

## **Abingdon Tourism Advisory Committee Meeting – Tuesday, October 2, 2018**

Present: Chris Cannon, Neta Farmer, Hannah Hietala (for David Matlock), Cindy Patterson (Town Council), Lisa Quigley, Kathy Shearer, Aaron Watkins (for Kalonn Roberts), Janet Woolwine.

Guests: George Brewer, Callie Hietala, Lindsey Keen, Cathy Lowe, Kate Michel, Samir Patel, Tonya Triplett.

Tourism Staff: Jayne Duehring, Amanda Livingston, Sara Saavedra

Meeting called to order at 3:05 pm.

**Location:** Virginia Highlands Small Business Incubator

**Approval of Minutes** – motion by Lisa Quigley, second by Neta Farmer, approved.

### **Website Presentation: The need, the trends, the strategy**

Marketing Manager, Amanda Livingston, presented the support research for our new website design. We are still on schedule to launch late November 2018.

- Last website launched in 2013 – we’ve had several hacking incidents, format out of date, not optimized for mobile users who represent 52% of our traffic.
- New website will focus on content marketing – “People don’t search for brands. They search for answers.” Information will be visitor-centric - available within 1 – 2 clicks – this recognizes the diminished attention span (8 seconds) of an adult.
- Strategy: Responsive design, content marketing, inspiration over information, shareable.

Amanda challenged everyone to visit <https://www.wandernorthgeorgia.com/>. What are they selling?

Discussion followed:

Partners urged to keep their sites updated – our site will provide links to theirs, pay attention to your photos, Google information

Update your events and photos on Virginia.org – events feed to ACVB website and will feed to new Friends of SWVA website

ACVB website will utilize Trip Advisor ratings – discussion followed about the effectiveness of “peer” reviews. Trip Advisor ratings add credibility to our partners and to Abingdon.

There are opportunities for guest blog writers – Donna Marie Emmert’s recent blog on most haunted places in Abingdon.

### **Best Practices/Shining Example**

Sara Saavedra, shared a report from Monica Hall in group sales. SWVA Higher Ed Center did an outstanding job as a venue for the US Tours Legends Tour. Monica presented the opportunity and the Higher Ed Center carried out all the details. They did such a great job that they are the ONLY venue that the tour is revisiting in 2019 AND the tour was so impressed that they have booked Barter Theatre for a second Abingdon venue in 2019.

On average it takes three years to win a new tour. All that advance work can be erased quickly by not delivering great customer service. Abingdon CVB works to attract visitors – leisure, group and business – hospitality of partners and the overall Abingdon experience are what wins them over and keeps them coming back.

### **Staff Reports**

**Marketing – Media Highlights** Abingdon has been fortunate to have gotten better than average earned media coverage in the past month –

Smoky Mountain Living, Virginia Living, Our State, CityView, Northern Virginia Magazine and a mention in USA Today about our lodging partners offered discounted rates for Florence evacuees.

## **Events –**

80's Block Party a success – saw an estimated 2,000 people. Restaurants saw great sales. Will repeat in 2019. Crowd shot photo taken by Rubik's Groove attached.

Sara attended International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA) conference – made great contacts with other venues and “sampled” some new bands and artists.

January Jams – anticipate announcing 2019 line up soon. Performances scheduled for January 11, 12, 18, 19, 25, 26.

## **Roundtable**

Tonya Triplett – Abingdon's Yard Sale went well – anticipate repeating next year. Need to improve communication and map to make it easier for folks to get to sites. Christmas Activities – Barter Holiday Hustle and Merchant Open House scheduled for November 19. A rack card with highlights will be inserted into Barter souvenir programs. Washington County Business Challenge applications are now being accepted. \$32k in cash and services offered to winners. For more information <http://www.washingtonvachamber.org/programs/businessChallenge.aspx>

Kathy Shearer – HMA Harvest Festival – October 6, 10 am – 4 pm. Kathy also reported on HMA's successful partnership with the Roads Scholar Program.

George Brewer – this is his 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of moving to Abingdon. George shared the great experience of having 5 families fleeing Florence stay at Country Inn & Suites.

Cindy Patterson – thanked all partners for all they do to make Abingdon a vital destination.

Chris Cannon – They conducted regional meetings and conducted an online survey as part of a Strategic Planning process – eager to synthesize feedback and present a plan. Friends of SWVA has assumed operations of Round the Mountain – excited to re-engage artisans who are expressing enthusiasm for a renewed organization. Heartwood contracted with Gen Edge consultants to evaluate business model. Results and action plan will be formed by December. Melissa Mullins – hired as Director of Cultural Heritage. December 5 – first ever Christmas Tree lighting 3 pm – 5:30 pm. Jenna Wagner, marketing, will be joining VTC on an NYC media mission. She will pitch three topics: SWVA outdoors, music and arts & crafts.

Aaron Watson (for Kalonn Roberts) – Barter Fall Season in full swing. Announced Christmas season line up and Holiday Hustle event on November 19.

Neta Farmer – Washington County Tourism Committee meeting scheduled for October 11, 9am at the Chamber Offices. Reminded of the ongoing photo contest – opportunity for one photo to be featured on the cover of the new Washington County map. Chamber breakfast scheduled for October 18 at 7:30 at Higher Ed Center. Sheriff Fred Newman is the speaker.

## **Miscellaneous**

Farmer's Market tracked a 42% increase in traffic the same Saturday at the Town Wide Yard Sale. Community events help the Farmer's Market.

Janet Woolwine – asked how many bicycle wheels have been decorated for the Urban Pathway at this point.

Kate Michel – please check out the Komen on the Creeper Event scheduled for October 27. Not only is this event for a good cause, it brings visitors from out of town. Help make it a success by giving, running or cheering.

Jayne will check on TAC membership list to see the best way to secure a seat for William King on the TAC committee.