

Western Iowa Tourism Region Meeting September 18, 2019 • Yesterday's Memories, Sanborn

President Andy Milam called the meeting to order at 10:32 a.m. and guided everyone through the items in the packet.

Welcome: O'Brien Tourism committee member, Starla Reitsma, introduced John VanderHaag with Yesterday's Memories. John gave a brief history on the company which started in 1939 and how it transformed into a 125,000 square foot facility with over 200 trucks and 250 showcases of historical items. They host many events in the facility.

Approval of Agenda:

Kathy Dirks moved to approve the agenda, with Becky Hatting seconding the motion. *Motion carried.*

Approval of March 2019 Minutes: Lisa Riggs moved to approve the minutes, with John Westergaard seconding the motion. *Motion carried.*

Financial Report: Kiana presented the report stating that we are starting the year in fine shape with most of the counties paid and many of the memberships. We have not received the money from the state office yet but we know it is coming. Our annual tax return has been filed. Brian Kessler moved to approve the financial report with Julie Hering-Kent seconding the motion. *Motion carried.*

State Tourism Office Report: President Milam introduced Jessica O'Riley and welcomed Katie Kenne to the tourism industry.

- Grant applications are due on Sept. 25th. All the information is on the website including the IEDA marketing information and FAQ's.
- The Iowa Tourism Conference will be held Mar. 2 – 4, 2020 at the Hilton Downtown Des Moines. The registration and room block will be released via the E-Traveler in November.
- The economic impact study is now posted on TravelIowa.com along with an interactive map.
- The 99 Parks results are in. This campaign ended in August with 28,000 visits and 4500 downloads of educational material. An additional 4 million impressions and over 12,500 clicks also came from the digital ads for this campaign.
- There have been some Influencer campaigns including Lake Icaria by Corning and Five Ridge Prairie in Plymouth County.
- #ThisIowa website is featuring Jim Small's Fruit Farm. A "Share your Story" form will be available on ThisIowa.com next month so we can continue to showcase these amazing stories from all over Iowa.
- Tourism is now front and center in conversations that Gov. Kim Reynolds and Debi Durham are having across the state.
- Next summer is the big MLB game in Dyersville and they are working on plans to market Iowa when this occurs.

- There will be an “Iowa Made” Holiday Gift Guide online again this year which includes Carver’s Ridge & the Marketplace in Manning.

Travel Federation of Iowa report: Shirley gave the following report:

Thank you to everyone who took the survey – there were only 121 people this time so hopefully we can do better in the future.

- **SCHOOL START DATE:** We hope there is nothing to worry about with this issue. The Governor has publically declared we are not going to re-run this issue but there are rumblings out there. To quiet this issue, we could really use your personal reactions as to what happens to your communities and attractions (as well as your economies) when school starts. Just send Shirley an email with your testimonial and if you can back it up with numbers that would be great!!
- Funding is always an issue and since we are now a \$9 Billion industry and generating \$517.5 million in taxes, by funding tourism adequately would mean a greater return on investment to the state. Surely we could use some of the tax money we generate for marketing to draw people to Iowa.
- The hotel/motel tax issue – the 30 to 90 extended stay issue will come up again. For those of you who do not know about this, if you stay in a motel over 31 days, you do not have to pay hotel/motel tax for the duration of your stay. This is wrong on so many fronts – it robs the local communities of marketing money or whatever their hotel/motel tax referendum states. Usually 7% is collected for hotel/motel tax. We will be pushing to extend this timeline to 90 days. So far the people fighting it are the contractors and that’s understandable. Air B n B’s, Bed & Breakfasts, RVBO’s etc. are all subject to Hotel/motel tax so if you have these in your communities, they need to be collecting it.
- IWILL was not funded again. Everyone is continuing to pursue the 3/8 of 1 ¢ sales tax to fund our lakes and rivers. We are an agricultural state however we need to protect our waterways since some are sources of drinking water in the state.
- Online sports betting and betting at casinos brought in \$8.6 million since the middle of August and this was without all the casinos online. This is definitely another source of revenue for the state.
- One major federal issue that TFI has supported is the United States Mexico, Canada Trade Agreement or (USMCA) if you’ve been watching the news. We’re getting more and more respectability by jumping on board.
- So be sure you know who your legislators are, establish a relationship with them, host coffees and forums for them so you have a direct connection with them.

Rebecca Peters reported that the **TFI Legislative Showcase** will be Monday, Mar. 2, 2020 at the Iowa State Fairgrounds. Registrations forms will be out in November as well. Please watch for more information.

Economic Impact Study: Shirley reported that the new report will be on our website under the Membership tab on the top bar. Each of the counties present at the meeting were given a printed copy of how their county has fared for the past 15 years, and she will email these out to the county reps, you and others. Go on the website, compare your counties to others and there is also a page that shows the increase in the region’s numbers as well. Use these reports for your funding requests.

The state office passed out a summary of the Economic Impact report and it is online as well at traveliowa.com under Industry Partners.

Destination Development memberships: Shirley reminded all those with a DDA membership that they can take advantage of Roger Brooks webinars throughout 2019 at no cost, so go on the website if you have missed them and view the recordings.

Power of Travel: Shirley reported that Western Iowa is hosting the Power of Travel Days on Nov. 5 & 6, 2019 at King's Pointe in Storm Lake. There is a great program scheduled and we will be having our membership meeting on Tuesday, Nov. 5th at 3:30 p.m. to save travel to another location. There is also a networking event that evening and then many sessions on Nov. 6th. You can register online just as you do for our meetings. We hope you will all join us and show the rest of the state some "Western Iowa" hospitality.

Blogger/Influencer: Lisa Riggs issued an invitation to a session to be held Sept. 23rd with one of the Influencers she has coming to Elkhorn. This is an open invitation and it's important to network with these influencers and endorsers to get your story written.

Clay County Fair: President Milam thanked everyone who volunteered to work the booth at the 2019 Clay County Fair. We handed out twice as much material this year as last year. Final attendance numbers will be shared with Shirley and she will share it via our emails. If you have any feedback on the fair, please let Shirley know.

Next meeting: Just a reminder that our next meeting will be held on Nov. 5th at 3:30 p.m. during Power of Travel at Kings Pointe in Storm Lake.

Adjourn: John Westergaard moved to adjourn at 11:18 a.m. with Becky Hatting seconding. Meeting adjourned.

Introductions were made by everyone who shared what they have done to "kick things up a notch."

Respectfully submitted,
Shirley Phillips

Our speakers for the meeting were Mark Catton with M Catton & Co. and Shannon Rodenburg, the Marketing & Tourism Manager for the Wells Visitor Center and Ice Cream Parlor, on how they transformed the center to entice more visitors.