

# **HOSPITALITY EDUCATION**

**October 2010  
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Hospitality Education**

## **EDUCATION**

### **Industry Partnership**

Along with 33 partners in the Pinellas County hospitality industry, I hosted 15 representatives from the Central Florida Concierge Association (CFCA) and major Orlando Resorts. As they say, it sometimes takes a village. Especially when you try to show your best features and highlights of most of the destination- of which there are many. In a quick 48 hours we covered tip to tip of the county and over a 150 miles: Tarpon Springs south along Gulf Boulevard to Pass-a-Grille, down Central Avenue, over to St. Petersburg and back to Clearwater Beach. Jumping on the Jolly Trolley on day one, we traveled through Dunedin for a brief historical walking tour, had lunch at Casa Maria's including an amazing 'Cirque' show and several stops along Main Street. Continuing our journey, we travelled to Tarpon Springs for a sponge boat tour and demo, carved in time to stroll a local street festival along with a traditional Greek dinner and sunset that was postcard perfect. Our guests stayed at a sampling of Clearwater Beach properties to get a true sense of the wide range of accommodations they could recommend to their visitors ready for a beach destination after the excitement of the Mouse Mecca. Day two was another 48 points of interest that began with a Green tour of the Sandpearl then progressed south along Gulf Boulevard with a lovely pool side breakfast hosted by the Sheraton Sand Key. Partnering with the PSTA Suncoast Beach Trolley we showed the CFCA how convenient public transportation was should visitors want to site-see without renting their own vehicle. A few of the stops we made were: Clearwater Beach Walk; Suncoast Seabird Sanctuary; Treasure Island showing some of the widest stretch of beach; John's Pass Marina; tour and lunch at the historic Don CeSar; 360 degree views and environmental talk from the top of Hurricane Restaurant; then on to Gulfport for a respite, before moving down Central Avenue to show off some of our cultural arts along the way. Our concierge guests admired and were awed by the Chihuly Collection along with the 4500 years of works in the Museum of Fine Arts coupled with the ambiance of the American Stage and Palladium. We concluded our FAM at the Hanger Restaurant to join an exclusive event the Dali hosted for the Bay Area Concierge (BACA). This was a special 'Sneak Peek' of one of Dali's figure called the 'Rainy Taxi' which will be displayed in the new museum. Everyone received a hard hat tour that night and complimentary tickets to come back for a full tour of the current Dali Museum. Several hundred local concierge and hospitality partners participated in this networking and preview media occasion.

Acknowledging that a crisis can materialize in any shape or size and excludes no one or no place; the University of Florida formed a Tourism Crisis Management Institute several years ago that includes partnerships with organizations and institutions that represent the private, public and academic sectors. I was fortunate to be invited to their 1<sup>st</sup> Tourism Crisis Management Leadership Workshop in Gainesville. The purpose of the workshop was not only to share best practices of communication during a crisis, but also to determine the best predictor of visitor perceptions and their economic impacts to a region. Our presenters were from around the globe

and included leaders and experts who shared their stories of crisis management – what they learned – what worked and what they might have done differently in hindsight. Lee Cockerell former VP of Operations at Disney World, Dirk Glasesser from the United Nations World Tourism Organization and Ibrahim Abu-Helil President Advisor to the Arab Tourism Organisation were just a few of the more notable speakers. Just as noteworthy, we heard about the partnership between the Asset Management Company Sanibel Harbor Resort and Spa which pulled off a \$59 million rebuild after Hurricane Charlie in only 5 ½ months versus other resorts that took 3 ½ years; all because of effective pre-planning and communication. Visit Gainesville Director Roland Loog, related his dilemma during the media hype involving Dr. Terry Jones and the threat of burning the Koran on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Hundreds of press descended on his town wanting a story that really was out of context for what the University of Florida or Gainesville truly represents. Should you downplay the situation since the minister was working out of his house and clearly looking for media attention? Or address it head on in case his intent for action might incite a riot or worse? Another interesting perspective of crisis management was given by Kitty Ratcliffe, the Director of the New Orleans CVB at the time of Katrina. She gave a heartfelt recollection of the uncertainty of her own staff's safety and having absolutely no means of communicating as they all relied on their phones and technology that wasn't available during the crisis. Add that to most people having left the city, at what point do you request workers to return and begin rebuilding their tourism business which in her mind the way to save New Orleans' was to save Hospitality. This was an incredible educational opportunity that gave me a much broader perspective on the value of preparation, which was a key 'take-away'. Having a well thought out, comprehensive and rehearsed plan is imperative! A plan that includes plan "A, B, C, D" and more... What If, you had a mad cow type of epidemic and had to close every out-door venue for a year? What if, you had a volcano explode across the globe that stranded a million passengers, including teachers and business people that halted business for a month or were stuck in your destination with no money to stay? An extra bonus of this conference was that an entire group of UF Hospitality Tourism students attended as well. After meeting them, their professor invited me to address their graduating class about internships, the value of tourism and what an exciting and diverse career path it could be. I also recruited an intern for the Superior Small Lodging Association, Alex Hillman who will start in January 2011.

Back to back with this conference was the Florida Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus (FACVB), very productive from an educational and networking perspective. What a great opportunity to share best practices from your counter-parts around the state and embrace it as a collective effort to promote Florida's diversity. I feel the BP oil spill helped solidify our tourism industry as a whole in that we all felt the effects of the situation. Of course we are still competitive for business. However, current attitudes seem to steer towards getting the visitors to Florida first and foremost for a great experience so they go back wanting to explore more as well as telling their friends how much we have to offer year round. In addition, a couple key discussions we had were around what role FACVB should play as advocates in certain issues in Tallahassee; embracing sustainable Green programs along with promoting tourism and successful strategies to work effectively with the various governing boards.

One of my favorite partnerships is working with our own CVB staff. I truly enjoy when I can engage with our different departments and meet their clients to promote tourism. The Leisure Department needed some extra support for a couple of their International FAMs which I gladly joined. One was TAM Airlines from Brazil and the other was Denure Tours from Canada.

### **Value of Tourism Presentations**

- County Volunteer Orientation, Heritage Village
- County Volunteer Orientation, Fort Desoto
- Largo Kiwanis

### **HOSPITALITY**

#### **VSPC Representation**

- Big C Monthly Meeting
- Tampa Bay Beaches Chamber (TBBC), Board of Directors meeting
- TBBC Lunch and Learn??
- Bay Area Concierge Association, Dali “Sneak Peak”
- USF Bayside Business Summit – DT and Chihuly Kate Tully present
- TBB Chamber Alden Business Mixer and Site Visit
- Women in Tourism
- University of Florida Crisis Management & Tourism in Pinellas?

#### **VSPC Planning**

- Great American Teach-in
- Telephone Customer Service Skills