

## NORTHEAST GEORGIA MOUNTAINS TRAVEL ASSOCIATION BOARD MEETING

1888 House and Tumlin House, Dahlonega

Wednesday, May 9, 2018

**Attendees:** Teka Earnhardt, Hilda Thomason, David Zunker, Tobie Chandler, Jerry Brown, Margaret McLean, Vicki Wineland, Cheryl Smith, Vicki Starnes and special guests, Jay Markwalter (GACVB) and Rob Nichols (Lumpkin Co. Chamber President)

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 am by President, Tobie Chandler. David Zunker welcomed the board members and introduced special guests, Jay and Rob.

**Meeting Minutes:** The April Board and general membership meeting minutes were reviewed and approved. Motion to approve was made by Hilda Thomason and seconded by Teka Earnhardt. Minutes will stand as submitted.

**Treasurer's Report:** Teka Earnhardt reported that we are still waiting on three payments from Winter Chautauqua. Tobie has gotten approval for the service charges to be reversed for the 2<sup>nd</sup> account (for petty cash). Once credit is received this account will be reconciled. A motion to approve the treasurer's report was made by David Zunker and seconded by Margaret McLean.

The insurance policy for \$1,244 is due for renewal. Vicki Starnes motioned for approval with a second by Margaret; motion passed.

### **Committee Reports:**

**Education:** Tobie informed that the June webinar educational session being offered to membership will be a video produced by DCA on the topic of "Working with Local Media."

There will be no meeting in July and the next meeting will be held August 8<sup>th</sup> at the Railroad Depot in Lavonia with a program on "Georgia Water Trails".

**Co-Op:** Margaret McLean reported that a meeting is scheduled for May 15<sup>th</sup> for all 2019 Co-op partners to discuss the different media options for next year and that this will move forward quickly. She also stated that she would like to work with Vicki Wineland to consider doing an e-blast to partners of leads generated. Teka requested that Margaret forward the list of the 12 partners in order to be able to invoice from the RTA for their share. Invoices will go out in July, but will not be due until next June. Cheryl requested to be copied on any co-op emails, as well.

Margaret also briefed the group on the special GPB Royal Wedding Watch co-op which will involve 6 days of specials and 2 TV spots per day leading up to the wedding. This is in process of closing out and GPB will bill each partner individually.

Teka updated the group on the Garden and Gun co-op opportunity reporting that Rabun County will be advertising in the summer issue. The price she has negotiated for ¼ page is \$5,200 and she currently has 4 participants. She also just learned that the state has now decided to include Garden and Gun, however, she is proceeding with this advertising buy and anyone interested should let her know. The state will open up their co-op soon, but it's at a higher price.

Tobie recapped that there are three different co-op opportunities currently being coordinated through the Regional Travel Association, which speaks loudly on promoting the region as a whole.

**Membership:** No update

**New Business:** Tobie opened the discussion on expanding the meetings to reach out to others that have not attended for some time and offering for the RTA to pick up their lunch tab. The consensus was this was a great idea and the suggestion was to first engage the DMO's in our travel region, such as Hartwell, Banks, Forsyth, Habersham, Jackson, Barrow, Madison, Stephens, and Dawson. Teka said she would reach out to Alisha in Banks County to invite her. All were in agreement that we need to reach out and invite folks to the Lavonia meeting since it appears that almost 2/3 of the region do not attend the meetings. It was suggested to send out the latest meeting minutes prior to the invitations.

Cheryl also suggested engaging the Georgia Restaurant Assoc. and the Georgia Lodging Assoc. in the future.

It was also suggested that Cheryl begin distributing printed copies again of her latest tourism updates at the meetings with a reminder to read the email version for the links included.

**Unfinished Business:** Vicki Wineland reviewed the three quotes received for reprinting the regional map/**brochures** and will need to get some further clarification on design and shipping charges, then will send this information to the board for a vote via email.

The **website** is in progress and the Rabun intern did not work out for the **RTA Facebook page** so Tobie will get back with Candace regarding this. Vicki Wineland has started the setup.

Tobie mentioned that "Georgia Mountains" is a top search and it was suggested that we inform the membership of the monthly analytic numbers from our website. Vicki pulled up the April numbers and there were 1.9K users, 2.2K sessions with the average session duration of 1.56 minutes. Referrals were 26.32 with the top referral being from Exploregeorgia.org.

Tobie distributed copies of the nomination form created for the **Top of the Mountain Award** and will send Vicki Wineland a digital copy to put on the website and also to send out to membership.

Jay and Rob both expressed their appreciation for being included in the meeting and commended David Zunker on the excellent State of Tourism event held at Montaluce Vineyards last night. David reported that the first annual Tourism Industry Icon award was presented to Bill Hardman, Jr. and plans are to make this an annual award presentation.

Motion made to adjourn the Board meeting and join the gathering membership for lunch and the program. Meeting adjourned at 11:15 am.



## GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

President, Tobie Chandler welcomed the membership attendees to Dahlonega and to National Tourism Week, stating that in 2017 tourism generated a record 63.1 Billion in economic impact. She introduced David Zunker, Tourism Director for Dahlonega, who also welcomed the group and gave an update on Dahlonega's expansive growth, including the \$550,000 renovation to the Gold Museum and all the new lodging and restaurants opening downtown. He thanked Yahoola Grill for catering the lunch today and introduced Jay Markwalter.

Jay Markwalter, Executive Director of the GACVB also commented on the amazing growth just in the last 3 years. Tobie was commended on doing a terrific job as President of the RTA and he noted the great job Cheryl does with the 17 counties in her tourism region. Jay reported he has plans and ideas to expand the GACVB membership and reminded everyone of the importance of attending the Governor's conference at the end of August which will be in Atlanta. He said to embrace what you have and to work as a region to promote tourism and highlighted some of the recent bills passed. The brunch bill has a \$25,000 impact per location and the land stewardship act for outdoor recreation equipment were just a couple he noted. He stated he is going to make sure that tourism is on the GMA city council agendas to help them understand the impact that tourism has and mentioned three important components: Collaboration, Customer Service and Cleanliness.

Owners of the 1881 House, Catherine and Sara Beth briefed the group on the trials and tribulations of restoring the property, noting that the core is history and heritage, but in the end they have a beautiful event venue that has been embraced by the community.

Following presentations and board introductions, Tobie briefed the group on the RTA opportunities to network, inclusion on the website and the regional map/brochure and covered the Google analytics for the month of April. She stated the board works hard to provide the education, networking and co-op advertising opportunities you get by being a part of the travel association.

Tobie thanked Jeff Skelton for his 15 year service to the board and presented him with a gift since he will be moving to Texas and will be greatly missed.

Please mark your calendars for an educational webinar offered on June 13<sup>th</sup>, no July meeting and the August 8<sup>th</sup> meeting in Lavonia at the old Railroad Depot.

Cheryl Smith reiterated the importance to attend the Governors conference since the state will be revamping the Exploregeorgia website and there will be partner admin sessions offered. "Georgia On My Mind" day in Lavonia is May 25<sup>th</sup>. In the future, she will be bringing printed copies of her latest tourism report to distribute, and she is still working on the itinerary for the German writers FAM tour and the Georgia foothills wine trail. Other news: Hartwell is getting a brewery and the Braselton Brewery will be opening in late June. She stated Nancy Palmer is a good contact for anyone interested in breweries.

The meeting concluded at 12:40 pm with the group walking 2 blocks to the Tumlin House for dessert, tour and door prizes.