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Wow!!

Duane Parrish
Director, SCPRT

This year's Governor's Conference on Tourism & Travel was one of the best in the four years I've been at SCPRT, an extraordinary celebration of more than 50 years of tourism growth in South Carolina and a time to reflect on where we've been, how we got here, and where we're going. We were reminded that even popular destinations like Myrtle Beach were once undiscovered, that extraordinary destinations like Hobcaw Barony offer equally rich experiences, and that a commitment to promotion can help all communities identify and reach their tourism potential.

Throughout all the changes our industry has experienced over the past 50 years, our mission has remained the same: putting Heads in Beds, Feet on Fairways, and People in Parks. And by

Statewide Hotel RevPar -- An increase in statewide hotel occupancy of 5.1%, combined with a 5.5% increase in Average Daily Room Rates yielded a 10.9% increase in Hotel RevPAR statewide. RevPAR in the Walterboro/Hardeeville, Greenville and Myrtle Beach areas increased more than 15% during the month. Statewide RevPAR averages \$61.25 year-to-date.

Admissions Tax -- Overall Admissions Tax collections in December were down 15.9% compared to December 2013. Admissions Tax Collections from golf were up 8.2% for the month, and up 2.0% year-to-date.

State Parks Revenue -- State Parks Revenue increased significantly in December 2014 compared to the same month in the previous year. State Parks experienced increases in all major revenue categories during December: Admission, Campsites, Cabins and Retail. Overall, 86% of State Parks experienced revenue increases.

doing this, we play a critical role in growing our state's economy and improving the quality of life for all Palmetto State residents.

During the conference, we shared SCPRT's commitment to promoting South Carolina and growing tourism in a series of presentations, and you can find those presentations online at www.SCGovCon.com.

The centerpiece of our commitment is the new DiSCover campaign. With the promise "There's Always Something New to Discover," we are inviting consumers who like to travel off the beaten path to explore more of South Carolina's outdoor adventures, cultural attractions and unique experiences. And we're appealing to them through eye-catching billboards, creative radio spots and digital ads; by offering the [DiSCover](#) guide in print, online and as a mobile app; by sharing stories through social media and public relations, and constantly enhancing and optimizing the website at DiscoverSouthCarolina.com.

Additionally, we'd like to invite everyone in our own industry to step out and discover something new in the Palmetto State. Travel to a historic mill village or small town you've heard of but never visited. Take on a new festival. Explore South Carolina's lakes, scenic rivers and forest trails. Build your itinerary on the [website](#) or find inspiration with this video.

Fifty years of tourism growth... wow! Look at all that we have accomplished. I'm looking forward to working with all of you as we set the pace for our future successes for the next 50 years.

Reminder!
TAG Applications
Due March 31

Airport Deplanements

Deplanements at most major airports across South Carolina are up for the calendar year 2014. Among the airports in the state's boundary, Charleston International Airport leads with a 7.8% increase for January through December 2014 over the same period in 2013.

Occupancy Forecasts

Smith Travel Research forecasts marginal increases in occupancy statewide in March and April, and flat growth in May 2015.

Renovated SC Welcome Center at Landrum Re-Opens

The South Carolina welcome center at Interstate 26 East at Landrum is open after undergoing renovations to its traditional guest services. The new design, including its new floor plan and added technology, will serve as a prototype in SCPRT's larger project to transform all nine welcome centers into showplaces of hospitality.

Under the new open floor plan, travel counselors now serve customers around three concierge stations, much like an Apple Store, rather than behind a large desk. The new design also opened up enough space for more seating, movable brochure racks, electronic charging stations and mini-work stations.

Technology was added to give guests a variety of travel information and assistance options at their fingertips. There are four interactive screens driven by the travel counselors with tablets to provide specific and detailed travel information, a GO Board allows guests to explore the many visitor experiences South Carolina has to offer, and two static screens rotate through accurate and up-to-date FAQs of travel information such as weather, traffic and gas price maps.

The new layout and design enhance the overall guest experience and provide

The deadline for Tourism Advertising Grant applications is 5 p.m. Tuesday, March 31. Applications and guidelines can be found at TourismAdvertisingGrant.com, or contact Jenny Waller at jwaller@scprt.com or 803-734-0450.

even greater exposure for the state's wealth of diverse destinations. Over the course of the next year, SCPRT will monitor the effectiveness of the new technology and floor plan at Landrum. When it's time to upgrade the other centers, SCPRT will have insights and technology assets that have been both time-tested and visitor-approved.

SCPRT Director Duane Parrish considers welcome centers to be the "front porch" of South Carolina that should deliver the high standards of hospitality visitors have come to appreciate.

New Videos Add Depth to Content at DiscoverSouthCarolina.com

The Artisans of South Carolina

Videos on the state's official travel consumer website at www.DiscoverSouthCarolina.com are capturing authentic stories about South Carolina's history and culture, and sharing them with consumers.

The most recent video is art-inspired, featuring claysmith Rob Gentry of Pendleton, basket artists Angela and Darryl Stoneworth of Mt. Pleasant, and painter Mary Gilkerson of Columbia, each sharing their passions for their crafts and validating South Carolina's cultural appeal.

Videos like this are drawing in the audience and keeping consumers engaged in the South Carolina story like never before. In fact, the number of views on the four previously posted videos on the website exceeds 215,000.

Biologist Hired for South Carolina State Parks

Joe Lemeris is the new biologist with South Carolina State Park Service. He is a graduate of Boston University and received his Masters of Environmental Management from Duke University.

Before joining the State Park Service on Dec. 17, his work primarily focused on international wildlife conservation issues. He worked for National Geographic's Big Cats Initiative, where he coordinated much of the Big Cat Research projects and grants given by NGS throughout Africa and Asia. He's worked with conservation projects involving not just big cats, but also lemurs,

sea turtles, kiwi, bats, and others.

In his off-time, Joe is an amateur photographer / musician, and loves spending time outdoors.

Joe is extremely excited to continue working to protect wildlife, as well as the habitat that makes up the natural resources of our State Parks. He has already visited/worked at Poinsett, Cheraw, Keowee, Table Rock, Givhans Ferry, Hampton Plantation, Hickory Knob, Jones Gap and Caesars Head state parks.

Joe Lemeris

Travel Counselor at Little River Named Welcome Center Employee of the Year

Mary Owens, the Travel Counselor at the Little River Welcome Center on U.S. 17, was awarded the Welcome Center Program's Customer Service Employee of the Year during the program's recent annual conference.

The Customer Service Employee of the Year embodies the standards set forth by the program for welcome center guests but also teammates and partners. This person must exemplify the characteristics and standards in every customer service interaction, such as striving to improve the experience for the guest, consistency in quality service, actively engaging and welcoming guests, actively selling reservations, showing initiative, and showing compassion.

Mary Owens

Mary initially received Employee of the Quarter earlier in 2014 for providing assistance to an elderly couple who had planned to travel straight through to Savannah. After learning about their interest in history, she encouraged them to make stops in Georgetown and Charleston by sharing her immense knowledge of the historical sites in those destinations. Ultimately, the couple decided to spend a little more time in the Palmetto State, and she assisted them with a two-night hotel reservation, as well as restaurant reservations. With just one conversation, she not only provided top-level customer service, but also made a tangible, financial impact on our state's tourism industry.

Mary has served South Carolina for 30 years. She sets an example for her peers by often going the "extra mile," and demonstrating initiative, compassion, consistency, and good humor.

South Carolina Tourism Leaders Endorse Governor Haley's Roads Plan

South Carolina's Travel and Tourism Coalition, an alliance of public and private sector industry leaders who advocate for tourism growth, have issued a statement of support for Governor Nikki Haley's proposed plans to repair roads and to adjust the state's income tax. Their statement comes after a unanimous vote in favor of the governor's plans during an annual meeting on Monday, Feb. 9.

The statement follows:

The South Carolina Travel and Tourism Coalition fully supports the concept of Governor Haley's tax plan to address South Carolina's aging road infrastructure.

Road conditions are an integral part of the visitor experience for the tens of millions of travelers who visit the Palmetto State each year. If left unaddressed, our deteriorating roads can negatively impact visitation levels to our state by deterring repeat visitation.

Governor Haley's tax plan provides a solid funding source for infrastructure improvements through a marginal and incremental increase in fuel tax that will allow South Carolina to retain its competitive edge with our neighboring states. In addition, an increase in fuel tax will also generate a significant amount of additional tax revenue from the innumerable amount of travelers who drive through and to our state each year.

The proposed income tax decrease has a significant potential to encourage greater investment in tourism development projects, which will allow our tourism industry to keep pace with the consistent increases in tourism demand that we have experienced statewide over the past few years.

Better roads, lower income taxes, and greater tourism growth - Governor Haley's tax plan is a win-win-win for South Carolina's tourism industry.

Myrtle Beach Boardwalk Tops List of Award Winners at Governor's Conference

Myrtle Beach's oceanfront boardwalk won the state's top tourism award and highlighted a list of attractions, individuals and initiatives recognized for outstanding achievements during the Governor's Conference on Tourism & Travel.

The Myrtle Beach attraction was awarded the Governor's Cup as an exemplary development that attracted tourists, earned free publicity and spurred further development in the region.

The 1.2-mile-long boardwalk was completed just before the summer season of 2010. Nearly a dozen new businesses have opened in downtown Myrtle Beach since then to capture the potential increases in visitation, including SkyWheel, Zipline Adventures, and new restaurants and cafes. Their investment appears to be paying off, as the downtown merchants association reported a 30 to 40 percent increase in visitation to downtown Myrtle Beach during peak season, and an estimated 75 to 100 percent increase during non-peak season. Parking revenues increased by 43 percent in the boardwalk's first year of operation and 28 percent in the years after. More than 255 new permanent jobs have been created. And the new boardwalk netted more than \$2 million in free publicity, some of which came in the form of accolades from USA Today, National Geographic and Travel+Leisure magazine, further increasing its potential to attract new business.

The city of Gaffney in the South Carolina Upcountry won the Charles A. Bundy Award for rural tourism development and promotion after publishing the popular Cherokee Foothills National Scenic Highway Travel Guide. The guide offers a sampling of the experiences travelers can find along the 118-mile route of S.C. 11, the rolling backroad that skirts the foothills of the lower Blue Ridge and provides access to parks, forests, waterfalls and historic mountain towns. The scenic drive begins in the north at Gaffney, and the city positioned itself as a jumping off point for the experience, but also helps promote four other counties touched by the byway. The guide is distributed free of charge at state and national parks, at businesses along the route, and at South Carolina Welcome Centers and chambers of commerce across the state. Demand for the guide was higher than expected, and within months, a second printing was ordered.

The 2015 Hospitality Employee of the Year Award was given to Jennifer Moss, assistant curator and education specialist of the Oconee Heritage Center in Walhalla. Moss was recognized for her commitment to sharing the story of Oconee with visitors at the center and her high standards of professionalism in serving as a reliable team player in a small-staff operation. In addition to greeting and orienting center visitors, Moss develops and delivers public programming. She also provides professional support to the center's lead curator during exhibit creation and collection management. Visitors often compliment Moss on her hospitality. Her nomination form states "Everyone who meets Jennifer instantly notices her magnetic and warm personality. She is always very welcoming, approachable, down-to-earth yet professional with visitors of all ages. Her cheerful attitude is infallible, even when faced with difficult situations or visitors. She is a wonderful ambassador and representative of Oconee County."

The Hampton Inn and Suites Greenville Downtown was given the Green Hospitality Program Award by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control for outstanding waste reduction and recycling efforts. The hotel has a significant recycling program, but also uses recycled products throughout its services. Due to its reduction efforts, the hotel saved \$1,879 in the 2013 fiscal year.

The Hampton Inn also has reduced its water and energy use by implementing a linen reuse program and installing green thermostats in guestrooms and public areas to conserve energy when rooms are not in use. The hotel participates in "LightStay," a Hilton Brand program that allows the facility to track and measure its sustainability performance using metrics such as energy, water, carbon, paper product usage and waste.

All Hampton Inn employees are trained on the hotel's green practices within 30 days of hire, and housekeeping staff are offered a monetary incentive to encourage them to return room keys for reuse. The hotel also reduces waste and gives back to the community by donating newspapers and discarded linens to the Greenville Humane Society.

The state's Tourism Awards program recognizes outstanding achievements in tourism development, marketing, events and business practice. Awards are given every year at the Governor's Conference on Tourism & Travel, an annual gathering of tourism industry leaders to discuss emerging trends and marketing strategies that help grow tourism in South Carolina.

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