

# HOSPITALITY EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

JUNE 2009

Rhnda Sanborn

Hospitality Education Director

## EDUCATION

### Industry Partnerships

St. Petersburg Chamber of Commerce requested a workshop for their volunteers and staff that would include information to help them have better destination awareness, emphasize the significance of customer service and educate them on economic impact of tourism. Several of their volunteers were actually long time locals and Chamber veterans of a dozen years. Helping them learn more about some of the hidden treasures in their own backyards and neighboring communities was refreshing. They learned quite a bit about who our visitors are, where they come from, what attracts them here, and lots of data about what happens with the tourism tax dollars they leave behind. Common practice for a Chamber is typically to only promote their memberships, which made for interesting discussions about the challenges of giving exceptional customer service. Should you make sure the visitor has all the choices available verses limited information, leaving them shortchanged for all our destination has to offer. We concluded it was beneficial to tourism as a whole to create the best experience possible so they would be compelled to come back and see the things they couldn't fit in the previous visits.

I had the opportunity to attend my first FACVB Destination and Marketing Summit (Florida Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus) in Tampa. There were several hundred representatives from most of the counties around the state, a variety of our service providers and a number of legislators. The breakout sessions were very informative with advice and tips that were practical and timely. Of course social networking, Facebook and Twitter were hot topics, as were packaging or bundling your promotion verses discounting room rates. Every session emphasized creating value or unique experiences for the guest and figuring out how to work with what resources you have available. One CVB had created surf packages that included beachfront accommodations, tour of a surfboard shop where they are handmade, a Beach Boys concert and Caribbean dinner on the beach. This package sold for well over what it cost to deliver, yet the guest experience was one of a kind. Another benefit of this two day conference was the sharing of best practices and creating new relationships to work more regionally. Another area where people were finding value was discussing conferences that had the greatest ROI and determining if they could potentially spread out and represent dual destinations then share the leads. The two closing presentations were also noteworthy, one from Smith Travel Research about our area compared to the US and other Florida destinations. The other presenter was a Hospitality lobbyist in Tallahassee, Fred Martin, who gave us some great insight into some laws very close to passing that would greatly impact tourism and particularly our coast.

UF Extension coordinated another Sustainable County Education Committee, which has a goal of sharing ideas and successes to promote green government practices. Representatives are from municipal and county government and we determine the resources necessary to move forward in

implementing green government practices within the county. Current activities include expanding recycling efforts throughout the county, a Green Business Partnership Certification (similar to Green Lodging), a common website off of Pinellascounty.org to host Green activities and promote positive efforts as well as updates on the Energy Stimulus Funding Projects.

Because the CVB is so outwardly public facing, we have numerous requests to help facilitate groups meeting about local issues that impact tourism or have high community energy around the subject. A recent meeting that was pulled together was after speaking with the Ocean Conservancy and their interest in sustainable fishing and catch restrictions being hotly debated with our local fishing community: both for recreation, livelihoods and restaurants. They are interested in doing a public outreach campaign and thought we could be of assistance. After several conversations, a joint meeting was held that included a number of individuals on matters of coastal community concern. At the table were the CVB, Ocean Conservancy, Tampa Bay Watch, John's Pass Marina, Friendly Fisherman and the Pier Aquarium. It was soon apparent there are many sides to issues that impact sustainability of our natural resources and people's livelihoods. No easy or one answer solution will solve the current dilemmas but some common ground must be found. Discussions are ongoing and at least concerned bodies are openly discussing the possibilities.

## **HOSPITALITY**

### **VSPC Representation & Community Involvement**

- FACVB Destination Summit (Florida Assoc. of Convention Bureaus)
- Tampa Bay Beaches Chamber business mixer
- Dunedin Merchants Meeting
- Clearwater Chamber Hospitality Sales & Marketing Exec Forum
- Largo Chamber, New Location & Welcome Center meeting
- Clearwater Beach Chamber Annual Industry Awards Banquet
- Bay Area Concierge Event at Oceans Prime
- Women in Tourism Charte House Suites
- Gulfport Chamber of Commerce & Cancer Fundraiser
- Tampa Bay Beaches Chamber Hurricane Preparedness lunch and learn
- Webinar, Understanding the Role and Impact of Destination Marketers

### **Value of Tourism Presentations**

Toastmasters Club in Clearwater, Toast to Your Health  
Toastmasters Club at Bankers Financial, Carillon Park  
St. Pete Chamber

### **VSPC Planning**

Concierge Certification collaborative with Tampa and Orlando