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Visit Tampa Bay hosts first Legislative Summit

Tourism advocates, state, local leaders review key issues ahead of 2017 session

TAMPA (Oct. 17, 2016) – Visit Tampa Bay hosted its first Legislative Summit on Oct. 12, bringing together state and local elected leaders with key players in the tourism industry to discuss issues of importance in the upcoming Legislative session when legislators from the Tampa Bay area will hold leadership posts in both parties and both houses.

The primary message of the meeting: Tourism is big business for Tampa Bay and the state as a whole and generated tremendous return on investment for every public dollar spent promoting it.

“Each and every day we are bringing people to our community that are spending money and keeping our local business afloat,” said Santiago Corrada, president and CEO of Visit Tampa Bay. “We are in the business of importing money.”

Among the summit's guests were Will Seccombe, president & CEO of VISIT FLORIDA, and Pinellas County resident Roger Dow, CEO of the Washington, D.C.-based U.S. Travel Association.

Dow stressed that public investment in tourism has a direct impact on visitation and the associated economic benefits tourism brings. When Pennsylvania cut its state tourism spending by 75 percent, they saw a corresponding drop in tourism, Dow said.

“We have a great destination,” said Mary Ann Ferenc, owner of Tampa's Mise en Place restaurant and incoming chair of VISIT FLORIDA's Board of Director. “But it's only great is people know about it.”

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Also present were Rep. Janet Cruz of Tampa, incoming leader of the House Democratic caucus and Rep. Kathleen Peters of St. Petersburg along with a representative of state Sen. Tom Lee of Brandon. Hillsborough County Commissioners Ken Hagan, Sandy Murman and Stacy White also attended, as did representatives from the Hillsborough County Tourism Development Council and from Pasco County's tourism office.

The summit follows a Legislative session when the Legislature loosened the rules governing how counties can spend Tourist Development Tax funding – expanding the use in several Panhandle counties to include law enforcement and lifeguards, among other things.

“There is a new level of respect for tourism,” said Florida Aquarium CEO Thom Storke, who helped shape the state’s TDT law when he was chair of VISIT FLORIDA. The purpose of the tax was for promoting tourism, he said.

“We’ve got to protect the bed tax to grow the industry,” he said.

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About Visit Tampa Bay

Visit Tampa Bay encourages adventurous travelers to unlock our destination’s trove of unique treasures. We are a not-for-profit corporation that works with more than 750 partners to tell the world the story of our home – the hip, urban heart of the Gulf Coast of Florida.

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