

**Maryland Tourism Development Board Business Meeting Minutes**  
**Wednesday, January 28, 2015 @ 11:30a.m.**  
**Loews Annapolis Hotel-Powerhouse Building, Annapolis, MD 21401**

**Call to Order/Roll Call**

MTDB: Delegate Wendell Beitzel, John Fieseler, Alice Lloyd, Dave Meloy, Matt Neitzey, Wini Roche, Heather Renz, Greg Shockley, Victor Sulin, Vira Safai, Judy Bixler, Anthony Cohen, Patricia Heffelfinger, Bunkie Ebersberger MDMO: Lisa Challenger, Connie Del Signore, Sandy Turner, Cassandra Vanhooser, Tim Morgan, Kelly Groff, Dan Spedden, Rachelina Bonacci EDC: David Reel, Kevin Atticks, Ross Peddicord, Deborah Carter, Terry Hasseltine DBED: Margot Amelia, Hannah Byron, Chanda Miller, Marci Ross, Liz Fitzsimmons, Lucy Chittenden, Diana Chen, Greg Bird, Bill Pencek, Heather Ersts

Guests: Frank DiVenti-Annapolis & A.A County CVB; David Melnick, Alex Ferrari, Ron Thompson-Siquis

Hannah Byron, former Assistant Secretary of the Department of Tourism, Film & the Arts bid farewell to everyone and advised Bill Pencek would be at the helm as Acting Assistant Secretary.

Board chair Greg Shockley welcomed everyone then introduced Connie Del Signore, and thanked her for hosting the board meeting. Greg also mentioned that Heather Ersts, who was in attendance, was now Partnership and Outreach Coordinator for OTD.

**Welcome – Connie Del Signore, Anne Arundel County Tourism**

Connie welcomed everyone and mentioned the excitement of legislative session being underway. Connie also mentioned advocacy for tourism during session and that it was especially important to engage newly elected officials.

**Board Member Comments/Highlights (not all inclusive)**

Judy Bixler-Talbot County has a number of anniversaries this year including the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum and the Tilghman Island Museum will be opening with a soft opening this spring and then a grand opening in the fall.

Anthony Cohen – Things are going well-no new news to report.

John Fieseler –Optimistic about a great year ahead. The hotel market for 2014 saw a demand increase of about 6.5 percent. The ADR (Average Daily Rate) is still off which John attributes to the loss of many federal rooms the year before because of sequestration during which time rates went up. There's a continuing push ahead for a full-service Downtown Marriott.

Vira Safai – All is well at the hotel and they are proud of Visit Montgomery and their marketing efforts.

Heather Renz – 2014 was a pretty big year-there was positive gain-looking forward to a good 2015. Ruth's Chris is celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.

Bunkie Ebersberger- is excited to work with the new Governor, Mike Busch and Steve Schuh on the campaign for counteracting heroin overdoses. The MGM Grand is on schedule and should be operational in two years.

Wini Roche – will be tourism manager for two more days and is also serving as interim director for Visit Harford. There is now a hotel tax that is 100 percent dedicated to tourism activities. Details are being hammered out about how the money will be divided, funding the DMO and enhancing tourism. Wini has been coordinating tourism day for MTC and over one hundred people have registered to attend, fifty legislators have RSVP'd and the Lt. Governor and Comptroller will attend and make remarks.

Alice Lloyd-CNN covered the crab drop on New Year's Eve and was also covered by Travel & Leisure, The Baltimore Sun, Washington Post and Huffington Post and the local Salisbury station. Five thousand people viewed the video of the crab drop. They are beginning to prep for Restaurant Week which is in March.

Trish Heffelfinger– The Maryland SoccerPlex received an honor from the Sports Turf Managers Association. The stadium field was awarded professional soccer field of the year by the association. They are in slow period in the winter and finishing the last two fields.

Matt Neitzey-the county has been engaged in brand research for the past several years. There is media placement at the airport and Metrorail. They also have a new mobile app-Explore Prince George's.

### **Chairman's Report**

Ocean City is getting ready for the next season. The Dew Tour won't be returning but has done its job for Ocean City for the four years it was there. Lower gas prices and good weather would mean a very good summer for Ocean City. School start date is continuing and gaining momentum. The Comptroller has made it one of his three priorities this session. Dave Reel has also been remarkable and very active in keeping stakeholders informed through meetings. Tourism is seen as a viable industry and has had success. This year's proposed budget for MTDB is one of the largest ever and is very fair. Greg urged attendees to continue to advocate and educate legislators especially new ones about tourism. Greg informed everyone that in their binders is an update on board terms. Greg remarked at the end of the meeting that OTD employees are effective and outstanding.

### **Executive Director's Report**

Margot pointed to the Advocacy Plan in the binders which was updated at the strategic retreat in September and we'll probably go over it at the next meeting. It references recommendations that the board made for a long-term strategic plan not unlike the one Virginia just did with Price-Waterhouse where it's a year-long process and a consultant goes out across the state and works with tourism stakeholders to build the tourism development plan so that there is a roadmap of success for both state and private investors but with a rather substantial process. Margot recommended that if the board is funded at the level the governor has proposed, that it would behoove the board to commit to that funding for Fiscal '16 and proceed with that plan. She understands from Bill's conversations with new leadership at DBED that the item is very interesting to the Hogan Administration. As for the board term chart there are two people including Greg who are term-limited. Governor O'Malley did not make any reappointments in his last year and left available slots for the new administration to fill. Margot suggested that all other board members send a note to express interest in continuing board term if interested. With regard to advocacy Margot urged everyone to continue to reinforce how important the tourism budget is. Margot presented the budget which is also included in hard copy form in meeting binders. Margot mentioned the need to re-print materials in FY 15 because of the new Governor and suggested that perhaps the board can educate administrations that it isn't necessary to put the Governor's name on everything and in particular advertising.

After the budget presentation, Margot then turned the presentation over to Siquis staff David Melnick, Ron Thompson and Alex Ferrari to walk everyone through the proposed new marketing campaign. The Siquis team discussed travel trends and stated that people are now looking for experiential travel opportunities, culinary, multi-generational, and authentic experiences. The team presented the Spoil All 5 Senses campaign in print format and played a rough TV spot for the group. Ron Thompson of

Siquis mentioned that next steps included finalizing the copy for the DMO tool-kit to be presented at the next MDMO meeting and then campaign roll-out once finalized.

Margot stated she would be happy to share the finalized creative once the board gives its stamp of approval for it. Following Siquis' presentation and after several questions and comments, Greg asked for a vote from the board on the creative to which all were in favor of.

### **Staff updates:**

Liz Fitzsimmons-working hard to get campaigns done, Destination MD was out by January 21<sup>st</sup>. Public Relations staff has been traveling to keep pace and increasing its public relations coverage for the state. Staff has been working to make sure listings on the database are correct.

Lucy Chittenden-played video regarding the new website and provided some screen shots of the website showing various images consumers will see. The website will feature a new mapping calendar and a new social media hub and images that will work well with the new creative. A tourism industry website will also be built for industry professional and will house research and reports, and the green certification application. Seasonal sweepstakes Nov. /Dec. included shopping in Berlin, a two night stay at a hotel and other items was put together by Lisa Challenger. webDAM is a digital assets management system and is searchable storage for images. Kathi Ash will be reaching out to DMO's to ask for images.

Marci Ross -the current grant term has been extended by 6 months. FY 15 funds can be used from last July through the end of the calendar year. After the end of this calendar year the term will go back to a 12 month term which will go from January 1-Dec. 31 to give DMO's 12 months to make marketing decisions with their grant funds. Welcome Centers are operating 5 days a week, phones are ringing off the hook from a call center standpoint with people waiting for the new Destination Maryland guide. From a product development standpoint, the Civil War has one more commemoration in Maryland focusing on the end of the war, Lincoln's legacy and Maryland's story of how the Union chased John Wilkes Booth from Washington, through Maryland into Virginia. Working on unique promotion to get the word out. Commemoration starts the beginning of April; a new and final appter with John Wilkes Booth Escape of the Assassin story. After 15 years of work we finally have a historical National Park dedicated to Harriett Tubman in Maryland and in New York. Heather Ersts is transitioning from War of 1812 efforts into a full-time Partnership and Outreach role that will begin July 1 as War of 1812 work is being shut down. Legacy products will be transitioned to Anne Kyle, Product Development Manager, and likely she and Bill will wrap up and finalize the work. Over the next several months Heather and Marci will collectively reach out to people to understand what the industry needs from a partnership and outreach standpoint. Sportmen's Marketing Initiative has several objectives which are chronologically driven. The steering committee has conducted an amazing amount of research and they are in the process of launching a website and once that has been done the committee will complete and finalize everything to conclude at the end of the grant term which is June 30th. A logo for Fish & Hunt Maryland was presented to the group. OTD will continue to provide technical assistance to stakeholders to make sure our investment is protected leveraged and amplified moving forward.

Bill Pencek-Bill had one-on-one meetings with Acting Secretary Mike Gill who will be sworn in February, and Ben Wu who will serve as Deputy Secretary. Bill informed the group that he is Acting Assistant Secretary, and that there will most likely be a re-organization in DBED but it is not likely to affect the Division of Tourism Film & the Arts which is recognized as a high-performing, functioning unit. The budget news all around was pretty good. Margot mentioned the table showing board terms and informed the group that the deadline for the Governor to submit Greenbag appointments is February 22<sup>nd</sup>. Bill encouraged board members interested in remaining on the board to submit letters to the Governor's office ASAP. DBED as a whole is facing an additional 1 million dollars in cuts through action of the Board of Public Works back in December, and then an additional 2 percent from the FY 16 budget, which will be left up to the Secretary. Though not yet final, preliminary indications are that DTFA will be held harmless in FY 15 and FY 16 because of the dings we've already experienced. Bill

has reached out to Secretary Gill for him to meet with the Executive Committee of the board to introduce himself and he has been invited to Tourism Day and given the next board meeting date to which an invitation has been extended for him to attend.

### **Executive Directors Council and DMOs (brief summary – not all-inclusive)**

Ross Peddicord- overwhelmed with the activity and energy which is going on in the horse industry. There is a record number of riding stables in the state-there are 760 which is 200 more than when he started four years ago. There are 35 horse discovery centers in 15 counties where people can learn about horses. There will be a statewide scavenger hunt in April.

Tim Morgan-activities for Lincoln 150 "On the Trail of the Assassin" will be held April 17-19 additional activities are planned for the latter part of Fiscal 15.

Dan Spedden-has been Washington County DMO for almost six months. Senator Mikulski's office called to ask that he go to Washington to meet with the Department of the Interior executives to draft legislation for a Civil War Welcome Center. The minor league baseball franchise is celebrating its 35th year and a huge summer of events is being planned around that. The Historic Maryland Theatre turns 100 this year. Gathland State Park in Washington County is relevant to the John Wilkes Booth story.

Kevin Atticks-Maryland Tourism Coalition is re-inventing itself. It has been a volunteer board for the last two years and we've had phenomenal volunteers such as Wini who has been coordinating Tourism Day. It is set up to be a phenomenal Tourism Day. Tourism Day is a great way to lobby and get to know delegates and senators and tell your story. Has new position as Executive Director of Maryland Breweries Association. The wineries and breweries are working on marketing initiatives easing the laws to do more events. There's a lot of work to do with the Breweries Association with marketing beer trails and to do what the wineries have done and a lot of what wineries haven't thought of doing. They are different markets but there is a lot of overlap.

Deb Carter- serves as chair of the Maryland Tourism Education Foundation which is alive and well. A newsletter will be sent electronically at the beginning of February. Scholarship applications will be sent at that time. Roseanne Souza is the Executive Director. Regarding the Maryland Association of Campgrounds business is incredible. There aren't enough campgrounds in the state to fulfill the demands. They won best directory nationally for a small association in Las Vegas in November. Deb went to Capitol Hill at the US House of Representatives representing campgrounds in the country and an electronic campfire was held on Capitol Hill. Deb also had an opportunity to visit HUD in Washington, DC which distributed a memo on how they determined what a RV was and which would have had enormous impact across the country and there was enough support from around the country which led to HUD rescinding the memo. There have been 32 consecutive months of increased production for shipment of RV's, motorcoaches being the largest part of that.

Cassandra Vanhooser- coming up on a two year anniversary as Tourism Director for Talbot County. She was a travel writer previously. Talbot County has been undergoing a major brand restructuring. Their new look is in the new Destination Maryland guide and reflects their new website. They have thousands of new images and rebuilt their photo library. Please that they are mirroring much of what is going on with OTD with respect to re-branding.

David Reel-two signature events are held by the MD Lodging Association each year-an annual golf outing and an annual stars of the industry awards event which recognizes people from bell-person of the year to GM of the year and will be held February 24<sup>th</sup>. One of their top three priorities is post Labor Day school start- optimistic legislation will pass. Another issue is funding for which they will stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the tourism industry. Online travel companies don't always tell people that when they collect a guest fee at the end of a stay, they don't remit the full sales tax to the state. Online travel companies consider it a service fee and not a tax. The general assembly has been approached to advise them that it is a tax that needs to be remitted to the state. The Maryland Hotel & Lodging Association is becoming more involved at the local level due in part to the increased

number of charter counties which address the issues that impact the lodging industry. Their board of directors has expanded their mission statement to get involved at the local level.

Rachelina Bonnacci-funding has increased by 15 percent; a new visitors guide will be arriving on doorsteps shortly. Welcome Center has been a success; a satellite center has been added in Savage. There are now conversations to add a Welcome center in Columbia overlooking the lake.

Lisa Challenger-an outfit that wants to build an indoor ice-skating/hockey arena with outdoor fields has been in serious talks with the county because they saw that the Dew Tour was held in Ocean City. They have a really strong shore craft beer initiative that includes all of the craft breweries in the Eastern Shore as well as Sussex County and Kent County Delaware. It's really picking up momentum and the whole initiative is to try to get folks familiar with all of the craft breweries and to try to get the restaurants to serve the beers and to do more tastings and pairings.

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business to come before the Board, upon a motion duly made, seconded and unanimously approved, the meeting was declared adjourned.