

**Maryland Tourism Development Board Business Meeting Minutes**  
**Thursday, January 30, 2014 @ 10:30a.m.**  
**Annapolis & Anne Arundel County Conference & Visitors Bureau, Senator Astle Room**  
**Annapolis, MD 21401**

**Call to Order/Roll Call**

MTDB: Delegate Wendell Beitzel, John Fieseler, Alice Lloyd, Dave Meloy, Matt Neitzey, Wini Roche, Kathy Sher, Greg Shockley, Victor Sulin. MDMO: Donna Abbott, Connie Del Signore, Cassandra Vanhooser, Tom Riford. DBED: Margot Amelia, Hannah Byron, Chanda Miller, Marci Ross.

Board chair Greg Shockley welcomed everyone then introduced Connie Del Signore, and thanked her for hosting the board meeting.

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

Connie welcomed and thanked everyone for their hard work and mentioned that events such as Taste of Maryland bolster the sentiment whereby legislators have really recognized tourism. It is an exciting time for Annapolis as they are at 55% occupancy; otherwise they would be at 28%. The 90 days during session will be good for business. Connie discussed the Military Bowl and that though they had just six months to prepare, about \$1 million dollars in impact was generated just from the two nights, one day that people were there for the game-a 38% increase in hotels. The calculator also showed an approximate \$13 million impact for the region. 4,000 people worked during the event; 30,164 tickets were sold out of the 34,000 available. Next year will likely double the overnights and have two team hotels decorated in the team colors. Governor O’Malley held reception for Medal of Honor recipients.

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

Delegate Beitzel- There is a big push to pass the minimum wage increase this session. Montgomery and PG Counties have already passed their bills. Restaurants and tourism industries that employ part-time and seasonal workers in places such as Ocean City and Deep Creek Lake may experience some of the pinch with the passing of the legislation. Perhaps there will be amendments and provisions put in place for carve-outs for high school and college students. There will be an event called Deep Creek 2014 next fall which will be a big deal for Western Maryland and for the state. Several events will lead up to it. Deep Creek in general experienced difficulties during the economic downturn. Wisp ski resort went into bankruptcy and has new owners.

Matt Neitzey – Tanger Outlets National Harbor opened in Mid-November and was the biggest opening in Tanger’s history in terms of sales, which of course entails a 6% state sales tax on every transaction. There is a meeting with them next week and Rich Gilbert is attending to discuss the bus tour business. Additional attractions will be added to the site including a hotel. There was a recent announcement of the Capital Wheel to be built on the National Harbor waterfront. It is estimated that approximately 600-800,000 people may visit the attraction per year which will cost \$15 pp. for a 15 minute ride. Six Flags is opening a new section of the park with their 9<sup>th</sup> roller coaster and Mardi Gras themed-*Ragin Cajun*, opening this Spring. A major international convention of Jehovah’s Witnesses is coming to Fed Ex field in August approximately 50-60,000 people may participate. The conference is three days and people will probably come earlier and stay later. In the Fall PG County will welcome the Big 10 to College Park which gives way to a whole new wave of visitors and visitor patterns for alumni bases. Folks in the D.C. business community believe it to be a big deal in terms of corporate purchase of stadium boxes to host and entertain.

Kathy Sher –The central space of the Aquarium was renovated and re-opened in August to present the Blacktip Reef exhibit. Attendance has been going strong and they had a very good Fall. Going forward, they are lobbying at the state level for additional capital improvements to keep the aquarium on top and hosting conferences on conservation to elevate visibility as much as possible. Maryland Mornings promotion is in place during the off-season in which Maryland residents can come to the Aquarium for about \$10 off any day except Saturday and Fridays after 5 which continues to bring in thousands of people. Important to engage Millennials on their advocacy for conservation and in tourism and promotion.

Victor Sulin – Anne Arundel County is doing well and may be the largest employer in the state. Maryland Live! continues to generate money-they are generating one million a day in taxes. Lots of money goes into the community due to negotiations made. Cordish is looking to build a convention center. Taxes from hotels remain solid. Arts Council money has doubled.

John Fieseler –Legislation in place which is the modification of the hotel tax language-the definition of transient stay subject to the tax. It's currently 30 days, the default in Maryland is four months, they are changing it to 90 days. Continuing to gear up for this year's commemorative events working with Marci and her team on a new 1864 Civil War trail. Anniversary of the Battle of Monocacy this July and activities at Mount Olivet cemetery where Key was buried and which has the second highest concentration of 1812 veterans in the state.

Alice Lloyd-in their five years in business as of this January, beverage sales are up by \$3,000. Inn sales and food sales are up as well. They have been having a good January despite the cold weather. They also just made the Washingtonian top 25 restaurants list- having a good first quarter.

Dave Meloy- he is hopeful that the interim resolution to the federal budget is going to roll back some of the sequestration issues that have been affecting Harford County. They are beginning to see some activity from some segments that they haven't seen in a while. It's a little too early to predict a wonderful '14, but he thinks there will be some improvements. Kent Manor Inn has added a second wedding venue and it will be ready for wedding season this year. The seating capacity right now is at 350 and will have a seating capacity of 500 when fully implemented.

Wini Roche – Harford County relies quite a bit on Government business in the hotel world and they have taken a hit on tourism taxes this year. The silver lining is that it will hopefully improve and that people have been focusing on other areas of business for our hotel and tourism industry. People are focusing on sports which is good for hotels and restaurants because people are paying more than the per diem. There are some big tournaments coming up this Spring. There was a destination study conducted a couple of years ago which recommended some structural changes in Harford County, ways to generate more revenue and that they form a CVB. A CVB will be in the works which the office would staff until there was a transition and funding stream into the CVB. With that would come an alliance with the Chamber of Commerce which would help them to expand their visitor's services and to have more of a store-front. They are also looking to provide a group reservation service that the CVB would operate which would become a funding stream for the CVB and improve the issue of sports housing.

Planning for Tourism Day has gone well this year. Have over 200 people registered and 75 legislators who have RSVP'd. Wini has gotten feedback that President Miller may attend. Chairman Conway will make remarks.

Greg – He and Margot have been involved with the school start date study. Looking for a shift of 5 or 10 days so students would go back to school after Labor Day. They would still attend school 180 days- 1080 hrs. and they would get out of school a week later in June. It has been an interesting process. Eighteen people are on the task. Superintendents are opposed to the idea. Minimum wage hike will be very difficult for restaurant businesses. It would drive up what they charge customers and tip credit would go from 50% to 75%.

## **Chairman's Report**

The Governor proposed the largest ever budget at \$8.5 million. First hearing was last week's Senate hearing. We then learned that legislative services analyst recommended a \$2.5 million cut from the proposed budget so it is time that we let legislators on both sides know that we need and deserve the budget as originally proposed. Adding additional money to the budget will allow us to produce even better results. The House budget hearing is today and hopefully the word will also be spread at Tourism Day tomorrow. The Governor went out of his way to give us more funding so hopefully we can maintain what he allocated. In large part due to the success we have had in past years and we have grown tourism, and it continues to be an economic engine. As Margot and Connie both mentioned, we have become recognized over the last 6 ½ years as a team. We are cohesive, we put forward the same message every opportunity we get and we've made great inroads. It goes back to the strategic plan with set goals and in addition, Margot and OTD have gone above and beyond the call of duty as well as members of the board. The budget that the Governor originally put forward is a testament to that and if we can hold that money in place, it will be a testament to the tourism team working hard and accomplishing this goal. We have learned that this is a year-round job and Greg congratulated everyone on a great job and asked that we keep up the good work.

## **Executive Director's Report**

Margot explained she will be brief due to the impending hearing. Margot thanked everyone for their advocacy efforts which helped to receive the highest proposed funding ever for the Maryland Tourism Development Board. The letter that was sent by the board to the Governor directly correlates to how they were funded in his budget. There are examples in the binders of the press articles that are out. In one article, Senator Robey discusses increasing the general fund and that cuts to the Governor's budget were recommended, which is why DLS recommended cutting MTDB's budget by \$2.5 million. Margot gave a special thanks to everyone who attended the hearing last week to testify-it was a good day.

Margot referenced advocacy pieces in the binders which she explained will be helpful for tomorrow's Tourism Day and for any other interactions with elected officials. The Visitor Industry Advocacy plan will be sent to the full board to allow everyone to review prior to the next meeting. The Tourism Monitor has been changed a bit-have started to track gaming revenue. It shows four months of data in fiscal 2013. Maryland Live continues to be a great revenue generator. We saw an increase in tourism sales tax this fiscal year over last. Counties in Southern MD continue to have issues impacted by government shutdown. Saw positive increases in hotel categories. Lodging Monitor-our region is tied to government workers who took a hit in 2013. Hopeful that an increase in tourism taxes will be seen.

Margot advised that there are new materials-Marketing Plan, folders, calendars, Annual Report.

The next board meeting will be hosted by board member Trish Heffelfinger at the Soccerplex in Montgomery County on April 30.

### **Staff updates:**

Marci Ross – All grant agreements and applications were in on time. The grant pool is \$2.7 million. Will review to see how funds are being spent.

Product Development: We are almost through our commemoration activities and are working on new initiatives. The focus will be on outdoor recreation-boating, fishing, and paddling. Another theme is culinary and we are looking beyond wineries to include breweries and distilleries.

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

Tom Riford- Tom has accepted another position within Washington County. Washington County hotel occupancy/revenue was up for the first 5 months of the year.

Washington County has some challenges. Many jobs are leaving the area. Hagerstown Suns will leave at the end of the season. Team is going to Fredericksburg, VA. Good news –landed the National Convention of Geocachers. Has been a good winter. Patrons of Whitetail ski resort help to fill hotels although they are located in Pennsylvania. Tom will be testifying at the House today for Washington County Day.

Cassandra Vanhooser- Talbot County is expecting a great 2014 and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Plein-Air Arts Festival. There is a \$10,000 prize for the grand-prize winner. Restaurant Week is coming up March 30-April 5. Talbot Co. has a wonderful culinary scene.

Donna Abbott- snowy pictures were posted on their Facebook page-people like to see snow on the beach. Donna thanked Margot for her help with guiding Donna through using a metrics reporting system. The system was used to compile a monthly report and it is on their website. The reports have been very favorably received. It tracks website visits, mobile app downloads, water pumpage, bus ridership and more. Dew tour will return in June for the fourth year. It has been a huge economic engine-they won the economic engine award at last year's Summit. Performing Arts component of the convention center is underway. Working with their agency on new creative. Commercials will roll out in late April. They are pursuing a strategic tourism plan. The film Ping Pong Summer, which was shot in Ocean City, premiered at Sundance Film Festival.

Hannah Byron mentioned she attended Sundance for the movie's premier and TFA provided some tax credits for the film as did Ocean City. A party was held in Park City which brought a bit of Ocean City to Sundance with salt water taffy, photo-booths and ping-pong tables. Hannah hopes a premier party in Ocean City perhaps on the beach will be held.

### **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.