

# HOSPITALITY EDUCATION

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## EDUCATION

### Industry Partnership

RNC, RNC, RNC – oh yea and Tropical Storm Isaac. Obviously this was the CVB and Tampa Bay Area's most time consuming event. Here are some of the areas the Education Department was most heavily involved in.

- **Most Creative:** Dolphin public art project. Thanks to the efforts and leadership of Anita Treiser with the Clearwater Regional Chamber, we joined 50 other local businesses to promote our destination through a public art project to the RNC attendees. The dolphins were 6 foot high fiber glass pieces with a blank slate to be decorated by an artist of your choice or one who had submitted a sketch of their artwork to pick from. The completed dolphins were displayed along the sidewalk area of Pier 60 the week before RNC and two weeks afterwards. They were such a huge draw that the project will continue for site-seeing as dolphins are relocated around the County along with a map to find them. In addition to the physical mapping, we hope to include a technology component that uses your mobile phone called Geo cache. With this technology we will also be able to include some historical or tourism fact connected to the location of the dolphins
- **Most Spectacular:** RNC Preview Event hosted at Tropicana Field. This was the first ever pre-convention event that hosted the media and delegates at one venue. Complete with elevated Cirque Du Soleil show, this multi –media event wowed our guests with fabulous destination shots on the big screen, performances by famous artists, well stocked buffets with local fare, along with top shelf lounge areas. Although weather predictions challenged the best laid plans, delegates were safely and conveniently transported door to door from their hotels and festive night.
- **Most cool factor:** VSPC communication and media centers. Another first was the Information Lounge area for media to hook up and repower. Partnering with Tampa Bay and Company, we offered a lounge area in the Tampa Convention Center for the 15,000 media reporting on the RNC. Operating from 6:00 am to 8pm, there was food and beverage available, representatives from both CVB's to field questions on the destination, a comfortable spot to sit and rest from the hectic high speed media pace, plenty of charging stations for every electronic device imaginable and BTW, a beautiful booth that showed our best photo features of the Tampa Bay Area. The other command center was located several blocks away with 50 social media experts answering questions about the destination in real time. Over 190,000 Tweets went out!
- **Most enthusiasm:** Volunteer engagement with community projects and appreciation events. Over 5000 local volunteers were recruited to support the RNC. A number of outreach efforts were held around the Tampa Bay Area, with information sessions and orientations. Opportunities were made available that engaged as much or little participation as a volunteer might want. Opportunities ranged from greeters, to transportation guides, to hospitality representatives at hotels, VIP guides to security experts, and more. Every volunteer I interacted with was so excited about their chance to

participate in this event and be part of making history by hosting the RNC, as well as to share their knowledge of the Tampa Bay Area. The volunteers also showed their community spirit by participating in a number of charitable events around the bay area, bringing in books for shelters and schools, to park clean-ups and home repairs.

- **Most Smooth:** Hosting 25 of the US States and 5 US Territories, our hotels and communities were excited at the opportunity! Hotels were engaged and flexible given the limitations communications due to security concerns and unpredictable weather. From banners, to food preparation, to special touches for each state that was hosted, the Pinellas hotels embraced their visitors and acknowledged where their guest came from with special amenities to welcome them. Obviously the Gulf of Mexico is considered one of our best features so hotel staff had planned to hold a number of events on the beach. They kept a very close eye on weather and worked seamlessly behind the scenes to pull those off or recreate indoors at the last minute. Many of the properties also accommodated late arrivals back from the convention with open bars and late night menus.
- **Most opportunity for improvement:** Transportation across 16 bridges, 60 square miles, 100 locations, with plans publicized weeks in advance for everyone to take note of. Except maybe, out of town drivers who were given last minute route changes and written maps that differed from outdated or confusing GPS directions. Throw in some weather diversions and moving the RNC agendas out another day, with too many command chiefs– you're bound to have some confusion. We had busses delayed for the first day's session two and three hours and then more than necessary show up. Returning from the convention, had delegates and guests transported to an off-site loading area but with limited directions of what bus took them to which location – if they could remember their hotel names at midnite. Some busses didn't make it back until 3:00 or 4:00 am with very worn out delegate at this point.
- **Best Customer Service:** Prior to the RNC we had two successful trainings targeted to the transportation companies called, G.E. T. Tampa Bay. The acronym stands for Guest Experience Training and was part Customer Service training and part destination awareness. It was lead by Ruby Newell-Legner who is world class speaker and trainer. She has done thousands of trainings in her career, with clients that include the Tampa Bay Lightning, The Vancouver Olympics, Orlando Magic, US Tennis Open to name a few. She has also trained customer service in Dubai at the only seven star hotel in the world. Several hundred drivers attended from cab companies to private limo drivers and bus drivers. This was the first roll-out of this regional partnership and will be offered both in Hillsborough and Pinellas in the coming year.

VSPC had an engaged role in the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Dine Tampa Bay Event along with FRLA (Florida Restaurant and Lodging Assoc), Tampa Bay and Co. We had 130 Restaurants participate (only 30 last year) and 1/3 were from Pinellas County. The event was two weeks long and including media outreach through Tampa Bay Times, radio, and most every social media outlet including YELP and food bloggers. We also pre-printed menus for consistency and had those available on a phone application and website called, [www.DineTampaBay.com](http://www.DineTampaBay.com). Thousands of business cards with the website were distributed to restaurants in advance to have them also promote to their guests prior to the actual event. To kick off the event we had a celebrity chef cook-off with 200 foodies in attendance and some of the participating restaurants offering a sampling of their signature dishes to encourage trying new restaurants.

### **VSPC Representation**

- Tampa Bay Beaches Chamber (TBBCoC) Board Meeting
- TBBCoC Breakfast with the Mayors
- TBBCoC Business Education Committee
- TradeWinds Casino Cruise Ship Ribbon Cutting
- BIG C Mayors Meeting, St. Pete Beach Community Center
- St. Pete Chamber of Commerce Tourism Promotions Council
- TBBCoC Ambassador meeting- Think Quick Printing Co.
- Science Café at Florida Craftsman, Crochet Coral Reef project

### **Value of Tourism Presentation**

- Heritage Oaks, Palm Harbor

### **VSPC Planning**

- Superior Small Lodging State Conference