

## **TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (TDC)**

The Indian River County (IRC) Tourist Development Council (TDC) met at **2:00 p.m. on Wednesday, August 18, 2021**, in the County Administration Building, Building A, Commission Chambers, 1801 27<sup>th</sup> Street, Vero Beach, Florida. You may hear an audio of the meeting; review the agenda and the Minutes on the IRC Website – <http://www.ircgov.com/Boards/TDC/2021.htm>.

Present were: **Chairperson Joseph Flescher**, Indian River County Commissioner, District 2; **Robert Brackett**, City of Vero Beach Representative; **Karen Mechling**, Interested in Tourist Accommodations (not Operator) Representative; **Will Collins**, Owner/Operator Tourist Accommodations Representative; **Keith Kite**, Owner/Operator Tourist Accommodations Representative; **Steve Hayes**, Interested in Tourist Accommodations (not Operator) Representative and **Amanda Smalley**, Interested in Tourist Accommodations (not Operator) Representative.

Absent was: **Christopher Nunn**, City of Sebastian Representative and **Jennifer Bates**, Owner/Operator Tourist Accommodations Representative;

Others Present were: **Jason Brown**, County Administrator, **Kristin Daniels**, Management & Budget Director, and **L**, Recording Secretary.

### **Call to Order and Welcome**

Chairman Flescher called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. at which time it was determined there was a quorum present. Chairman Flescher requested a brief introduction from the members. Robert Brackett introduced himself and stated he had replaced Richard Winger on the Board. Chairman Flescher led the pledge of allegiance. Chairman Flescher welcomed everyone in attendance.

### **Additions/Deletions to the Agenda**

Robert Brackett requested on behalf of the City of Vero Beach, that Chairman Flescher remove from the Agenda the City of Vero Beach's presentation. He stated he would like instead during that time to have a few minutes to speak about why he was there and what his thoughts, processes and goals were for meeting. Chairman Flescher stated that Item Number 9 would be struck from the Agenda.

**ON MOTION BY Ms. Mechling, seconded by Mr. Collins, the Council unanimously (7-0) approved the Agenda as written.**

### **Approval of the Minutes of May 18, 2021**

Ms. Karen Mechling stated great job on the minutes. They were very accurate and written like a book.

**ON MOTION BY Ms. Mechling, seconded by Mr. Hayes, the Council unanimously (7-0) approved the May 18, 2021 Minutes.**

### **Tourist Tax Revenue Update** – Kristin Daniels, Management & Budget Director

Ms. Kristin Daniels, Management & Budget Director presented a PowerPoint presentation of the Tourist Tax Revenue Update through June of 2021. As a reminder, the County levies four cents of Tourist Tax. In the current fiscal year, four cents are split with one and a half cents going towards the Tourism Promotion Agencies, one and a

half cents goes towards the beaches and one cent to fund our lease obligations out at the Historic Dodgertown Facility. For the next fiscal year starting in October, the allocation of the four cents has changed. We will now be awarding 1.56 cents towards our beach restoration, 1 2/3 cents towards tourism and one-half cent towards our obligation out at Dodgertown. Also, in that meeting the Board had asked that 75 percent of the additional funding going towards Tourism Development Agencies be put in our reserve for contingency with the other 25 percent going towards the amount that the Board had awarded to be disbursed.

Our June collections were up \$118,172 or 62.9 percent over last June which was June of 2020. Collections are at \$700,481 or 32.8 percent compared to year to date so that's October through January. Keep in mind that anything since March of this current fiscal year had been compared to March of 2020. March through May were basically the height of the Safer at Home Order. Also, the vacation rentals were suspended so June of last year we had just come out of that. Revenues are above projections by \$137,770 or 81.9 percent for the month and that's \$763,818 or 36.8 percent for the year. The budget was cut by 10 percent in this past year since we were unsure of what COVID was doing. Obviously, we have greatly exceeded our budgeted estimates. It will be interesting to see what happens over the upcoming months. She felt July would be strong. August and September with things being as they are now with the increasing cases, she wasn't sure how much that would impact our numbers or not so we'll see when those numbers are published. She showed on a slide the COVID-19 impact which was compared to fiscal year 2018-2019 so this was the pre-pandemic numbers so if we compare it to pre-pandemic, we are still up. June collections are up almost \$100,000 or 48.5 percent. In year-to-date we are up \$384,112 or 15.7 percent. If you take out those strong months pre-COVID and just compare the March through June which was all of COVID this year compared to 2018-2019, again, we're still up 29.7 percent. So even in the wake of the 2020-2021 budget that we have been subjected to COVID, we are still outperforming our prior year numbers. March through May is when we took the brunt of that hit from COVID. We started to recover again in June of 2020. In the current fiscal year 2020-2021 we had outperformed both of the two prior years, six out of nine of the months that we've reported so far in the current fiscal year. Actuals have outperformed the budget every single month in the current fiscal year. Ten-year history 2017-2018 was our historical record year. We broke 3 million dollars in tourist tax collections. 2018-2019 tread off a little bit. Ms. Daniels' assumption is that this could have been due to red tide in the Fall of 2018. 2019-2020 obviously we were severely impacted by COVID-19 and our busiest month that was March and then the months to follow off that. In 2021, we are sitting today through June at 2.8 million. We still have three months left of collections. Ms. Daniels anticipated that we will surpass our 2018-2019 numbers and it's possible that we could set a new record even passing 2017-2018 depending on what these three last months do.

Mr. Keith Kite discussed revenue versus budget. The marketing that they did to these drive markets in Florida, Alabama, Atlanta and Charlotte have proven fruitful. He suggested that we may want either a blended marketing campaign or we may want to focus summer time campaigns to the markets that were in this successful marketing that we have seen here. We have certainly seen the data at the hotels that those are the people that are here. We don't want to lose them in subsequent years. In any case, he just wanted to be cognizant of that this early in the game in the County's budgeting and expense of where you're going to be spending your marketing dollars as we go into next spring to continue to capture the success we've had and the people enjoying Vero Beach just by driving here a few hours. Chairman Flescher responded that he thought that we are robust with the numbers. He thought that all of our partners are hard working individuals. He thought that robustness happened because we were the only game in town for quite some time. That's just his perspective. This was the only game in town for quite some time. If people wanted R&R they knew they had to come here. Word got out and we were rather busy when other jurisdictions were rather challenged and their numbers were quite low when we do comparisons. He thought now that everything is a lot more open even though we have a current wait he thought that the State of Florida is now open fully. He didn't think that we will be enjoying that honey home mentality. He thought that we had a very good run. He thought it would continue because of the great draw that we have but he thought that now the competition of the other locations are up and running as well. Mr. Kite agreed with that but again we haven't had any international visitors. We haven't had any Canadians. We haven't had a lot of other visitors that we normally have so as that comes on, that will help support that fall off but he knew the marketing groups out there are aware of where their data is coming from and the results of it so he didn't want to lose that limited capacity in some regards.

## Presentations:

### **Indian River County Chamber of Commerce 2021-2022 Budget Presentation – Kirk Funnell, Tourism Director and J.T. Fisher**

Mr. Funnell provided an overview of the tourism efforts undertaken by the Indian River County Chamber of Commerce for October 1, 2020 to August 31, 2021. Mr. Funnell stated that they are the County's DMO which is the designation marketing office but they're also known as the destination management office because they do a lot more of the marketing. So, going onto their analytical reports, the SPR Reports have, like, a report card. They kind of look and see the occupancy rate, look at the ADR and kind of see how our county is doing as a whole and compare it to the previous years. Something new this year is all the rooms. It's kind of like the SPR Report. It shows the same information but for vacation rentals. Obviously, we're bringing people in so they want to know how many people are coming here for vacation rentals and its really good information for them to know how to monitor compared to the hotels. One of their favorite ones and one they use often Arrivalist. Arrivalists picks cell phone location data and actually pinpoints people in Indian River County and up-to-date information so they know exactly when live people are coming here and what they're doing while they're here so they can really coordinate their campaigns to that information. Kind of similar is that Vice-A-View. This one is kind of very similar to Arrivalist but it tells you how much people spent while they're here. They use the credit card data. They know where they come from, how long they stay here for and overall, it's a good component to help the Chamber with their campaigns.

Everything is Google related nowadays which helps them to narrow down that target market as well as the Visitor Study. They just did a comprehensive Visitor Study. Based off of analytics we were actually up nine to ten percent compared to 2019 which we had a good year for that as well. We're kind of moving over to the targeting market and kind of similar to what Keith was saying we had two totally different groups come in pre-COVID and during COVID. Obviously before COVID it was high income/55 plus, more of the female and different key locations will be New York, Atlanta drive market, New England area Ohio, Michigan and obviously Canada. We didn't have those travelers during COVID. They are really structured towards the luxury beach and Art & Culture. During COVID, he thought everyone just threw their marketing plans out the window because they saw a whole group of new people. It was just a drive market and it was more middle-class families that we saw in our data that were more focused towards the beach venturing and ecotourism. So, they kind of had to adapt their campaigns to that during COVID. We're now seeing those people that were afraid to come out before COVID and now that they have been vaccinated the public are coming back. We need to find new innovative ways to kind of reach to those audiences. You kind of have to adapt as our target market adapts.

In 2021, 98 percent were domestic travelers and of those domestic travelers, 89 percent was the drive market. That's the entire State of Florida. Obviously, it was a drive market during COVID and we've obviously hit that goal. Another thing as well is that they are staying longer. In 2019 there was an average of four days and in 2021 it's an average of 6.2 days so obviously they're staying longer and are spending more money while they're here. One important thing with this target market is that we create look-a-like audiences to help formulate their campaigns and really make sure that they gather that information to send out to these people.

Mr. Funnell explained a CoxNext Site Analysis Report. That basically went to all of their sites and saw who the target market is on their sites. It really breaks it down to what restaurants they like, what social media they go to and that really helped them understand how they have involved their campaign as well. They didn't have a Pinterest and LinkIn before this and they saw that most people that visited their site also go to those sites. They wanted to use this and grow in every area as possible. So, they're always staying adaptive and always making sure that they want to bring people here. Going into their website traffic, they added the Treasure Coast Kids quest. They built a website for them and it's actually growing. Their biggest one obviously is in Indian River County. They get about 50,000 users a month. Treasure Coast Website which is the collaborative that they have with St. Lucie and Martin County they get 1,000 users per month depending on if they're promoting it or not. Treasure Coast Wine & Ale Trail website they get about 2.3.

Going onto print, so obviously print is a dying industry and they really work hard to make sure that everything that they do print related has a digital component. That way they're able to track it because obviously circulation can only mean so much and you really don't know what you get from that unless you put a call to action and sometimes

that is even unhelpful. So, some things he pointed out here is that the travel and lifestyle that's the one where everyone loves that yes, it is a print article. They also get Good Morning America and Time Square and that's always a fun one to go to New York and people can actually see Vero Beach pop up on the big screen. He pointed out Makers, it's the film office and they partnered with them because usually DMOs in other areas also handle film. It brings people in out of state into our hotels and we actually help them with permitting and everything like that. They joined Film Florida to get more films through the company and just film different areas around our community. On the bottom of total impressions which is the number of impressions they got from their print campaigns and at the end they total them up just so they can follow along with how many impressions they got during this campaign.

Everything that they do now is digital. A couple of ones to point out is the Visit Florida Visual Campaigns. Obviously Visit Florida is a huge partner with the Chamber. They help them support big campaigns and he'll go into that a little bit more later about this new campaign having launched with them. However, they partnered with them in the Rebound Campaign which really helped to push their site as well as booking hotel rooms. Another one he pointed out was Expedia.

He stated that video has become a huge component as well and they have two series going right now. He encouraged everybody to go check out these videos on YouTube and check them out. It's uncovering Indian River and Holy Grail Meets. It really showcases what we have to offer in our community and they're working hard to promote those through OTT, True View, Social Post, Hulu, Amazon and they also do Gas Station TV where you look into the pump and see the little TVs going. They have a little ad that comes up and shows about Indian River County. Expedia is one of their favorite campaigns. They actually get to see how many room nights they booked. Obviously, that's the pen game. They want to get heads on beds and want to see people come here and it shows how much our marketing can translate to actual room space. They love to do this to kind of gauge how their marketing is doing and how they're spending their dollars. They're actually bringing people here and not just showing different ads around the website. The Visit Florida EDA Campaign partnered with them on this campaign. They actually came here and did video content in order to promote this on connected TV, streaming TV, Google Ads. They paid \$100,000 and they only paid \$25,000 so in essence they got a \$125,000 campaign for the price of \$25,000. That's what they bring to them and allow them to do. They could never afford that campaign if it wasn't for them and that's why they love the partnership with them.

They brought Google Ads last year in house and they want to be able to optimize as they go along. They're seeing a great trend upwards which is what they always like to see. They get about 11 million impressions during these throughout the entire year and they get about 1,000 click throughs so obviously it goes through and they can track who actually goes to their site and it really just makes the awareness of their Google world better. They also do YouTube promotions with that as well.

Mr. Funnell introduced T.J. Fisher who also does tourism with him. He discussed their campaign. They have free monthly e-mails. Those get set out on a result schedule to 50,000 subscribers. Since his involvement they've increased their budget rate by about 15 percent and the open rate has gone up about 1.5 percent. The events email is pretty standard just letting everybody know what happened in the county. Everything from the Frog Leg Festival all the way to Burgers & Brews. The generic emails are more like a newsletter so those show off events and share articles and their partnerships with the Treasure Coast Food Guide and the Cultural Council.

The tourism reports that go straight to their partners. That will pretty much give everyone the insight to their research. Their collaborations are panning out and they're putting heads in beds. Engagement marketing has a much broader reach and it gives them an opportunity to target specific demographics. It has 400,000 people. That can range from age groups to locations such as their recent giveaway where they targeted certain colleges because they noticed a lot of college people want to do these giveaways and stay in hotels and visit the area. So, they were targeting places like UNC and Auburn. Their news updates cover anything from COVID to the Red Tide. That's why a lot of people are considering the DMO to mean more of a management organization instead of just marketing. He discussed different series. The most recent was the Photographer Spot Light, the second is the Harvest Spotlight. They partnered with co-counsel to put them in contact with local artists and artists that are visiting that create local art. They're really happy about them and they've gotten a lot of feedback on that. A lot of comments on their website as well. The Food Insider. They outsource all of their blocks. The reason for that is so they don't have any inside bias. They notice that when they post on social media or write a post sometimes they get negative feedback so now they have someone that

they can reach out to and they do the work for them in a way but it's a great partnership and they also use them to host their TD series, the Holy Grail Eats. They have a monthly meeting post that includes new restaurants, businesses, events or articles such as Travel Writers that come here and they host. Whenever they write something, they also like to share. Come Discovery Love is one of their newer brands created just before Treasure Coast Kids Quest. They do see less compressions on that page but they do plan to start partnering the same way they do as, like, with the Cultural Council or Treasure Coast Foodie with vendors so that they can come in and answer a Q&A or do a video with them so they can help promote that brand. Anything that's romance related such as destination weddings, honeymoons, bachelor, bachelorette parties, they want to be able to host those people.

They increased and updated their Pinterest and Linked In and they are doing something new with Instagram. As everyone knows, TikTok is kind of like the streaming app. It is blowing up like crazy and it gets more impressions than anything else. Instagram's answer to that was Reels. So, they started doing Reels when he came on board and Reels are basically an imitation of the TikTop so base on what you follow and the pages you click on and what you look at you will see more contents similar to that. They use these Reels to get on people's pages that would never see our stuff before. They have posted three or four Reels now and each of them gotten around 4,000 views which is substantially than what their normal posts get and it also increased their stage traffic by almost three times. Reels are going to be a constant thing from hereon out.

Virtual Tours and Travel Shows – Kirk did an excellent job before he came on board switching everything over from in person to the virtual world, Zoom, Facetime meetings and that sort of thing. They did their virtual travel show with the Traveler Adventure Show earlier this year and it was a great experience. It was his first travel show. Unfortunately it wasn't in person but it was still great to be a part of it. The host anticipated 15,000 people to enter and there was over 170 booths entered. The travel show went on for about ten hours and they took turns with the other Charter Post partners, Martin and St. Lucie County to host and answer questions and be a part of the Zoom and chat room. The booth that was created in house by himself and by Kirk gave anyone who visited their booth an opportunity to book now and go to their social media pages for the three counties and also go to the private websites as well.

They did a couple of virtual FAM Tours. The best one had 16 travel writers from US and Canada. They sent out little gift baskets and basically what they got to do is visit Indian River County virtually. They had a panelist of their partners. They had Kendra from Coastal Connections. They had the Foodie Guy. They had Mel Fisher Treasury Zone and Lake Kimpton all on board so it was if they stayed at the Kimpton Inn and they got to experience the treasury museum and they got to go out to dinner with the Foodie Guy and that's how they made it work. They got a lot of positive feedback from that. They had about four articles written one in Canada and three in the US. They are a part of FAMO but they are also going to the Governor's Conference this September and they're continuing to do their media shows and they're going to continue to do these virtual events as long as they have to. With the way the trend is now they're going to continue those but looking forward to the Governor's Conference in September.

Treasure Coast Kids Quest at the I-95 Welcome Center which is an awesome little feature that they have promoting people to come to Indian River County. It was a very successful first year. They had kids coming in all the time with their little backpacks and smiling little faces. It was actually so successful that St. Lucie and Martin County want to start their own chapters now and they're currently working on getting those started. What's strange about that is that someone in Martin County can go and do this one weekend and be, wow, I really loved that, what other places have this and they can see Indian River up here and they want to come up to Indian River for the weekend and just hang out and participate in this trail. So, obviously they go to each one of these locations, get a stamp and at the end they get the little backpack with the sea turtles and certificate.

Local partnerships they partner with is a whole bunch of different industries around town. They love being involved in the community. Their one priority is the hotel partners because they're the ones that actually pay this tax that we all fight for.

The Treasure Coast Foodie, Coastal Connections, Cultural Connections, Cultural Council and Art Blogs. They started a new chapter called "The Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association." It's a Treasure Coast Chapter and that really helps with legislative issues and helps the restaurant or lodging do any type of training. Mr. Funnell is on the Board of that committee. He's also on the Board of Play Treasure Coast Tourism. He felt that it was a great

way to help the community and come together. He has volunteered his time to help really grow the tourism industry and that's what it's all about is growing industry and getting a good return on investment.

Partnership opportunities they had a giveaway with the Kimpton and they also did Captain Hiram's. They had a little Instagram contest where somebody follows Captain Hiram and follows the Chamber and then text three friends. He felt that everyone had done that on Instagram just so they can win an opportunity to come down here and stay in our destination. He felt that was a great idea. They saw good success from those campaigns. They do social media posting. Anybody that partners with the Chamber should send a post and put it on their behalf to a lot of big platforms. As long as it brings people, they would love to promote it. Social media campaigns they do a lot with festivals. If your festival is going to bring people to the area and have people stay here, they would more than happy to launch a campaign for that and to make sure that it gets reached to Orlando or Miami or to somebody from the drive distance. They always have advertising coops where they send it out to their email database and make sure that everyone is involved and if you have any questions anybody in the audience or any other boards has anything that they would like for us to look into, they would be more than happy to meet with them and work in any way they can. Obviously, they are a community partner and love to help any way they can.

Treasure Coast Campaign update. They made the Treasure Coast Chapter about three years ago now. Visit Florida helped distinguish it. They do a lot of obviously personal travel shows, fan trips. They work a lot into the Atlanta market. They actually started with the Atlanta market in general because they weren't actually in there beforehand and they thought well, it might essentially come together and pinpoint that Atlanta traffic. Something that's new is that they are making a Podcast with them. That will start next month and they already have two episodes booked to air and they're looking forward to seeing the involvement in that. They have never done a podcast before but it's a new trend and they want to be involved in it. It's called the "Don't Come Here Podcast." It kind of has a twist on the words. They're also doing the Visit Florida EDA Domestic Campaign. It is kind of the same thing before the 80/20 split with Visit Florida. They're doing that as a regional effort as well.

The American Recovery Plan. They have worked with the County as the Tourism Promotion Florida We Are Open Campaign. They made [discoverindianrivercounty.com](http://discoverindianrivercounty.com) and it's a landing page that hosts a whole bunch of hotel deals and shows the attractions such as restaurants. It is basically a landing page of all the efforts that they're doing in this promotion so anywhere from OTT, TrueView, Social Google Ads is all heading towards this land page. They pretty much create a whole new page for just this campaign because it is a separate entity. They're also doing an Expedia campaign on that and they've already had 3,000 room nights booked in the last two months. They actually sent out two million emails with Engagement Marketing. They had a huge deal going on and it was too good to pass up and they had great results. They also plan to have a retainer. Obviously the COVID is still out there and they want to make sure that they have a retainer in case this thing comes up. They have until 2023 so they have time to use it and they want to be mindful of those funds.

They are a certified Visit Florida Information Center. He encouraged everyone to go there and check out all the brochures they have there. They also have a local photography wall. It's a nice little gallery and they have their full-time information specialist, Rebecca, there.

They had their tourism luncheon at the Kimpton Vero Beach Hotel and Spa. They brought Nancy Meekins who is the person that put them on the cover of Southern Living. So, they are making sure that she's coming to town and talk to all of their partners about what she looks for in destinations and kind of what it is through the eye of a travel rep. Obviously, they're trying to make sure they maintain their presence in Google. They have Google DNR Update which is they're seeing about 11,000 views a month to a Google My Business. If you do not have a Google My Business they are a Google My Business Provider. They will help you get that set up and they will give you the access, tokens and everything that you need to become a Google My Business. They are a Local Guide 6 which is a pretty high level on Google. They have 3.5 million views on their photos. They're constantly adding photos to make sure that people can see how beautiful our area is.

Treasure Coast Wine & Ale Trail Festival is November 20<sup>th</sup> this year. The last time they had their festival they had 1,200 visitors as well as raised \$15,000 for a trail. This makes the trail self-sustained so they don't have to put any of their monthly dollars towards it anymore. It actually gives them enough money to buy the swag, buy all of the equipment, do marketing promotions and it's a great way to promote all the breweries. They also won a couple

of awards this year. They won the Etsy Award as well as the Flagler Award. Moving forward obviously they're still monitoring COVID and making sure their partners have provided the most recent health support and guidelines as well as setting up emergency marketing plans. Obviously, they have various marketing plans depending on if they're allowed to go outside international or stay in domestic. If they have to stay in this drive market, they're monitoring that on a daily basis to make sure their campaigns are successful and they're spending their money wisely. Working on coops, the Sebastian Area Chamber, they love their relationship with them and continue to work with them further. Always remember, it's about sunrises and not high rises.

Mr. Collins reinforced a similar conversation that we had about this time last year that concern when he came into the position last year considering the circumstances of what was going on socially, economically and like when all of the hoteliers were calling and telling him to fill out their hotels. He felt that they have done a great job being versatile and flexible and prepared for multiple contingencies at different times. He thought it was worth acknowledging out loud that he has been abreast and he thought we attributed a lot of the success they've had in the last six months which had been straight forward historic for this area to their capacities to go out and find the types of people that they knew could come and enjoy this area. He also piggybacked again to what Mr. Kite said that it's kind of not over now. We have this new group of customers that frankly the hardest thing for them in the hotel business is finding new people. It's one thing to get people to come back but we've been afforded the opportunity in the last year or so to really find new people coming out of Miami that had to get out or whatever it is and being focused on how to retain those people and keep them from going back to whatever it is they used to do for vacation. It's has been a really good opportunity. The Canadians are going to come back or whoever else used to come.

Chairman Flescher congratulated Ms. Stone on selecting the fine individuals to present the endeavors of the Chamber and more specifically being so embracing for all of the new technologies that are available. Ms. Stone indicated she had to learn a whole new language. She felt very blessed to have such a great team working in their Chamber. Kirk and JT do a fantastic job. Ms. Stone thanked the Board for their continued support of the Chamber's position as their tourism provider. She stated that they have been their tourism providers longer than either of these two have been alive.

#### **Sebastian River County Chamber of Commerce – Heather Sears**

Ms. Heather Sears, Tourism & Events Coordinator of the Sebastian River Area Chamber of Commerce. They are already utilizing their new Visit SRA logo and tag line simple pleasures authentic treasures. She was excited to be rebranding that. She started at the end of May. She is very excited to be working for the Chamber. She wanted to share all of the accomplishments that they have been doing. She has 15 years' experience of marketing and event coordinating. She is also very well familiar with non-profits and ecotourism industries. She stated it's a good match. She looked forward to working more with them.

Her first order on her agenda was to increase awareness on their social media with the rebranding. She started with Facebook. Facebook is the new website as far she is concerned. They needed to get that all rebranded, refreshed and get those posts going weekly and daily. Sharing their tourism partners posts as well to kind of cross market with them and hopefully get those followers increased. Just within the last three months, they've increased it by almost 200 followers to their page. In looking ahead they're going to be utilizing the Facebook ads, the paying ads to kind of help increase the reach there and also creating some short videos to add to their YouTube library to get those increased as well.

The second order of business was the Monthly Tourism Newsletter and continuing that on, rebranding that as well. Getting their subscribers out. Just within the last three months their opening rates have more than doubled and they have really filled it with lots of relevant content, house marketing all of the tourism partners. They have 125 of them at this point. Every issue has a tourism partner spotlight. She has enjoyed learning all of their tourism partners and putting lots of information up there about them with pictures and they include their destination video in that as well. Moving forward they would like to put in some fishing reports and surfing reports with their tourism partners to increase the subscribers there. One of their digital projects that they just did was with Rogue Vacations. It hits a younger demographic. As you can see, it's still a higher household of income and it's featured in the August-September issue and a big story about wild Florida. They are highlighted in one of their waterfronts camping and their eco adventures that Sebastian is so well known for.

Their Visitors' Guide is a beautiful award-winning full color Visitors' Guide. On the back part it opens up with a map which shows you the beautiful full-color ads they let their tourism partners advertise in and they give them the opportunity to do that. It's a wonderful marketing tool for them. Many of their visitors take the Guide home with them and use it for future use.

Their Visitor Center overlooks the Indian River Lagoon and the Sebastian boat ramp. It's a designated Visitor Center for the Indian River Lagoon National Scenic Byway as well as Visit Florida Visitor Information Center. Patti Williams will greet the visitor and put together a whole vacation itinerary for them. They have their big screen in the Visitor Center with their destination videos really giving visitors an inside look at different tips and things they not know about that the locals know about that they can help plan their trip. They generally have 10,000 yearly visitors. They are going to be focusing their priorities on promoting those businesses who were hurt by COVID. They have live Webcams in the Center of the Sebastian Inlet and the Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge. Patti Williams put together charts and gathers all of their information and it gives them the top five people who are still coming here. 30 percent of the visitors are Floridan residents which is why they are still going to be continuing to focus on those drive markets during the summer to Orlando, Tampa, Miami cities and then in the Fall and Winter branching out to the other northern states as well.

They are going to be utilizing Visit Florida. It's a wonderful resource. It's one of those unique marketing opportunities. They are going to continue to market their Ecotourism, the fishing and festivals. Targeting the younger demographics since they're the ones coming out more since COVID is still keeping the older folks at home. They are looking forward to the Governor's Conference in September and to get meet their reps from Visit Florida and find some new vendors that coincide with their marketing plan.

They are going to be continuing their Tourism Committee with their 125 tourism partners. Continuing the FAM Tours, special events. They are looking forward to partnering with their local partners. She was looking into seminars to provide their local partners to help guide them for their own marketing efforts as well. She thanked the Board for all of their support.

Chairman Flescher stated that the reason the Chambers presentations are at a different meeting is that they are lengthier than the other presentations. There was some question regarding how the presentations are done and how they deal with the budget. Time after time the Chambers have delivered full robust information that they can count on and that's the element of trust that they've always worked with and he hoped to be able to continue that unless anyone felt that maybe perhaps we should have it all on one day in one package. Just add to the lengthy day. The Board members agreed that it should not be changed.

Chairman Flescher moved to Item No. 8 which was further discussion for the Cultural Council of Indian River County to submit post revised budget request and other documents regarding the discrepancy over the \$10,000. Chairman Flescher stated the Board heard a presentation that might not have been informed of the full amount of information that would have justified additional expenditures but once again the Court approved at this board level on further recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners. There definitely was the same element of challenge that was present here but it was more amplified which the Board of County Commissioners did not accept the recommendation from this Board. The \$10,000 in additional for the Cultural Council was then shifted into a contingency fund for other matters. The funding that they did have in the same exact amount was put in a placeholder and fully accounted for at the Indian River County Commission as far as budget. The discussion at the Board was if they had a furtherance of explanation they could reconsider. He had a conversation with the applicant and he had recommended that this presentation come to the Board first and then they would refer it to the Board of County Commissioners so that they can have final approval or they would leave it where it is.

#### **Cultural Council of Indian River County – Alicia Quinn, Chairman of the Board**

Ms. Quinn provided further information about the plan that they had presented to the Board on May 18<sup>th</sup>. A PowerPoint presentation was provided by Ms. Quinn, which is on file at the Board of County Commission office. When they were here in May, they talked about some significant changes that they wanted to make by creating a further branch of their cultural concierge service to include a cultural tourism outreach. That strategy was to



collaborate with culturally rich areas outside of Florida to work with cultural tourism. Their mission has always been not only to support the cultural arts here in Indian River County and the arts industry here but also to promote and encourage tourism and they feel that the focus on this instituting our cultural tourism collaborative that will definitely connect them with other culturally rich areas that they will see a different drawing of more tourism.

Ms. Quinn stated that she believed everyone recognized the impact of the Cultural Council on tourism. The latest studies showed 35.3 million adults say that art and culturally related events influence their choice of a destination where they travel. It is determined to be the fourth largest driver of decisions when planning vacations.

They have looked to expand their cultural concierge service into targeted markets and have looked at two geographical areas outside of Florida that they've partnered with. They are looking forward to move forward with a robust program with them. They have looked at Mid-Coast Maine specifically the areas from Brunswick to Belfast and the Mid-Valley area with the Ulster and Dutchess Counties. Both of these areas have been ongoing centers for visual and performing arts. They have significant museums. They're known for their creative educational institutes and have dealt with the arts in a very meaningful manner. This is also communities where we are looking at residents who travel to warmer climates in the winter, colder months and they seek a higher quality of arts and cultural experiences like they're used to having in their communities. To look specifically at Mid-Coast Maine, they are talking about an area of the Mid-Coast area. They have connected with a magazine there that they feel would be very influential in that area and that is Maine Boats Home & Harbors. They will be working with them directly in a partnership. This particular route has over 400,000 users. They have a 3 million plus page of views on their website and you're looking at more than 6,000 email subscribers. They will be getting data tracking on visits to their ads and their content as part of the package. They are also working on editorial feature regarding the cultural rich arts here in our county and having that coincide with the art ads that they'll be producing through the magazines. They're exploring a feature story with Décor Maine Magazine. This is a local home magazine in that area and they're talking about doing a feature with them explaining the collaboration of the cultural tourism route with them. They are also talking in collaboration with the Bay Chamber Arts & Music School and the Maine Arts Commission. They're still working out some of the details in those areas in terms of exactly who their programs will interface.

The Mid-Hudson Valley plan is to utilize the Hudson Valley Magazine Publication. They have a web and online monthly visitors of more than 230,000. Their social media you're looking at a total reach of more than 155,000 and again tracking will be provided for us so that they can closely look at the impact they're having. They're looking at full page color ads in three of the publications. We would be talking about on-line impressions. 25,000 on-line impressions both November and February. In February and September two emailed mailings as well as a sponsored e-blast in September. They will be also working with the Bay Chamber Arts & Music School partnering a concert in 2022 which would include advertising any upcoming events and newsletters and all the on-line ads as well. In the Mid-Hudson area, they're looking at print ads, website and on-line and social media. They're talking about an encrypted half page in three issues, January, February and March and also a seasonal ad in the Ramadan Performing Art Center Playbills. That will be a full page for the entire season. They see approximately 25,000 viewers for each playbill. This program with Mid-Hudson includes a large digital component as well as an on-line component. Villus Style Educational Advertising stories, dedicated links taking their visitors to their information. They would be dealing with the partner contact bundle that there goes out to over 26,000 subscribers.

The budget for the total program for these two would be \$14,700 dedicated to just these two areas and to marketing there. They will also be looking to strengthen their social media news tremendously and in the process of doing this they'll be adding to their social media expense account and paying for actual placed ads in Facebook. They would be talking approximately \$150 to \$200 per month in terms of additional boasting on social media ads. All of this social media strengthening will require updating their website for better interaction with the visitor. We will also be looking to placing these ads on Facebook. All of this social media strengthening will require updating their website for better interaction with the visitor.

Their total budget the \$60,000 that they had asked for would break down into \$18,000 for their Guide Publication. Now, the Guide Publication will also contain ads from both of their partnerships out of the area and they will be receiving copies of the Guides delivered directly to them for disbursement in their area as well as the Guide will be on line and available to anyone who is using any of their social media or website so that they can connect and see the Guide on line easily as well. Their general advertising with graphic design, their digital guide putting that on

the website and their E-newsletter that the people will be able to key right into from any of their ads as well as videos that will be created to supplement these. Social media is listed as \$9,250 and that's including a paid Facebook ad.

Their Cultural Connection radio broadcast will no longer be paid out of TDC funds. They have looked to secure a grant for that program rather than using TDC funds in that area. They have a few minor courses in terms of equipment and supplies throughout the year for some of the TDC work that they do. \$6,000 is in their cultural concierge advertising and that is advertising with the two Chambers. That the Vero Beach Museum of Art and Vero Beach Magazine which all have significance of subscribers outside of the area and they have ads with them and they'll be promoting all of them as well as the rest of the organizations through their advertising. They will be needing updating and production about cultural concierge area. Through their website, their social media, ads and video design in order to have all of these things into faces in such a way that people can just click one button and bring them directly to the spot they want to look at in terms of their website. The total outreach they're talking about adding in of the \$14,700 would be the \$60,000 that they have requested for a year including the \$14,700 that would be dedicated to this specific program but additionally a good portion of the \$10,350 would be upgrading what they currently have to allow these collaborations to work better and more smoothly.

The last item that she wanted to bring forward from what she understood they were awarded the \$49,301 which is the same amount that they had been ordered for this past year. They had asked for an increase of the \$10,699 to give them a total of \$60,000 to fully put the entire program in place.

There was a general discussion among the committee members and others present. Ms. Quinn stated that she was very pleased to have had an opportunity to come back and present more detailed information. She stated that it was a little difficult a few months ago to have as many details as they have now. They have made some major progress. There are still other items that they'll be working out as they finalize their contracts with these people. Mr. Kite stated that there needed to be cohesion here. He did go to various cultural venues around our community. He has gone to virtually all of them that he's aware of. It's archaic marketing. He felt they needed to find synergy and cohesion with their cultural partners. He felt that has been lost in his opinion with the Cultural Council. He felt it was a dysfunctional operation that is not being connected cohesively with what he has heard from the Cultural venues in this County. Secondly, they're competing against Sarasota, West Palm Beach, Miami, even Orlando. We are not going to be able with this small amount of money to get a few people that look at the Maine magazine or the Hudson-Valley Magazine to come to this County with the amount of resources that the rest of this State. He felt that those dollars would be far better spent maximizing and leveraging them with the cultural opportunities that Visit Florida has and other venues as well as working with their local partners. I would like to see out of the Cultural Council support from our own institutions here in a hard format that they are supporting Cultural Council in what it does and how it's bringing increased culture & arts to our community. He has always been a huge supporter of the Cultural Council. He has always given it the highest rating when they vote but from his research, he was very disappointed. He said he would need to see some results before he can approve any additional funding to the Cultural Council and particularly this individual request that he saw. Ms. Quinn stated she was sorry to hear that Mr. Kite was disappointed in them. She stated that she would be very happy to speak with him about it and get more information from him. They felt that they have reached out and have worked well with a lot of their local partners. They corroborate closely with museums, ELC, Riverside Theatre. They're housed in the office building of the Indian River Chamber and have worked and coordinated with the Chamber. They have worked with both of the art clubs in Sebastian and in Vero Beach. They have supported four venues of art and public places. They showcase the art works of artists throughout the County in these places and they are looking to grow three additional venues for art & public places within the next year. They have been invited for the first time ever the members of the Cultural Council to produce an exhibition that will run for a month in a gallery at the museum. They have put all of that information out to all of their artists, their art clubs, and their galleries. People are very excited about participating and having their work displayed in the Vero Beach Museum of Art. Mr. Kite stated he would welcome the forum of the cultural venues at the Cultural Council to discuss that very issue. He cannot do it individually but he would welcome all of them to be invited to a forum. He would most definitely attend to do that. He is in support of everything that she had just stated but the Board is a tourism marketing organization. He did not see other than the book that is published here locally that we are getting the reach and the results that the dollars that were supposed to be invested with are being utilized to get them more heads on beds to pay the taxes. He did agree with everything she said about what had happened around the community but he saw the vast portion of that being done locally. She stated that they're hoping that the collaborative that they have started with these two organizations once they get that up and running it will be something that they can move forward into many

other areas. Once they have it operational and the fine tuning done to what they need to do with their website and their marketing in house be able to reach out to their markets and do more with this. Mr. Kite stated that he understood that but they're all competing against us. He has to seen some sort of direction in how they're getting those people, looking at those publications coming here.

Mr. Hayes stated that what Mr. Kite had tried to say is that there's a very small percentage of the people that read those magazines would actually show up in Vero. He felt it was probably not a wise expenditure of \$10,000 to advertise in just those two publications. He felt the money could probably be spent a whole lot better digitally through their website which would reach a lot more people. He felt that they're concentrating \$10,000 on a very minute portion of this country. He felt that they would not get \$10,000 return on their investment.

Ms. Smalley asked if that \$10,000 was something they can allocate to the Chamber to use with somewhat of a focus on cultural and that way it includes all of their cultural arts businesses and then they help to promote that along with other stuff so give them an additional \$10,000 in funds to them. Chairman Flescher stated that's not what we do as far as the allocation. The initial request was approved here. The County Commission further debated and at that time the recommendation was the \$10,000 that was requested as an addition was sent into a separate fund, a contingency fund for other matters that may come up as we are revolving through the whole COVID time and there may be something that's fast moving and that that funding would be then available for direction at the Board of County Commission. As far as hearing it here, they're hear it to recommend to the County Commission approving the funding or to fund it. Chairman Flescher stated that he agreed about the limited market.

Mr. Hayes stated that if we did it, he would like to see what the return on the investment is. Mr. Collins asked whether their options were to either approve or not approve the additional funding. Chairman Flescher stated that he asked for that so that we can send it back to the Board of County Commissioners. He stated that would be where the funding would be determined or left in abeyance where it's at in the contingency fund for other endeavors. Mr. Collins stated that the access to more information didn't make him feel better about it. He tended to agree with Mr. Kite. He stated that the amount represents a big portion of their budget at least from what they are funding. He agreed that the money could be used elsewhere. Mr. Brackett commented that he thought it was a very small market. He said it is a very small amount of money. He felt that it wasn't going to move the needle hardly at all if any.

Ms. Mechling asked Ms. Quinn how did they land on those two markets. Ms. Quinn stated that they are two markets that they had a lot of interaction on their websites from those areas and they are very culturally rich areas. They reached out to them and attempted to set up a partnership which has been difficult to do not knowing if we had any money. They are printing a guide with two of their ads in that they gave them complimentary in terms of some complimentary things they're doing for them. But in terms of being able to afford a fruitful program without the funding, they cannot. They felt very strongly that this could have a good impact. They're looking at over a million people getting this information through these different venues they've looked at. They got very good deals offered to them through these people based on tradeoffs. Again, the editorial that would be in the magazine as well as an article in the home magazine that has good distributions in that area. These are big tourism areas during the summer months so when their ads would be getting there and continuing through into summer and fall.

**ON MOTION BY Mr. Collins, seconded by Mr. Kite, the Council unanimously (6-1) denied the request for further funding to the Cultural Council with Karen Mechling descending.**

### **Additions/Deletions to the Agenda**

Chairman Flescher stated that item Number 9 was withdrawn, however, they had the addition of Robbie Brackett. It came about in their meeting on August 17, 2021 that Councilman Richard Winger had some health issues of late and had asked to be removed from the position because of that. This would have been his last meeting because he was not running for re-election in November. He asked Mr. Brackett to attend. He didn't give his presentation today due to he was not prepared to answer questions that may have been asked of him because it was his presentation. He did the research and did the homework on it. He is very happy with what the TDC groups do to promote Indian River County, Vero Beach, Sebastian. He felt that they did a great job. Tourism means a lot to us

but it also creates challenges for some municipalities and some of the County Government people. We have to work hard to stay ahead of that curve, stay ahead of the challenges out there. Mr. Brackett stated he is a person who thinks we can always make organizations better. He looked back at what TDC has done and it has done a tremendous job. He only hoped that he was there to add another dimension to that. He looked forward to working with the TDC Board with facing the challenges ahead because as this area grows and they get more tourism there will be additional challenges ahead.

#### **Next Meeting Date**

The next Tourist Development Council meeting will be held on **Wednesday, November 17, 2021, at 2:00 p.m.**

#### **Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at approximately 3:40 p.m.