



## TDC MEETING MINUTES

November 14, 2019

Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass, chair, called the Lee County Tourist Development Council (TDC) meeting to order at 9:01 a.m.

**Council members in attendance:** Commissioner Cecil Pendergrass, John McLain, Fran Myers, Pamela Cronin, Tony Lapi, Colleen DePasquale, Robert Wells III, Bill Waichulis and Brian Anita Cereceda. Brian Kramer was excused.

Wells made a motion to approve the Oct. 10, 2019 TDC meeting minutes. Cereceda seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

### **The newest CGSP participants of Guests First recognized**

Dr. Nicole King-Smith, VCB tourism & hospitality training manager, recognized 86 newly Certified Guest Service Professionals (CGSP), bringing the total to 907 CGSP graduates in Lee County. Five Certified Guest Services businesses were also recognized: LaQuinta Inn & Suites Fort Myers Airport, Outrigger Beach Resort, Pure Florida Fort Myers, Sanibel Moorings and Sanibel Siesta.

### **Public to be heard**

Beth Oliver, Offshore Sailing School director of marketing, thanked the VCB, TDC and South Seas Island Resort for the Hobie 16 Worlds support and for the opportunity to host domestic journalists on a sailing excursion. Oliver added the event is happening through Nov. 16 and it is \$5 per car to spectate. Offshore Sailing School has some upcoming events including hosting the Suffolk University MBA program and the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society Cup Regatta. Tamara Pigott, VCB executive director, thanked Oliver and the Offshore Sailing School for providing the Hobie 16 Worlds committee boats.

Ralph Santillo, Southwest Florida Military Museum founder and CEO, thanked the VCB for the attractions marketing grant the museum received on Nov. 13. The grant will be used to bring students to the museum with the goal of 20 students per month to add to the 21-25 thousand visitors per year. Santillo also mentioned the museum's program that provides veterans and meal every Tuesday.

Andrew Kurtz, Gulf Coast Symphony director, mentioned appreciating the symphony's opportunity to share the stage with Kristian Bush at Island Hopper Songwriter Fest and thanked the TDC and the Florida Repertory Theatre for the support during the festival. He also encouraged attendees to see a show this season.

Jack Carver, Florida RV Trade Association, reported that the association is preparing for the Fall Clean Sweep RV Show Dec. 6-8 at the CenturyLink Lee County Sports Complex and the Fort Myers RV Show Jan. 23-26 at the Lee Civic Center. He anticipates a good season.

Alison Giesen, Mound House director of cultural resources, reminded the TDC of Mound House's fourth anniversary celebration in the evening.

### **Municipalities to be heard**

None to be heard.

### **Report of the Executive Director**

Tamara Pigott, VCB executive director, reported record-breaking tax collections of \$42.7 million for FY2019, an increase of 1.4% year-over-year. This represents 10 consecutive years of bed tax increases. For the month of September 2019, resort tax collected was \$1,547,207, a 6.6% increase over September 2018 collections of \$1,450,198.

Pigott also reported that the average occupancy rate in September 2019 was 49.7%, which is up 4.1% from September 2018 (47.8%). The average daily rate for September 2019 was \$101.72, up 3.7% from September 2018 (\$98.10) and RevPAR for September 2019 was \$50.60, up 8.0% from September 2018 (\$46.88).

During September 2019, 460,869 passengers traveled through Southwest Florida International Airport (RSW). Figures represent an increase of 10.2% in passenger traffic compared to September 2018. Year-to-date, passenger traffic is up 8.5% from the same period last year.\

### **Lee County Visitation update**

Phillip Downs, DSG, reported on July – September 2019 and calendar year highlights. Total visitation during the summer months increased 12.3%, visitor expenditures increased 13.1%. Domestic travel accounted for 84% of Lee County's total summer visitation. New York and Miami-Fort Lauderdale were the top feeder markets. About 16% of visitors arrived from international markets, with the largest from Germany at 5%. 1,074 surveys were completed to gather these statistics.

### **Island Hopper Songwriter Fest update**

Nancy MacPhee, VCB product development manager, presented an overview of the sales, marketing, and PR efforts for the 6th Annual Island Hopper Songwriter Fest in September. An estimated 21,000 attendees enjoyed 150 performances by 88 songwriters at 23 venues in Captiva, Downtown Fort Myers and Fort Myers Beach. All marketing and PR efforts combined produced a record setting 142 million impressions for the destination. These efforts included using sales missions to promote the festival, tap takeovers at breweries, commercials and sweepstake contests. Room night revenue was up 25% over September of 2018. Macphee reminded the TDC to save the dates for the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Island Hopper Songwriter Fest, Sept. 18-27, 2020.

Commissioner Pendergrass thanked VCB staff for their hard work and mentioned he enjoyed speaking with festival attendees as they visit from all over.

### **Other updates**

Pigott welcomed Kryz Guillaume as the VCB's new project-based intern. Guillaume will support all areas of the VCB. He is a senior and an international student at Florida Gulf Coast University majoring in Resort & Hospitality Management. He recently served as a multi-department intern at the Hyatt Regency Coconut Point Resort and Spa, as well as a food and beverage intern at Spring Run Golf Club in Bonita Springs. Guillaume is from Haiti and speaks French, Haitian Creole and English.

Pigott also mentioned that the deadline has been extended for the IGTV video entries until Dec. 6. She asked that the TDC share the information with anyone that may be interested.

Pigott asked the TDC to review the proposed 2020 meeting schedule as it is up for approval at the next TDC meeting.

### **New Business**

Fran Myers made motion to approve the FY20 Sales and Marketing plan. Anita Cereceda seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Pamela Cronin made a motion to approve the FY18-19 fourth quarter budget report. Robert Wells III seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

### **TDC Member Items**

- Lapi wished the TDC a happy Thanksgiving and reminded the TDC about the Tree Lighting ceremony at Tween Waters, 4 p.m. Nov. 29.
- Wells presented Pendergrass with a plaque on behalf of the entire tourism industry, thanking him for his leadership of the TDC the last two years. Pendergrass thanked the council and stated he appreciated working with council members and VCB staff on the various tourism challenges the last two years.
- Waichulis informed the council that Maren Morris, past Island Hopper songwriter, recently won album of the year at the CMA awards. He also encouraged the TDC to use Google Travel as it is a good resource for the industry.
- DePasquale reminded the TDC about FRLA's upcoming Hops for the Holiday event, 6-9 p.m. Dec. 10. The Greater Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce is also having its holiday party, 5:30 - 8:30 p.m. Dec. 3.
- Myers informed the TDC that the Spirit of the Holidays event at DiamondHead Beach Resort is in need of bicycles and auction items.
- Pendergrass updated the TDC that with the departure of Jeff Mulder, Port Authority executive director, deputy director, Ben Siegel, will serve as interim chief.
- Cereceda reminded the TDC about the Fort Myers Beach Christmas Boat Parade, 6 p.m. Dec. 7 and the Mound House anniversary celebration.
- McLain informed the TDC that the Village of Estero has three and a half new hotels being built.
- Cronin updated the TDC on the Shell Factory restaurant rebranding, the progress being made on the outdoor entertainment area, the partnership with the Cacioppo's on the *Players Circle Theatre* coming to the Shell Factory and lastly a 1927 carousel that is being retrofitted for the attraction opening in early Dec.

### **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 10:16 a.m.

### **Next TDC meeting**

The next TDC meeting is at 3 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 12, 2019. The meeting will be held in Room 118, 2201 Second St., Fort Myers, followed by a holiday gathering at The Veranda. To view a complete tax collections report, go to [LeeVCB.com](http://LeeVCB.com). Contact: Tamara Pigott, [TPigott@leegov.com](mailto:TPigott@leegov.com), Lee County VCB, 239-338-3500.