

Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Humboldt Lodging Alliance, meeting Wednesday, November 19, 2014 at the Hampton Inn & Suites, Arcata, California

Present: Mike Caldwell, Chris Ambrosini, Marc Rowley, John Porter, Donna Hufford, Gary Stone, Lowell Daniels, Tony Smithers

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 pm. The minutes of the last meeting (September 2014) were reviewed and approved (Porter/Caldwell/unanimous).

As the first order of business, the committee discussed a request from the Trinidad Chamber of Commerce for permission to use HLA-commissioned video of the Clam Beach Run in its off season promotional campaign funded with HLA community tourism funds. John Porter said with regards to use of HLA video: "The more the merrier," to which Gary Stone agreed. Marc Rowley cautioned that there needs to be an official process for granting permission to use HLA content. Lowell Daniels warned that we don't always know who is profiting from the promotion and the content we allow to be used. Mike Caldwell stated his agreement with all the points being made. Chris Ambrosini then suggested that Trinidad be granted permission as a one-time deal, but that the HLA then needs to develop an official policy and procedure for content use. The committee agreed, and staff was directed to place this item on next month's agenda.

Next, the financial statement for October, 2014 was presented for the committee's inspection. In discussion, John Porter asked why no community tourism funds had been expended in Ferndale, to which Lowell Daniels replied that negotiations were under way to fund a Ferndale visitors center. Mr. Porter then moved to accept the October statement; Marc Rowley seconded and the vote was unanimous.

The HLA sponsored ad in the 101 Publications' in-room directory was then reviewed and discussed. Marc Rowley wondered whether the ad needed to say that the HLA welcomes you—Gary Stone said that less is more. Lowell Daniels suggested taking off the gold lettering at the bottom of the ad. Mr. Gregg Gardiner of 101 Publications was present and he expressed his willingness to make any alterations the committee desired. The purpose and structure of the guide was reiterated for the committee, and Lowell Daniels gave it a strong vote of confidence as relates to his own property. John Porter moved to accept the ad with modifications as noted (removal of gold lettering); Lowell Daniels seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Next a report was given by Ann Anderson on Humboldt Restaurant Week, which had received HLA funding for outside promotion. She began by saying that the event itself was considered a roaring success. Now in its third year, it had grown to 32 participating restaurants from Trinidad to Garberville, and for the first time the event was managed by a nonprofit organization (Locally Delicious). The total advertising budget (including HLA's \$5,373) was \$10,000. Some of the trackable metrics were 6,500 website visits and some 125,000 Facebook views, however, Anderson admitted that tracking of participation from people outside the county was weak. She was uncertain about the direction the event and the HLA should take next year, suggesting that perhaps it could be wrapped up in a larger agri-tourism promotion to get greater traction.

Lowell Daniels and John Porter responded, saying that while they did not feel the event was a large destination draw, it was still a very well run event and did well in exposing local residents to the range of Humboldt dining experiences. Gary Stone was also highly complimentary of the event. John Porter said that recurring events grow over time, and the door was kept open for future participation by HLA.

Following this, a presentation and funding request was made by Dave Feral of Mad River Alliance, for promotion of Humboldt Steelhead Days. He was joined by a representative of California Trout, the event's other major organizer. Mr. Feral described the event's history (beginning as the Mad River Steelhead Days, mostly in Blue Lake), and of the organizers' plans to expand this into a countywide fishing event. He stated that California Trout has 9,000 members who would be very interested in travelling to such an event. He also detailed much of the groundwork he had done in lining up event hosts, sponsors and other participants. The committee expressed some concern about the event being too focused on Blue Lake and the participation of Blue Lake Casino; Mr. Feral countered that this year's planned event will expand to the Eel River, and that it is still in the growth stage. After an interruption for the Misfit presentation (next item), the discussion with Mr. Feral continued. Ultimately, Lowell Daniels moved to grant the event \$3,500 by way of encouragement, and the motion was seconded by Gary Stone. The motion passed, but not unanimously.

Then the committee participated in a webinar with Matt Kolbert of the Misfit agency, in which he led them through the agency's initial work toward redefinition of the Humboldt County brand. Kolbert's presentation detailed much of their competitive analysis, examining how Humboldt's competing destinations position themselves in the marketplace, and what they say about themselves. His analysis revealed an open space in the marketing channels—that of a destination which stresses “unplugging” over plugging in to its activities, and which focuses on the visitor and the experience/values he takes home with him, rather than on the destination and all of its attributes. Then, the exercise went on to track the “voice” or archetype with which our competitors communicate. Several potential archetypes were discarded as already being crowded by other brands. The remaining archetypes in consideration were “rebel” and “magician” and Mr. Kolbert provided some sample positioning statements for each of these. When the choice was put to the committee, they chose Magician (Daniels/Caldwell/unanimous). Mr. Kolbert said that this was the choice he recommended as well.

The meeting adjourned at 3:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Tony Smithers