



# NORTH CAROLINA TRAVEL AND TOURISM BOARD

## MEETING MINUTES

February 4, 2014

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Kevin Baker, Sabrina Bengel, Rolf Blizzard, Secretary Sharon A. Decker, Denny Edwards, Senator Ralph Hise, Chris Humphrey, Representative Pat McElraft, Caleb Miles, Diane Nordstrom, Tammy O'Kelley, Jessica Roberts, Senator Norman Sanderson, Art Schools, Wit Tuttell

**BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:** Donna Carpenter, Randy Cobb, Randy Danos, Lew Ebert, Representative Susi Hamilton, Randy Kolls, Bob O'Halloran, Vinay Patel, Jamie Reibel, Leonard Rigsbee, Steve Thanhauser, Chris Valauri, Paula Wilber, Lynn Wingate

**LIAISONS, STAFF AND GUESTS PRESENT:** Peggy Brookhouse, Karin Cochran, Cary Cox, Steve Dunkley, Guy Gaster, Scott Gilmore, Bryan Gupton, Jim Hobbs, Leigh Anna Johnson, Ashlee Kirk, Secretary Susan Kluttz, Richard Lindenmuth, Brooks Luquire, Dana Simpson, Marlise Taylor, Kara Weishaar, T. Jerry Williams

## CALL TO ORDER

Rolf Blizzard, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 11:03 am.

## COMMENTS AND INTRODUCTIONS

Blizzard welcomed attendees and reviewed 2013 year-end accomplishments and numbers. He also read aloud the Ethics Statement in accordance with Executive Order No. 35.

## ELECTION OF NEW CHAIR

Blizzard reported the decision of the nominating committee to put forth Tammy O'Kelley as the new chair of the North Carolina Travel and Tourism Board. The nomination was unanimously approved. Tammy O'Kelley accepted the nomination.

## COMMENTS FROM CHAIR

O'Kelley presented Blizzard with a plaque in recognition of his leadership as chair of the Travel and Tourism Board. O'Kelley reviewed the agenda for the meeting.

## PRESENTATION BY SECRETARY DECKER

Secretary Decker noted that the Economic Development Board has released its 10 year strategic plan. The Listening Tour throughout the state has been completed and Travel and Tourism was represented well. Statewide branding initiative has begun with the creative help of area universities and a RFP has been issued for an agency to be chosen. The US Open will serve as the platform for the announcement of the new state brand, but it may take two years to unroll this brand.

Secretary Decker introduced Richard Lindenmuth as the interim Chief Executive Officer of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC). Mr. Lindenmuth addressed the Board to explain his role and upcoming plans.

## MINUTES APPROVED

Rolf Blizzard motioned to approve the December 3, 2013 meeting minutes. Second by Sabrina Bengel. Unanimously approved.

## DIVISION UPDATE

Executive Director Wit Tuttell provided an update to the Board on the Division's work and accomplishments during the year 2013 as well as an outlook for 2014.

2013 Year-End Lodging Highlights: Room Demand was up 2.7% statewide. More than 31 million room nights were sold throughout the state in 2013. Hotel/motel occupancy was up 1.7% statewide. Room rates (ADR) in North Carolina also

hit record levels last year, increasing 2.2%. Statewide, RevPAR was up 3.9%. Room revenues grew 5.0%. Room Supply in North Carolina increased 1.1% in 2013, which is the highest on record for North Carolina with more than 53 million room nights available last year.

**Employment Outlook:** The US travel industry has recovered 101% of the jobs it lost since 2007. In NC, 104% of travel jobs have been recovered. Both the US and NC travel employment recovery have outpaced other industry employment.

For the third straight year, attendance at North Carolina's state parks and state recreation areas hovered at a record level with 14.2 million visits in 2013. Fort Macon State Park in Carteret County reported the highest attendance at 1.19 million visits, followed closely by Jockey's Ridge State Park in Dare County with 1.18 million visits.

**Website:** Visitation to VisitNC.com in 2013 was up 9.26% with more than 4.5 million visits. Downstream referrals to NC industry partner sites were also up, totaling more than 1.28 million. Because mobile use of VisitNC.com on tablets and phone has grown to more than 40% of site traffic, the website's new responsive design is incredibly important.

**Partner Event Calendar Widget:** The event calendar widget, powered by VisitNC.com, provides partners with the ability to input their event listing data one time on VisitNC.com and also have it appear on their own travel websites via placement of the widget.

**API Update:** The Division and LGA are now working on development of an API tool which will give partners the ability to list, add, update and delete their listings and events on VisitNC.com and their own sites.

**Public Relations:** Successful media relations support garnered tremendous exposure for North Carolina and partners across the state, totaling \$5.5 million and circulation of more than 570,000,000 in 2013. Highlights for the year included placements in *The New York Times*, *Good Morning America*, *Endless Vacations*, *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, *Ladies Home Journal*, *New York Post* and *The Tennessean*.

The New York Media Mission was held January 28 at the New York Public Library. 30 tourism partners attended along with the Division's Public Relations team to meet with more than 70 national media.

**Social Media:** Fans and followers of VisitNC's social media accounts grew to more than 120,000 in 2013, generating more than 250,000 interactions.

**Film – 2013 Highlights:** More than 60 productions registered with the NC Film Office and filmed in North Carolina in 2013. Those productions amassed a record-high of more than 5,700 production days with filming taking place in more than 30 of the state's 100 counties. Year-end projections show television and film productions had a direct in-state spend in excess of \$254 million and created more than 4,000 well-paying crew positions for the state's highly skilled workforce. These productions created nearly 25,000 job opportunities, including talent and background extra positions, for North Carolinians. These numbers are the second highest in the industry's history for in-state spending by productions as well as total job opportunities created.

**Film – 2014 Focuses:** Officials from the N.C. Film Office are wrapping up a week-long recruiting trip in January at the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah. They met with various decision makers in the industry while also promoting the state's strong infrastructure, talented crew base, vast locations, and refundable tax credit.

**Domestic Sales and Marketing:** Motorcoaches bring more than \$3.2 billion to NC. Annually, the Division attends several group travel trade conventions to promote North Carolina as a destination for all travelers to tour operators. The Division hosts tour operator and AAA Travel Agent familiarization tours, and conducts a domestic sales mission reaching tour operators, tour receptive operators and travel agents in key domestic markets.

International – 2013 Highlights: UK - The Division participated in a sales mission in the UK and met with 18 media outlets. *Charley Boorman's USA Adventure* television show highlighted North Carolina and reached 1 million viewers globally.

Germany/Switzerland/Austria – In 2013, tour operator CanUSA's MapSite featured 6 NC locations with special offers. Also, the Division participated with Travelzoo in a co-op marketing opportunity with Brand USA which featured a customized microsite with NC destinations and deals with more than one million subscribers.

Canada – The Division participated in a familiarization tour bringing 4 high value tour operators and Air Canada to the Outer Banks.

International – 2014 Focuses: UK – Hosting 6 tour operators and golf writers to the US Open and also visiting surrounding areas; Participating in the 2014 Brand USA MegaFam, bringing 100 UK travel agents tour the South.

Germany – Also hosting tour operators and media for US Open and North Carolina will be a featured destination in Swiss Tour Operator Knecht Reisen's Wheels Preview Brochure for 2015, reaching 25,000 consumers.

Canada – The Division will participate in a co-op marketing opportunity with Total Vacations to include a monthly catalog to 24,000 and 3 e-blasts to 1.4 million; Another co-op marketing opportunity with Merit Golf Vacations will feature courses statewide.

TRAC: The Division held successful TRAC programs throughout 2013 in 5 areas of the state: Fayetteville, Pinehurst, Avon, Greensboro, and Boiling Springs. Representatives from the Division's programs were able to have one-on-one meetings with hundreds of partners in these regions.

Welcome Centers greeted nearly 7.1 million visitors during the year. Interior updates continued at various Welcome Centers, with new signage incorporating the state's tourism logo and refreshed photographs.

Call Center Performance: The Division's Call Center answered more than 21,000 incoming calls to 1-800-VISITNC, 1-800-BYTRAIN and other related toll-free numbers in 2013. The Call Center began distributing the Department of Transportation's map in June. The Call Center mailed about 273,000 North Carolina Travel Guides, 124,000 Civil War Guides, 100,000 Wine Guides and 340,000 North Carolina maps in 2013.

The Governor's Conference will be held March 2-4 in Charlotte at the Westin Charlotte with keynote speakers including Charles Frazier and Roger Brooks.

US Open Golf Championships: North Carolina has a tremendous opportunity for global exposure during the back-to-back men's and women's championships on the same course at Pinehurst No. 2. The Division has consistently made dedicated efforts for golf travel marketing including public relations, advertising, web content, consumer promotions, and a monthly eNewsletter.

Retire NC: The Division attended AARP Life@50+ Expos and several Ideal Living Real Estate Expos, generating multiple leads for the Certified Retirement Community Program. The program now has 7 communities with 2 more applications received in January.

In-state Media Partnerships: The Division's collaboration with in-state media partners allows the promotion of North Carolina and VisitNC.com to residents; partnerships include the NC Press Foundation, NC Broadcasters Association, and UNC-TV and *NC Weekend*. This spring, a partnership with the NC Outdoor Association will place outdoor advertising across the state.

*NewsLink*: Produced 52 editions and 4 Special Edition NewsLinks with a total of 1,113 stories in 2013 and was distributed to approximately 5,500 people each week.

#### **COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR**

To review funding requests that are presented to the Board, O'Kelley created a subcommittee which consists of Jessica Roberts, Sabrina Bengel, Caleb Miles, Representative Pat McElraft and Senator Norman Sanderson. A position statement will be presented at the May Board meeting.

#### **LEGISLATIVE AND INDUSTRY REPORTS**

Senator Ralph Hise noted that there were improvements in growth and employment in the state, but there are also major changes in the tax code which brings an uncertainty of how Medicaid will affect the 2014 revenues.

Senator Norman Sanderson expressed his appreciation of the Board's work as a statewide effort to promote travel and tourism.

Representative Pat McElraft also expressed her appreciation of the Board's efforts and is happy to be a part of it.

Board Member Rolf Blizzard of the NC Travel & Tourism Coalition reported that they will be meeting tomorrow (Feb. 5). A Resolution was created in reference to the Public Private Partnership. Blizzard made the motion that the Travel and Tourism Board support the North Carolina Travel & Tourism Coalition's Position Statement on the proposed Public Private Partnership. This motion was seconded and carried unanimously.

Board Member Caleb Miles of the NC Travel Industry Association reported that there would be a session at the upcoming Governor's Conference focusing on careers in tourism and hospitality. The annual Legislative reception will be held on May 28, 2014. Additionally, the Tourism Leadership Conference will be held October 8-10, 2014 in Winston-Salem.

Board Liaison T. Jerry Williams noted that he has heard that some of the occupancy taxes collected were not being spent on tourism. Discussion followed amongst the Board members and Dana Simpson from the NC Travel & Tourism Coalition. This issue was tabled until it could be examined further.

Board Member Denny Edwards of the Destination Marketing Association of North Carolina reported that they passed a similar resolution in support of the film incentive. He also thanked Secretary Decker for her support of the Tourism industry. Chair Tammy O'Kelley noted that several organizations have passed resolutions in support of extending the film incentive.

Meeting adjourned at 1:25 pm.