

Members Present: Linda Thorpe, Emil Bakka, Ron De Bruyne, Leon Kukanich, Ralph Sitzberger

Department Personnel Present: Cindy Burzinski, Vilas County Tourism  
Janet Christianson, Vilas County Tourism

Others Present: Lyn Pilch, Pilch & Barnet  
Fritz Laeser, Edgewater Inn & Cottages

Media: John Burton, NRG Media

Thorpe called the regular meeting to order at 9:00am in Conference Room #2 of the Vilas County Courthouse. The meeting was properly posted and notices sent to all media provided on August 29, 2011.

**Motion by Bakka, seconded by Sitzberger to accept the agenda to be taken in any order at the discretion of the chair; motion carried.**

**Motion by Sitzberger, seconded by Bakka, to approve the minutes of August 2, 2011 as distributed; motion carried.**

**Introductions** – John Burton was introduced.

**Musky Marathon** – Registration numbers remain slow and slightly down from 2010 but on par with previous years.

**Vilas County Chamber** – Burzinski indicated the Fall Resort Tour had been finalized for October 13<sup>th</sup> and would be held in the Sayner/Star Lake and St. Germain areas. Luncheon was scheduled for the North Star Lodge with Charles Metelka as speaker. Invitations will be mailed in the next couple of weeks.

Theresa Smith, Boulder Junction Chamber, had informed Burzinski that a visitor had stopped at the Chamber office indicating that she, along with several of her friends, had seen the television ad for Vilas County and decided to travel here and wanted the Chamber to know the ad was effective.

Burzinski presented a brief summary of WI Travel Best Bets' coop Getaway Giveaway promotion which ran June 1 – August 1, 2011. The co-op promotion featured various travel packages donated by the participating destinations along with links to every business mentioned in the package. Vilas County ran four (4) banner advertisements on the Chicago Tribune website along with placement on the Chicago Tribune homepage and travel section. These ads received close to 11.5 million impressions. Vilas County also received exposure in nine posts on the ChicagoNow.blog with each blog post linked to the Vilas County Tourism website ([www.vilas.org](http://www.vilas.org)). This blog generated 112 direct clicks to the Tourism website. Additionally the Getaway Giveaway was promoted via various marketing initiatives which included:

- “Getaway Giveaway” buttons on the participating destinations websites;
- Exposure in the June WI Travel Best Bets Insider E-newsletter;
- Exposure in the monthly WI Travel Best Bets Food & Attractions E-newsletter;
- Exposure in the Vilas County Summer E-newsletter; and
- Exposure in the July WI Travel Best Bets Insider E-newsletter

The next Chamber meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 8<sup>th</sup> at 1pm in Land O'Lakes.

**Pilch & Barnet** – Copies of both the current (2011) and the proposed (2012) Media Schedule/Budget were distributed for comparison/review. Pilch reviewed each line item and budgeted cost. She noted that several items noted/reaffirmed by the 5-County Branding Grant survey results such as the target markets, gearing toward a younger market and website searchability, had been incorporated in the 2012 proposal. The various television markets, network, cable and public television, were discussed as to their selection and fiscal feasibility. Pilch described the difference between banner ad placements (JS OnLine) and behavioral marketing (Yahoo ads) and how behavioral marketing is determined. Pilch also discussed possible Public Relations/Promotions ideas pending until the final budget was approved. Funds allocated to TREK and Artists Interactive (AI) were also not finalized pending further discussion by the partners involved.

One final item added was for Website maintenance and search engine optimization (SEO). Pilch noted that conducting an SEO on the website after a year would help review how the website is used, update page content, better present the website to search engines, streamline the Google Ad words used to search to reduce costs and increase user visits.

Sitzberger asked about the limited print advertising during the winter holiday season when much of the snowmobile traffic was anticipated. Pilch noted two major factors in that decision: 1) most advertising done 30 days prior to the event/season to set the stage and get people thinking and to avoid the high cost of most advertising during the holiday season (national advertising competition) and 2) generally a time when family & friends have already decided where they're traveling. Additionally, the unpredictable snow conditions are better suited to more immediate, Internet based advertising medium (email newsletters and blogs) than print ads.

It was noted that the 2012 proposal exceeded the preliminary budget as requested by Finance earlier in July and that some items would need to be trimmed back. Pilch indicated that the amount allocated to AI and the proposed television ads could be reduced. During this discussion, it was noted that while Tourism is the main economic base for the County, the line item for county promotion has remained the same. This actually results in a 3-10% annual decrease in available advertising opportunities as advertising costs continue to rise. The Committee commended Burzinski for continuing to follow the mandated guidelines of the Finance Committee in maintaining and/or reducing the budget each year and for Pilch & Barnet for finding creative ways to advertise with dwindling dollars; however, to stay a viable tourism destination, compete with neighboring tourism destinations and bring visitors to the area to improve economic conditions, simply maintaining the current funding level was inadequate and it was time the budget was increased. **Motion by DeBruyne, seconded by Bakka to direct Burzinski to increase the County Promotion line item (#326) by \$7,000 to \$100,000 which through budgetary cuts/non-increases over the past several years has severely interfered with advertising purchasing power and the economic promotion of Vilas County as a tourism and possible business relocation area; motion carried.** Thorpe noted that in addition to Burzinski's presence at the Finance Committee hearings, this Committee's support and presence at the hearings would be crucial in presenting and defending any increased budget for consideration.

**2012 Pilch & Barnet Contract** – Burzinski presented the 2012 Pilch & Barnet Contract renewal for review. There was a wording change suggested by Corporation Counsel (*Section 13 - ...time estimates may be too low inaccurate due...*); however, no substantive changes from the 2011 were made.

**Motion by Sitzberger, seconded by De Bruyne to accept the 2012 Pilch & Barnet Contract extension as corrected by Corporation Counsel and approve the Tourism & Publicity Committee Chair signing the contract extension; motion carried.**

**Five County Branding Grant** – Pilch noted the survey evaluations had been completed and encountered an additional interesting result – 30% of the travelers are seeking paid lodging with 70% of the travelers either 2<sup>nd</sup> home owners or staying with family or friends. This information along with the other survey results provides valuable information for marketing both Vilas County (already included in some 2012 media ideas as discussed earlier) and the five-county area.

Pilch noted the group had applied for \$40,000 for 2<sup>nd</sup> year funding for implementation of the area branding effort. The 2<sup>nd</sup> year, if funded (application award announcement by the end of September), would implement the results of the first year's survey – such as including the Twin Cities (MN) in the target market, develop a mobile app for new visitors, and developing a multicultural photography library. Items proposed in the 2012 media schedule may be used for the community ad match portion of the grant.

**2012 Vilas County Travel Guide** – Pilch indicated ad sales are proceeding on schedule with Hapka making some new sales contacts. Thorpe questioned if there were any outstanding ads from 2011 and Pilch thought there was only one and she believed that entity was no longer in business; further noting that ads not paid for by the time the Guide goes to press will be pulled.

**Tourism Shows and Expos** – Burzinski updated the Committee on her attendance at the North Central ITBEC booth at the Wisconsin State Fair. As this was the group's first attendance at the Fair, the booth location was not the best; however, the people stopping at the booth had good questions and seemed interested in learning more about Vilas County and in picking up the Guide. Approximately 600 Guides were distributed. The group will seek future booth placement in the Wisconsin Products pavilion. The gift package provided by Land O'Lakes (lodging at Gateway, dinner certificate to Sunrise Hospitality and miniature golf certificates to Eagle Falls in Eagle River) was won by a woman from Monroe, WI.

Next ITBEC meeting is at 10am on September 29<sup>th</sup> in Shawano.

**Out of County Travel** – None not previously approved.

**Department Reports** – Burzinski distributed Pilch & Barnet's May report which Pilch had already covered and the Department's August report.

Noting the importance of 3<sup>rd</sup> party endorsements and the blogs previously mentioned by Pilch, Burzinski noted the "Off the Couch" blog on the Heart of Vilas County Bike trail.

Sitzberger indicated he had heard that Vilas County was the #1 county visited of the northern counties and wondered where that information could be found. Both Pilch and Burzinski indicated the Davidson Peterson report provided tourism information and county rankings. Burzinski indicated she would provide Sitzberger with the link to the annual report.

Burzinski informed the Committee that a representative from Schenk & Associates, CPA's had revisited her regarding the possibility of the Department utilizing room tax dollars as a revenue source, similar to the Door County Commission format. Burzinski noted that room tax dollars were local tax dollars for the chambers and not available to the Tourism Department. After reviewing the Commission format, Burzinski felt those Vilas County communities that collected room tax were already utilizing the funds in the best manner for their area and could not continue their programs if any portion of those room tax dollars were no longer available to them. The Department and the local chambers currently have a great complementary working relationship and Burzinski just wanted the Committee to be aware of a possible recommendation from the Schenk & Associates' report.

**Budget/Approval of Bills** – Burzinski distributed the monthly bills and budget report and indicated all items remain on target. Thorpe noted the balances remaining and both Burzinski and Christianson indicated that seasonal projects (like winter brochures) are not prepared until just before the season starts while other projects are not completed until the very end of the year. **Motion by Bakka, seconded by Sitzberger, to approve the bills and budget as presented: Cindy Burzinski - \$467.94; Pilch & Barnet - \$10,600.00; Lambeau Telecom - \$29.55; Clermont Printing, Inc. - \$12.38; motion carried.**

**Correspondence/Communication** – Burzinski forwarded an email to Kukanich which the Department had received regarding the 2011 Vilas County Fair. Kukanich indicated the Fair Board had received several comments regarding the 2011 Fair and would be discussing them at a future Fair Board meeting.

**Next meeting** – The next regular Tourism & Publicity Committee meeting is scheduled for October 4, at 9am in Conference Room #2. Thorpe noted it would soon be time to schedule 2012 meeting dates and wondered if scheduling on a specific date (ie, the 5<sup>th</sup> of the month) would help in scheduling. The Clerk's office was not available to discuss the possibility so Burzinski will check with them as to the procedure to use for scheduling 2012 committee meetings.

**Motion by Kukanich, seconded by Sitzberger to adjourn the meeting at 11:24am; motion carried.**

Respectfully submitted, Janet R. Christianson

*Minutes reflect the notations of the recorder and are subject to change by the Committee.*