

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

Galena Country Tourism (GCT)

Tues., April 23, 2019 3p.m.

GGMI Admin Office

101 Bouthillier St., Galena IL, 61036

- I. Call to Order: Chair, Colin Sanderson. 3:01 p.m.
- II. Attending: Colin Sanderson, Mike Murphy, Bill Bingham, Bobby Hahn, Raechelle Ahmed, Birgit Radin, Merri Sevey, Katie Burcham, Mark Van Osdol, and CEO Rose Noble

Absent: Nancy Shady and Nikki Peebles
- III. Citizen Comment - None
- IV. Old Business/Board of director concerns

Radin reviewed a Best of Galena (BOG - non for-profit group of B&B owners in Galena) report for the board that was originally presented to City and County officials. The BOG report expressed the group's concerns of the growing Airbnb/vacation rental tax collection issue. The presentation contained reporting of tax collection in the City of Galena and County. Radin pointed out that the sales tax and H/M tax typically fluctuate in growth/decrease in unison, but the BOG report showed otherwise, leading the group to believe there is an issue in the tax collection throughout the county. BOG's intention is to help figure out how to improve the monitoring and collection process for H/M tax. Sanderson commended the efforts of BOG and Hal Gilpin for putting this report together and added that it will be useful when GCT meets with the County on Fri., April 26. Noble spoke up to remind the board to keep in mind that the City of Galena has gone through good efforts to report and monitor properties, but also note that there are properties in Galena that aren't annexed into city limits, in which case the county will collect for. Elizabeth and Hanover also have this issue, so it is important for everyone to be on the same page on how tax is collected. Van Osdol suggested contacting other counties and CVB's to see how they are tackling the issue with Airbnb and tax collection and see what steps they have taken. Raechelle asked if Noble has been able to establish a relationship with Airbnb and Noble says that Airbnb will not talk to a 3rd party, they will only deal with a government body so she has forwarded information to the County including ordinances of other Counties who have Airbnb collect tax for them.

Sanderson mentioned that the County DMO Ad-Hoc committee met last month, the GCT Board was invited to attend, and they discussed the collection fee withheld by the county to collect h/m tax, tax collection and monitoring issues county-wide with Airbnb/vacation rentals, and the proposed 1% county h/m tax increase. Sanderson says a main focus was asking how GCT can help improve collecting by monitoring rental properties throughout the county to make sure that everyone is paying H/M tax. He mentions that the county asked GCT to take a neutral stance on the 1% increase for h/m tax. Sanderson would like to have an Executive Committee meeting, Fri., April 26, to discuss these issues prior to the county DMO meeting that same day at 1 p.m. Noble and Sanderson will attend the County meeting and

then report back to the Executive Committee, who will then report back to the full board. Noble would like to come to an agreement on these topics with the county ASAP.

V. Consent Agenda – Sevey, Ahmed 2nd, carried.

VI. New Business – None

VII. CEO Report –

Noble introduced Justin Helle, GCT's new Sales Manager to the board. Mentions that he has spent the last week going through old contacts and files and also reached out to Circle WI attendees.

Noble noted quarter three was great, numbers are rising. Total interactions FY'20 are 13 million compared to FY'19's 9.9 million. The website had 121,000 unique visitors during Jan.-March. Noble referenced Travel Dubuque's 111,000 website visits for the entire FY'18 year as a comparison to show how well GCT is managing web content. GCT's 121,000 visitors browsed 479,000 web pages, stayed for 3.12 minutes and visited at least 3 pages. Mike asked how they're getting to the website, Noble says they are getting there through targeted display ads, through social media and print placements. There have been 35,000 blog reads, and since Jan. Noble expressed her excitement for this number as they really made an effort this year to improve their blog content. GCT has released a new blog each week since Jan. 1. This will help the Google rating for the GCT website and provide new, fun ideas for reoccurring visitors. Jan.-March 13,000 visitors have been serviced through the Welcome Center, anywhere from walk-ins to phone calls or guide requests. 1,800 guides have gone out to kiosks and displays around the County. Since January 7,300 guides have been sent out, some of which have been the Galenian. A large number of guides have been sent out from ad leads received from their Meredith Publishing campaign. In January, 6 videos were released, 3 created with GCT content and 3 created with user generated content. The user generated content campaign is creating great buzz with 460 shares on Facebook since launch in Jan. Noble updated the board on the Storytelling campaign, 6 stories built this year, 716 readers have shared these stories on Facebook with 2-6 x's time spent reading these stories compared to the rest of the website. User generated content has also been infused into these stories.

GCT has created a postcard which they will be dropping off to business for free. This will hopefully offset the request for guides requested from downtown businesses. Noble would rather mail guides out than have them sit downtown. The postcards have the website address as well as the address to the digital guide online.

The Chicago Tribune had a few Galena mentions. Also mentioned in the Julien's Journal and the IL Country Living Magazine. Multiple Social media mentions and 60+ media mentions during Jan.-March.

An ad was purchased in the Travel Food & Leisure Magazine as a part of an IL State Tourism co-op, which included a full-page ad and two page editorial written by GCT .

The Circle WI event was a success. A booklet was given to every Circle WI Sunday night attendee. Noble did a survey with the downtown businesses in which she received good feedback some even sent in their sales numbers, most businesses didn't count on attendees shopping as much as they did. Raechelle mentioned that not just Circle WI attendees were shopping that she had other visitors shopping as well. Noble said that the stores said if there was an event like this again that they would stay open late. Sanderson said that he had spoke with Circle WI and they said this was the best event they've attended

in a long time. Noble said that the CEO of Circle WI was very happy with the event. She noted that the Generals were at the Desoto house to greet the attendees but noted that the space was tight.

Noble said she is still receiving great feedback on the new visitor's guide.

Noble noted GCT is receiving mentions from local businesses on social media thanking GCT for including them in campaigns.

Segmented emails started in January. So far there is an average 60% open rate and 40% click-through rate. Murphy asked who is doing the emails and Noble informed him that GCT does this campaign in-house. April's segmented e-news had a 72% open rate with 46% click-through rate.

Helluva Half Mile is officially in the last stage and has been approved to be a registered "R". Galena Country and Galena Country Tourism are registered trademarks "TM" but will be receive an "R" shortly after Helluva Half Mile receives its "R" mark.

GCT has been recertified for FY'20! This is the first step in receiving grant money from the state. The next step is sending a breakdown of how GCT intends to use the grant monies. Noble will be able to craft this once budget numbers are set. She believes we should be receiving the same amount next year as was received this year.

VIII. Motion to adjourn, Murphy, Raechelle 2nd, carried. 3:37 p.m.