts the VCB's total cost. When these opportunities arise, we send tourism partners a request for indications of interest but usually only 1 or 2 responses are received.

Hospitality Training – Layne Whyman presented a history of the VCB's training programs and an outline of the 2004 program. This training has always been provided to lodging property staff (particularly front desk), retail, restaurant and convenience store personnel; in 2004 it will be open to the general public. The "Grand Junction Loves Company" kickoff will be May 12, during National Tourism Week. Three public forum sessions will be offered at City Hall Auditorium during the month of May. A video will be made for businesses to use in training staff hired after the initial presentation. Board members suggested that staff send a letter about the program to all service clubs; it was also suggested that recipients of Special Events funds be strongly encouraged to attend.

Online Conversion Study – The full report was distributed. The Director reiterated some of the results which were presented at the January meeting.

ADR/Occupancy Study – Average occupancy for 2003 was 59.5% versus 65.6% for 2002. Room inventory in 2003 increased by 80 with the opening of the Hampton Inn. Average Daily Rate for the year held steady at \$62, however rates declined each month of the 4th quarter. December's rate fell from \$63 to \$56 but occupancy increased 4.2%.

STAFF REPORTS: January lodging tax receipts increased 1% over January 2002. Heavy snowfall during January curtailed drive traffic and is reflected in the 18% decrease in guests served at the Visitor Center. The 2003 final budget report was distributed along with the updated 10-year financial projection.

Marketing Plan – The strategies and tactics are similar to 2003. Significant changes to the advertising plan include adding metro area billboards and radio while discontinuing the 16th Street Mall buses and television. Research projects will include an update of Dr. Tucker Hart Adams' economic impact study, an intercept survey and the ongoing ADR/Occupancy Study.

Group Sales – Tour operators at the Go West Summit reported that bookings are up 20%-40% over last year.

Promotions – The “Spring Blossoms Wine Train” package has been finalized and the advertising campaign is ready to launch. The package includes one-way coach rail on Amtrak; lodging; performance at The Cabaret Dinner Theater; local transportation; winery tours; return to Denver via luxury motorcoach. Four hotels are participating and packages start at \$289 per person. The Amtrak car will accommodate 60 people (including 4 media); guests will be treated to lunch, wine tastings and live jazz. The wine train will be promoted on Denver’s jazz radio station CD 104.3; RMA Tours will manage reservations/sales.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:00 pm.