

NATCHITOCHE PARISH TOURIST COMMISSION  
MONTHLY BOARD MEETING

Natchitoches Arts Center – 710 Second Street

January 28, 2009

5:15 – 6:20 PM

Commissioners Present: Jay Sharplin, Terrel Delphin, Theresa Gibson, Robin Levya, Sissy Harris, Lori Woodard

Commissioners Absent: Rick Seale

Staff Present: Iris Harper, Denise O'Bannon, Latisha McDaniel

Jay Sharplin: Introduction & Welcome Guest: Nick Pollacia, Executive Director with the Chamber of Commerce and Natchitoches Christmas Festival.

Mr. Pollacia thanked the commission for all of their financial assistance this past year with the Christmas Festival. He stated that the recurring revenue that they had previously received from the State of Louisiana was up in the air with the talk of budget cuts.

He reviewed some of the misconceptions regarding the Christmas Festival attendance and 150,000 was not a practical figure. Gate receipts in 2008 totaled \$187,000. This is the most ever made. Nick said you can feasibly put about 35,000 on the downtown riverbank and Front Street area. The expense of running the gates is also costly. Local non-profit and service groups work the gates for their organizations.

Mr. Pollacia talked about the growth of the additional weekends. There is only one day that they charge admission because now the crowds can view the entertainment and fireworks on the alternate weekends. The admission was down in 2008 even with the increase in gate admission.

Mr. Sharplin mentioned if they could charge on the other weekends since the crowds are so large. Mr. Pollacia stated that \$40,000-\$41,000 was spent on the additional weekends and the patron's drive only collected \$14,000-\$15,000. The CF was about \$25,000 short in collecting funds for the alternate weekends.

The CF is the premiere event for the state of Louisiana and to insure this they have been adding funds every year into a rainy day fund and currently have about \$100,000. They do this instead of buying the expensive weather insurance.

They want to have a 'festival in the bank' and one of the reasons they don't have more money is because of the cost of the additional weekends. It is critical this year to have the local support.

The CF budget will be planned earlier this year. It is more than just crunching numbers. Natchitoches has got to deliver a world class show. They will begin an aggressive campaign to get sponsors and fund raising earlier in the year. Mr. Pollacia presented patrons and revenue reports to the commission.

Mrs. Gibson commented that she was glad that the CF was doing this so that organizations know exactly where the CF stands as far as their revenue. Mrs. Gibson also congratulated that the Festival and fireworks were the best she had ever seen. The crowds were very good at night and she commended the gate keepers for doing so well.

Additional discussion followed in regards to fireworks, etc. Mr. Delphin asked what the crowd estimate was for 2<sup>nd</sup> weekend. Mr. Pollacia stated that there was no way to track attendance. Mr. Sharplin asked about any plans for additional revenue? Mr. Pollacia stated that the CF will be more aggressive especially with accommodations and merchants in seeking donations. It is an event that everyone should share the fun, the profit and the expense.

Mr. Sharplin asked about fund raising efforts similar to DU and it would help if Nick personally visited the hotel properties to ask for contributions.

Mr. Pollacia stated he would be keeping the TC updated in regards to possibly charging for the extra weekends.

Ms. Harper read the Mission Statement. *The mission of the Natchitoches Area Convention & Visitors Bureau is to provide leadership in initiating and coordinating the worldwide marketing of Natchitoches Parish as a highly desirable vacation and meeting destination; to solicit and service meeting and other group-related business; and to engage in visitor promotions which generate overnight stays in Natchitoches Parish, thereby enhancing and developing the economic fabric of the community.*

MINUTES: Mr. Sharplin noted everyone had received the minutes from the December 16, 2008 meeting and asked for any corrections or changes and for a motion to approve.

MOTION: Theresa Gibson made a motion to approve the minutes. Sissy Harry second. Motion passed. No discussion.

FINANCIALS: Current assets as of December 31, 2008; Exchange Bank Checking Account \$10,249.27; AG Edwards MMA; \$16,490.13; Certificates of Deposit total \$65,464.15.

Outstanding Account Receivables total \$1,895. Current assets are \$94,098.55 for the month ending December 31, 2008.

Occupancy collections for December were \$40,364.44 after administrative fees; an increase of \$8,733.22 or 21.636% over same month in 2007. Other receipts included reimbursements; \$900.90 and \$12.49 in interest. Receipts received in December totaled \$41,277.83.

Ms. Harper reviewed December expenses that totaled \$51,595.71. Advertising/Marketing expenses for December 2008 were \$31,397.31. We paid \$10,000 for our participation in the Epcot Promotion and prepaid \$5,000 for our Louisiana North partnership.

Mr. Sharplin asked for a motion to approve the December financial reports.

MOTION: Motion to approve the financial report made by Terrell Delphin; second by Lori Woodward. Motion passed. No further discussion.

#### DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

Ms. Harper asked the commission to review the various reports. Ms. Harper noted that she had been appointed Secretary/Treasurer for the Louisiana North Coalition.

Public relations activity for 2007 totaled almost 5.5 million dollars. Activity was down in 2007 for walk-ins at the Visitor Center due to the construction on Front Street. Construction was finished in mid November and activity did pick up in December.

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

**BOARD ELECTIONS:** Mr. Delphin made a motion to nominate the current slate of officers for another year. Robin Levy second. Motion approved. The following officers agreed to serve through January 2010:

Chairman: Jay Sharplin

Vice-Chairman: Lori Woodard

Treasurer: Theresa Gibson

Ms. Harper asked the commissioners to please get the Code of Ethics form back to the office.

After speaking with several local professionals, a simple individual retirement account was the best option for the TC. Anything over a 3% contribution would require a plan administrator and fees. The TC had budgeted 6% for contributions. Ms. Harper asked the board where she should put the additional funds that had been budgeted. Mr. Sharplin wanted the funds put in a line item for performance bonuses. Criteria to meet certain goals to qualify for the bonus will be established by a committee. Committee was not appointed.

**NEW BUSINESS:** Ms. Harper noted that a right side property on Highway 6 had been located if the board was interested in reviewing. She also suggested that if this wasn't the perfect location that the board may consider putting aside funds each year into a Building Fund.

Mr. Sharplin said this didn't seem like the ideal property. He reviewed the upgrades we had made for the staff and if we had a bad year we should have funds in a contingency fund and not over extend the finances. As the organization grows he does not want the budget paying for mortgages, rent, etc but to continue using the bulk of our money for advertising and marketing.

Ms. Gibson stated there are other alternatives that we most likely will need to address. Mr. Delphin mentioned that Natchitoches has not felt the ripple effect in the economic downturn and most likely will in the coming months.

## COMMENTS:

**FEBRUARY MEETING:** February 17, 2009 followed by the annual tourism forum from 6:00 – 7:00 PM at the Natchitoches Arts Center.

**MOTION TO ADJOURN:** Terrel Delphin made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:20 pm.

Minutes transcribed by Iris Harper.