

## Visitors Bureau MINUTES

### Chapel Hill/Orange County Visitors Bureau Board of Directors Meeting February 20, 2013

The Chapel Hill/Orange County Visitors Bureau met at Courtyard by Marriott

**Board Members Present:** Annette Stone, Anthony Carey, Dave Gephart, Gordon Jameson, Greg Overbeck, Jack Schmidt, Jim Parker, Karen DeHart, Lee Pavao, Lydia Lavelle, Mark Sherburne, and Penny Rich, Board of County Commissioners.

**Not present:** Gene Pease, Laura Morgan, Meg McGurk, and Mike Gering.

**Staff:** Laurie Paolicelli, Steve Brantley, Linda Ekeland, Patty Griffin, Martha Shannon, and Tina Fuller. Stephanie Perri, Clean Design also attended.

**Guest:** Kim Hufham, Wilmington & Beaches.

### Approval of Minutes

Mr. Gephart requested a motion to approve the minutes, Jim Parker so moved and Lee Pavao seconded. With all members in favor, the minutes were approved as written.

### Welcome/Announcements

New Courtyard by Marriott General Manager, Sandra Whittington, introduced herself to the board and welcomed them. Ms. Whittington gave an update on the hotel's current occupancy trends, increase in the group meetings sector and focus on conferences, corporate and transient guests.

Gephart welcomed Commissioner Penny Rich to the board. Rich represents the seat vacated by Valerie Foushee.

### Guest Speaker

Kim Hufham, President and CEO of Wilmington & Beaches, New Hanover County's Tourism Development Authority (TDA), addressed the Board as part of the Bureau's effort to showcase the strategic plans of other NC visitor bureaus. The New Hanover County Tourism Development Authority d/b/a Wilmington/Cape Fear Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau is the official destination marketing organization of New Hanover County.

Since the late 1980s, Wilmington, N.C. and the beaches of New Hanover County were marketed under the umbrella moniker "Cape Fear Coast." However "Cape Fear Coast" had limited name recognition and no location value outside the immediate area. Thus began a marketing journey to capture the uniqueness of four distinct entities (Wilmington and three beaches) under an umbrella brand that represents the area as a single destination. In August, 2011, the TDA Board of Directors voted to adopt "Wilmington, N.C. Historic River District & Island Beaches" as its new brand positioning with Wilmington as the lead "portal" through which visitors identify. Hufham emphasized the challenges and strengths of managing Wilmington, separate but parallel to Kure, Carolina and Wrightsville beaches.

Positives of having one Visitors Bureau manage all marketing campaigns:

1. Gives each beach town the ability to market their individual assets and showcase the diversity of the entire destination while having one Bureau provide guidance, media purchases, share one ad agency and execute cost savings.
2. Ability to more seamlessly and directly market each beach town to more individualized demographics best suited for that beach.

Challenges being:

1. Having four destinations within the same county often has the feeling of direct competition between each beach town and Wilmington; instead of capitalizing on the assets of one another and bringing in new audiences.
2. Additional staff workload to manage and implement separate plans and budgets for the destination as a whole and the individual beach towns.

Reports

### **Executive Director's Report**

Paolicelli discussed changes, expansions and renovations in the local hotel community, of which there are currently 1600 rooms with Atma Development being the next property to open; the first for Carrboro. She is immersed in meetings with hotel general managers as part of her annual outreach effort to track trends and best determine how the Bureau can be a stronger ally to Orange County properties. Her most recent meeting was with Manish Atma, The Atma Group (Hampton Inn, Carrboro) who is opening the Carrboro Hotel in July, full service, with a \$169 rack rate. The two discussed positioning and bringing in external leads.

Jack Schmidt, Carolina Inn, reported that their construction completion is 8 weeks out; they are currently running with 71 rooms (114 rooms off-line) by mid-April they will have a total of 185 rooms completed. He also report that the steam tunnel is completed. The renovation will conclude before commencement May 12, 2013.

Anthony Carey, Siena, reported that at this point he is not sure if they will take 27 rooms off line now for renovations, or hold until after graduation. He did report that the last 1/3 rooms would be off-line through July in order to complete renovations.

Paolicelli is concluding interviews for a part-time sales associate who will join the Bureau's sales team in March.

Sales Director Linda Ekeland informed board members of the upcoming UNC March Madness, a two-day "sales blitz" in which the Visitors bureau and local hotels remind decision makers on campus of new, existing and changing hotel accommodations and facilities.

She shared an inquiry that asked for 350 acres of land in the county. [Tough Mudders](#), a team building organization is looking for acreage for an obstacle course – 350 plus to hold 12-15000 people for the fall. Ms. Ekeland informed that she is working with the Sportsplex for the upcoming swim meets; brochures promoting hotels in Hillsborough will be distributed.

Paolicelli reminded of the upcoming Tourism Summit in Hillsborough. The Bureau has been coordinating with the Alliance for Historic Hillsborough to bring local leaders together to discuss how to bring everyone involved in tourism together.

## Marketing

Anthony Carey, Marketing Chair, together with Stephanie Perri, Account Executive for Clean Design (the Bureau's advertising agency) reminded that in November, the Board commissioned Clean Design to launch a study of our advertising campaign that will provide the Visitors Bureau "tracking" data that gives the ability to measure the effectiveness of our EDGE campaign; and track long-term changes in customer awareness, attitudes, and behaviors. Phase I of this study was recently concluded and will be presented at the March meeting, said Perri.

## New Business

Mark Sherburne with the Aloft Hotel said he was a member of the local community that addressed Chapel Hill Town Council in support of allowing larger ground signs at shopping complexes with over 50,000 square feet of retail space. East 54 is such a complex. The ordinance currently allows signs with a maximum size of 15 square feet in area and 8 feet in height. The proposed amendment would increase the maximum to be between 150 to 216 square feet. "I believe that improved signs will boost sales and increase the capture rate of community and visitor dollars," said Sherburne.

Arts Commission – Gordon Jameson reported that the fall 2012 Arts grants have been handed out, 20 recipients in all for a total of \$26,749 in funds. Also reported three Orange County artists were chosen for the Ella Fountain Pratt Emerging Artists Grant.

Visitor Bureau Communications – Patty Griffin reported that the new 2013 Visitors Guide recently was completed and sent to press. The new guide has a brand new look and is smaller in size. She also reported on her work with travel writers and Atlanta Media Mission.

Hillsborough – Jim Parker gave an update on new ideas for the upcoming Hogg Day, reporting that it will be structured differently, and will have an added historical aspect. As a premiere Hillsborough event, he hopes agencies like the visitors bureau will market Hogg Day, help the event organizers draw new audiences.

Carrboro – Annette Stone reported that the Board of Alderman approved a contract with the [Splinter Group](#) to begin branding Carrboro. She also reported that it is “For the Love of Carrboro” month, Carrboro Day is May 5<sup>th</sup> this year, and a Food Rodeo was held at the Farmers Market on Valentine’s Day.

North Carolina High School Athletics Association – Karen DeHart reported that they are in the middle of championship games. For March, they expect 8,000 – 10,000 people to attend the Basket Ball championships.

### Old Business

Laurie Paolicelli reported that at Carrboro Alderwoman and Visitors Bureau Board Member, Lydia Lavelle’s request, she has embarked on a plan to communicate to the board and visitors about the potential impact the construction at South Columbia Street will have on visitors to the area. That exit is a major artery of entry for UNC and athletic visitors and Lavelle had expressed an interest in having the Visitors Bureau be a communicator of this construction news to visitors. Paolicelli agreed to update the board at the March meeting.

And concluding the meeting, Ms. Paolicelli informed members that our next board meeting would be at the Basketball Museum with Rick Steinbacher.

With no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:40 am

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Minutes reviewed by: Laurie Paolicelli,  
Executive Director

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Minutes accepted by: Dave Gephart,  
Chairman

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Date

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Date