



INTRODUCING . . .

The Position of Tourist Commissioner

By Marilyn Barrett

An appointment to a tourist commission is a double-edged sword — it's an honor based on your expertise and people's respect for you but it is also an expectation that you will donate much time and effort to bettering the community. Everyone anticipates a 100 percent commitment from you.

Although you may have hesitated before accepting the appointment, you were propelled into the job by your excitement and self-confidence. A month or year from now, some of you will be happy in your new role, others, dissatisfied. Understanding your role as a community leader and your responsibilities as a tourist commissioner can make this appointment rewarding for you and your community.

Each one of you is a member of a team, expected to do everything necessary to help your community accomplish the goals of the commission. What is this team and what exactly are you expected to do?

The Tourism Team

Your official appointment may be as a tourist commissioner, a Chamber of Commerce board member for tourism, or a member of the board of directors of a Convention and Visitors Bureau. Although your job in all cases is the same — tourism development — the way you do it is related to tourism's strength in your community.

Visualize a continuum of increasing strength. In

every community, the initial thrust for tourism development begins when an individual or small special interest group sees that some community improvement — better roads or a more developed park — would initiate or increase tourism business while providing improved services to the community. By lobbying the local government for better roads or a more developed park, this individual or group functions as a tourism team. (This team might actually be a few interested citizens, the historical society, a business association, or a garden club.) Successful completion of the first project leads to more of them, and soon, an ad hoc tourism team emerges — sometimes within a chamber of commerce, or within the local industrial development board, or as an independent group of interested people who meet regularly for one purpose — tourism. The number of projects and importance of them to the community increases as tourism makes an increasing contribution to the local economy. Eventually, a formal tourist commission or convention and visitors bureau is formed. In the most advanced cases, the tourist commission or convention and visitors bureau has a full time, paid executive director and you serve as a member of a board of directors.

Certain characteristics apply to commissioners at every point on the continuum. Each one possesses the characteristics of a community leader, a team player, a volunteer, and a source for ideas and dreams.





Team Leadership

A superior leader manages a group by assigning tasks for which he pays regularly with recognition, wages or praise. But top quality performance comes from more than commands and rewards. A real leader secures superior performance by interacting and interrelating with people. He or she persuades *others to want to do something* that he or she is convinced should be done (Vance Packard, *The Pyramid Climbers*). A superior leader is a friend and a motivator.

A tourist commissioner is a unique leader. In everything he says and does, he exhibits motivation, passion, caring, and conviction for tourism, stimulating others to act.

Your motivation is probably like that of some St. Tammany Parish Tourist Commissioners: "I feel like you have to give something back to the community. You can't just sit back and leave it for others to do" (Dorothy Calderone). "We have so much to offer here in St. Tammany" (Anne Barnes). "Tourism must and should be promoted if all of the businesses in the parish are to do well" (Jim Williamson).

Your appointment indicates that someone saw your leadership qualities in the passion with which you showed your conviction that tourism is right for your community. You might be the one who organized an annual field day or crab festival. You might be the art association chairman who encourages visiting shows, or the hotel business person who figured out a way to annually host French visitors, or an active citizen who has said often and publicly, "We need tourism; it is the cleanest industry we can bring to our community."

You may also be the manager of a local industry, hotel or motel, agency, or retail outlet whose firm's success demonstrates your ability to stimulate others in a team effort. Each one of you has proven by individual activities that you can lead, encourage, cajole, force, persuade, and stimulate people to work toward a common goal.

But you are not independent. As a member of a commission, you are a team player, working with six or eight other leaders and responsible to many more. You balance the needs and desires of individual citizens, state and local governments, the community at large, the tourism businesses in it, the visitors, your own ideas, and those of your teammates.

In any group, diverse opinions and ideas are normal. Good community leaders are careful to remain focused on the good of the community-at-large in relation to the success of a particular tourism venture, avoiding adversity, petty matters, and negative confrontation by looking from everyone's viewpoint.

Your elected president or chairperson or your

executive director is the team leader. The latter is hired in some parishes by the police jury and in others by the commission, town, or chamber of commerce. He or she is a professional with excellent administrative skills and a storehouse of creativity who can give full time attention to the commission's projects. You are the policy maker; he or she is the care taker; leave daily details to your leader. When you provide advice, ideas, assistance, and most of all, support to your leader, you enable him or her to execute the program.

Appointed Volunteer

Commissioners are appointed volunteers. Louisiana law gives police juries the right and responsibility to establish a tourist commission and select those serving on it. Although you were probably nominated by a non-profit group in the community, you are responsible to the community and often, the police jury that appointed you. This local governing body can create or disband a commission on its own initiative within the boundaries of the parish or it can join with other police juries to form a multi-parish team. Because police jurors appoint you and provide your funds, you must know them and work closely with them.

Although you may have been asked to demonstrate your qualifications, and in some cases, you actually had to compete or lobby for this appointment, you are not a community employee. You volunteer time and effort, sometimes even goods and services, to the committee's work because of your intense commitment to your community and to developing tourism in it. Your primary reward is tourism's success.

Each commission's organization, generally laid out by enabling legislation RS 33:4574, differs from parish to parish, and entity to entity. For instance, on some commissions, the three-year terms of commissioners are deliberately staggered, on others, simultaneous or very informally arranged. The law defines the number on each individual commission (sometimes seven, sometimes more or less), and gives commissioners the authority to elect officers. In some parishes, each commissioner represents a specific entity like the hotel/motel industry, the retail sector, or the arts. In others, the commissioners represent a geographic area, or all represent a general interest in economic development through tourism.

What's the Job & How Do We Do It?

Collectively, you are promoters, idea sources, and workers — on a limited budget. "My duty is to promote tourism in Pointe Coupee Parish," said Tourist Commissioner Fran Bartee. In fact, Louisiana law defines your job as promoting tourism in your jurisdiction. Associated with that responsibility, you can collectively



accept grants or donations, sue and be sued (although you are protected under state law from suits involving decisions made in the interest of tourism), and make capital improvements as required to obtain federal funds. Your promotion efforts may include advertising, publishing information, operating a booth in a travel trade show, or conducting festivals, tours, or sales. You may help your community secure a grant or a place on the National Register of Historic Places. Both can result in tourist attractions. You may have to sell the citizens in your community on the wisdom of starting a festival or supporting the development of a particular attraction. Your team may manage fund raisers or lobby a legislator or local industry for added funds. In short, your team will do all kinds of things that will promote tourism and community development. Enthusiasm, willingness to work, and persuasion skills are your major tools.

But you sometimes perform on a tightrope. The law also says your promotions may not result in competition with local retail businesses or enterprises. The commission has no governmental power nor is the commission a political subdivision of the state or your sponsoring parish.

If you are in a community with developed tourist businesses like Lafayette or Lake Charles, you will suggest your ideas at regular meetings and, if there is agreement, your commission chairperson or president and/or the paid executive director will carry them out. You will participate in the activities designed to implement these ideas under his or her direction. In a community like Iberville Parish with a budding tourist commission, you will work with existing entities like the Plaquemine mayor's office, the Bayou Plaquemine Task Force, and the Chamber of Commerce to implement a project. Your projects may be few but you'll devote as many hours to stimulating citizen interest as working on a specific event.

To do a good job, commissions need operating funds. The law authorizes a police jury to levy and collect a tax of no more than two percent on the room or occupancy rate of hotel, motel, and overnight camping accommodations within its jurisdiction for tourism promotion. The police jury does not have to ask the people in the community for permission to levy this tax, nor does it have to impose the tax. Because the legislature will consider increasing that rate for established commissions, many existing tourist commissions now operate on budgets based on revenues from a three or even four percent tax on room occupancy rates.

Some police juries appropriate a set sum for tourism promotion from the parish general fund instead of levying a tax because they view taxation as unpopular. Others provide no funds, encouraging commissioners to conduct fund raisers and suggesting that volunteerism is adequate

for the job. (Consult the state law or your parish district attorney for a few additional limitations, and the specific method of appropriation for your parish.) Many tourist commissions supplement local funds with grants and loans from private or public sources and/or institute their own membership programs.

No matter what your source of funds, the commission's annual operating budget must be approved by the police jury and its accounts must be audited. Support from a police jury is almost proportional to the jurors' enthusiasm for tourism. You must keep them excited, informed, and involved.

Remain Focused

Be careful or your enthusiasm may lead you astray! As a team, set priorities together and confine your work to them. Individually assume responsibility for your segment of each project, but no team member should assume total responsibility for an issue or objective.

Know your community inside and out, and regularly keep abreast of changes in it. Develop a personal relationship with the business people that serve tourists; share your enthusiasm with neighbors and friends. But remember, you are responsible for the successful implementation of tourism for the community's benefit.

Success depends upon real, honest communication. It is equally important for you to discuss ideas and projects with your team, and with businessmen, police jurors, city officials, and state agency representatives. Because your monthly meetings are designed to make decisions toward your goals and objectives, you can effectively use informal communication to prepare for them. To broaden your base of ideas, regularly visit with tourist commissioners in other communities, taking every opportunity to learn their solutions to problems, their goals, and their procedures.

Ready, Set, Go

After reading this short introduction to your new position, you are ready to work with your commission counterparts in developing tourism in your area. To help you learn more about leadership, goal setting, fundraising, marketing, developing new attractions, and tourism as a sustainable resource, the Louisiana Sea Grant College Program is developing additional tourism fact sheets. Informal assistance with these topics is available from Sea Grant and the Cooperative Extension Service at present. In addition, the following resources — books, people, and government agencies — should help. From time to time, topics or questions may emerge for which Sea Grant can supply help. Don't hesitate to call us. If we don't have the answer, we will be glad to try to find it.

References

- Amos, Carole J. and Thomas D. Potts, *Home Town Discovery: A Development Process for Tourism*, Clemson University, Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management, Cooperative Extension Service, Clemson, SC. 1993. (\$10 + \$2 shipping/handling: 284B Lehotsky Hall, Clemson University, Clemson, SC 29634-1005)
- Arnold, John D., *Problem Solver: A Total System for Competitive Decision Making*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York. 1992. (\$24.95: Professional, Reference, and Trade Group, 605 Third Ave., New York, NY 10158-0012)
- Hirner, Deirdre K., Craig W. Colton, Glen Weaver, Glenn A. Gillespie, and Bruce T. Cox. *Tourism USA-Guidelines for Tourism Development*. University of Missouri, Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, University Extension, Columbia MO. 1986 and 1991.
- Kouzes, James M. and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How To Get Extraordinary Things Done in Organizations* Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, San Francisco. 1987. (350 Sansome St., San Francisco, CA 94104)
- Liffmann, Michael M., Steven A. Henning and Marilyn Barrett, *Road Map To Success: Marketing Tourism in Coastal Louisiana*. Louisiana State University, Louisiana Sea Grant College Program, Louisiana State University Agricultural Center, Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, Baton Rouge, LA. 1993. (\$10 + \$3 Shipping/Handling: Communications Office, Louisiana Sea Grant, Wetland Resources Building, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-7507)
- Moore, Margaret, *A Training Guide for Louisiana Rural Tourism Development*. Louisiana State University Agricultural Center, Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, Baton Rouge, LA. 1992. (\$25, LTPA, P.O. Box 4003, Baton Rouge, LA 70821)
- Weaver, Glenn D., *Tourism Development: A Guideline for Rural Communities*, University of Missouri, Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism University Extension, Columbia, MO. 1993.

Contacts

Many of the publications listed above contain extensive reference and contact sections. Although we have listed a few of the frequently requested tourism-related contacts below, a complete list is too long for this publication. Take advantage of contacts and references in every publication or conference.

Louisiana Ready Reference Guide: Booklet of telephone numbers of public and private agencies and associations providing expertise in various tourism-related categories from accommodations to wetland permitting. Listings by category. Obtain from Louisiana Travel Promotion Association.

Capital Small Business Development Center

9613 Interline Ave.
Baton Rouge, LA 70809
504/922-0998

Capital Resource Conservation & Development Council

P.O. Box 1296
Denham Springs, LA 70727-1296
504/389-0730

Coastal Management Division

P.O. Box 44487
Baton Rouge, LA 70804
504/342-7591

Dept. of Economic Development

P.O. Box 94185
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9185
504/342-5893

Dept. of Transportation & Development

P.O. Box 94345
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9245
504/379-1200

Dept. of Wildlife & Fisheries

P.O. Box 98000
Baton Rouge, LA 70898
504/765-2934

Div. of Historic Preservation

P.O. Box 44247
Baton Rouge, LA 70804
504/342-8160

Division of Archaeology

P.O. Box 44247
Baton Rouge, LA 70804
504/342-8170

Folklife Division

P.O. Box 44247
Baton Rouge, LA 70804
504/342-8183

Louisiana Assoc. of Museums

P.O. Box 3494
Baton Rouge, LA 70821
504/343-4341

Louisiana Municipal Assoc.

P.O. Box 4327
Baton Rouge, LA 70802
504/344-5001

Louisiana Preservation Alliance

P.O. Box 1587
Baton Rouge, LA 70815
504/928-9304

Louisiana Restaurant Assoc.

2800 Veterans Blvd. Suite 160
Metairie, LA 70002-6101

Louisiana Travel Promotion Assoc.

1012 S. Acadian thruway
P.O. Box 4003
Baton Rouge, LA 70821
504/346-1857 / FAX 504/336-4154
(Danny Young, Exec. Director
Statewide trade association for promoting
travel and tourism in Louisiana)

Louisiana Convention & Visitors Bureau

600 N. Hwy. 190, Suite 15
Covington, LA 70433
504/892-0520; 800/634-9443
FAX 504/892-1441
(Frances Leake, President
Louisiana chapter of the International
Association for Convention and Visitors
Bureaus, a professional association of
tourism leaders)

Office of Litter Reduction & Public Action

P.O. Box 82178
Baton Rouge, LA 70884-2178
504/765-0249

Office of Rural Development

P.O. Box 94004
Baton Rouge, LA 70804
504/342-1618

Office of State Museums

751 Chartres St.
New Orleans, LA 70116
504/568-6967

Office of State Parks

P.O. Box 44426
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-4426
504/342-8186

Police Jury Assoc. of Louisiana

707 N. 7th St.
Baton Rouge, LA 70802-5327
504/343-2835
