

**Minutes of the Executive Committee
Humboldt Lodging Alliance meeting
Wednesday, April 13, 2016
Red Lion Hotel, Eureka, California**

Present were Lowell Daniels, Cari Shafer, Donna Hufford, Chris Ambrosini, Gary Stone, John Porter and Mike Caldwell with Tony Smithers taking notes.

Guests: David Lippman, Dave Feral, Don Banducci, Mary and Tracy, Matt Kolbert, Cameron Tyler

The meeting was called to order at 12:05 pm, and began with a welcome of Cari Shafer who had been recently appointed to the Executive Committee. Introductions were made by all.

The minutes of the March meeting were examined and approved (Porter/Shofer/Unanimous), and the agenda for the April meeting was approved as is (Caldwell/Shofer/Unanimous).

Under Action Items, the first order of business was a follow up report from the organizers of Humboldt Steelhead Days, which had received an HLA grant of nearly \$40,000 for the 2016 event. David Lippman began with a brief history of the event, and identified the major goals and attributes of the event as:

- To increase shoulder season tourism based on a “natural strength”
- To provide an exceptional experience for anglers
- Slogan: “Fish the Peak of the Run”
- Humboldt is becoming known not just for its fishing, but for education about Steelhead
- A diversity of events appeals to many interests
- The out of town audience at the event is steadily growing
- With HLA funding they printed 8,000 brochures for the event and distributed them all over Northern California, including counter displays at 49 fishing outfitters.
- Don Banducci personally visited 19 fishing shops in Northern California to deliver the counter displays and get them excited about Steelhead Days.
- The organizers conducted targeted internet outreach with 30,000 plus reached on Facebook.
- The public relations effort included invitations to 26 fishing and outdoor journalists.
- “Where there’s fish there will be people.”
- “The Eel River is back” (as a productive fishery)

Reporting on the actual outcomes of this year’s event, the organizers had to report that the El Nino weather pattern created a significant, negative impact on Steelhead fishing. “The fishing was not good, but all of the other events went on,” they said.

For next year, the organizers are proposing to extend the event from December through March and to expand the diversity of activities, such as offering Nature Tours. They are considering promotion angles such as “invite a friend” and “play local, stay local.” There was also some discussion on the distinction between fly fishermen and tackle fishermen.

John Porter suggested that the event could incorporate river touring; Dave Feral agreed and added that a “river restoration” tour would be interesting and popular. Don Banducci said the expanded event could have broad focus on local food, art and nature in addition to fishing.

Gary Stone asked whether they had tracked hotel stays for event participants, and also wondered whether they had considered offering prize money to boost participation. They had not specifically tracked hotels, they said. About 1,500 people had participated in the various Steelhead Days activities, most of whom were local residents. Cari Shafer suggested that applications for fishing licenses could be used to track out of county participants.

Chris Ambrosini asked the event organizers to provide a list of other cash contributors to the Steelhead Days. “It has got to be about bringing out of towners to Humboldt County” he said. Dave Feral replied that 80% of the HLA funding was spent on event promotion, most of which was out of county. Don Banducci said that they absolutely understand the mission of “heads in beds.” Lowell Daniels added that the HLA and the partners it funds “must focus on Return On Investment to the hotels; nothing else matters.” Gary Stone asked the organizers whether they were going to wean themselves off of HLA support for Steelhead Days. Don Banducci answered: “We can’t promise that, but we hope to do so.” Dave Feral added that by diversifying the event they expect to bring in more support from others.

John Porter concluded by saying: “The direction of this event is right. It fits our mission and we know it takes time to establish an event. But at the same time, the rubber has to meet the road.” Don Banducci responded with a suggestion to form an ad hoc group of HLA board members and Steelhead Days organizers to flesh ideas out.

Next on the agenda was a Marketing Campaign Report presented by Matt Kolbert and Cameron Tyler of the Misfit Agency. Mr. Kolbert began by announcing that the Humboldt Lodging Alliance’s “Follow the Magic” campaign had been honored by the advertising industry, first taking home six “gold” awards in the Sacramento area awards, and then garnering four gold awards at the regionals (all of Bay Area/Northern California). These awards are not industry specific though the HLA campaign did beat out other travel and destination brands with much larger budgets, Kolbert said.

Reporting on new campaign developments, Kolbert first of all showed the committee the two cable television 30-second spots that were aired for three weeks in early April on Comcast Sports. There was a discussion about which specific games during which the HLA ads appeared, with Kolbert explaining that the agency was carefully tracking how different sports teams were doing in their respective leagues in order to maximize viewership, and also that the agency had secured tremendous “value-added” or free spots during the first campaign week. For example, we paid for three spots during Giants games but received 19 spots; we paid for 2 spots during Warriors games and received 5. Additionally, campaign related “ticker” and “linescore” messages were included during Giants games as value-added. Chris Ambrosini wondered whether the “VisitHumboldt.com” URL was on screen long enough, and asked whether the agency would develop different creative for added placements (yes).

Kolbert went on to discuss other campaign elements, including the very large two-page ad in the San Francisco Chronicle and the ongoing digital advertising spend. The agency was developing three new

“pre-roll” videos for the digital campaign that are creatively tied to the TV ads, he said. They are planning a smaller video shoot in June to capture more footage.

Chris Ambrosini asked what his suggestion was for reaching females and kids through television. Kolbert said that female viewership of basketball games is surprisingly strong. Kolbert also reported that the agency’s estimate of creative costs for the Weekend Sherpa advertising was reduced to half of what was originally anticipated, leaving a \$14,000 credit to be applied elsewhere.

Gary Stone said “I’m only concerned with what works. If something works, we should reinvest in it. That is why tracking of this campaign is so important.” Kolbert said that it is still too early to get a meaningful tally of website traffic—we need to wait 90 days. However, the agency can obtain the ratings report for the programs during which we advertised; this will be forwarded to the agency subcommittee, he said. One initial metric was 30,000 unique visitors to VisitHumboldt.com during March, he said.

The committee extended its compliments to Kolbert and his team. Kolbert said we should consider redoing what works in the Fall. Gary Stone asked whether the agency had any more thoughts about some of the “guerilla marketing” ideas presented previously, such as the full-size redwood tree projected onto a building or the small doorway on a busy street somewhere. Kolbert said that they like using the door as an in-market feature—it is in the video content and could be replicated throughout the county as a campaign tie-in. As for the projected redwood, they had looked into it and the price tag was in the hundreds of thousands.

Next on the agenda, the committee heard a brief report from Tony Smithers about the Prop 26 legal challenge to tourism marketing districts, with the lawsuit pending in San Diego County. The Cal Travel organization was working with Civitas, Inc. to mount a defense of TMDs, and was requesting a contribution from TMDs to help with this. The committee agreed that the Humboldt Lodging Alliance will contribute \$1,000 to Cal Travel for this purpose (Porter/Caldwell/unanimous).

Then the committee discussed and approved signing a letter of engagement with Civitas, Inc. for technical assistance in renewal of the Humboldt County Tourism Business Improvement District, with the provision that Civitas will limit its costs wherever possible (Daniels/Porter/unanimous). Tony Smithers said that renewal costs can be contained by limiting the amount of travel to Humboldt County that Civitas incurs, and he was directed to communicate this to the company.

Next, the committee considered a funding request from the Ferndale Chamber of Commerce for help in presenting their 2016 “Ferndale Concours on Main” event, a Concours d’Elegance event of classic sports cars. Lowell Daniels reported that the celebrity judges were already committed, and the chamber was developing a slick event magazine, trophies and a goody bag for participants. “This fits the mission of new events that bring in people from out of town,” Daniels said. After discussion, the committee approved a grant of \$10,000 from Opportunity Marketing Funds (Porter/Shafer/unanimous). Gary Stone advised that in future years the event should be moved from Labor Day weekend, when hotels are already full.

Next the committee discussed the 2016 HLA board elections, appointed Chris Ambrosini and Cari Shafer to a nominating committee, and directed staff to send out a notice to HLA assessed businesses inviting their nominations for board service.

Tony Smithers then presented the March, 2016 financial statement containing no unusual surprises, with the committee's approval quickly granted (Porter/Shafer/unanimous). The distribution of the Follow the Magic front desk kit was briefly discussed, and Matt Kolbert was requested to provide links to the campaign TV spots.

Finally, Smithers updated on planning for the Humboldt Concierge Training, beginning the following week, and requested approval for purchasing canvas tote bags with the HLA logo to use in the program (all within the grant funds already approved). This approval was given.

With no further time, the meeting adjourned at 2:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Tony Smithers