

**UTAH OFFICE OF TOURISM**  
**Board Meeting Minutes**  
Friday, January 13, 2023  
Petzl Technical Institute, West Valley City, UT

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Board Members Present Nathan Rafferty, Jared Berrett, Kym Buttschardt, Lesha Coltharp, Brian Merrill, Greg Miller, Glen Overton, Jordan Smith, Mike Taylor, Sara Toliver, Jennifer Wesselhoff, Shayne Wittwer

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Board Members Excused Lance Syrett

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UOT Staff Ben Cook, Lorraine Daly, Denise Jordan, Becky Kenney, Anna Loughridge, Celina Sinclair, Erin Smith, Flint Timmins, Vicki Varela, David Williams, Diane Wilson, Heather Zang

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Public Tim Behunick, Sydnie Furton, Joannie Hammer, Kylie Kullack, Nick Larson, Tom Love, Becky McRae, Dallas Miller, Chris Newton, Molly O'Neill, Natalie Randall, Hannah Saunders, Jonathan Smithgall, Maria Twitchell

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**WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS**

**Nathan Rafferty**, Vice Chair, called the meeting to order. Nathan welcomed everyone and asked for introductions.

**Keith Luscinski**, Petzel Institute Manager welcomed everyone, talked about Petzel's mission, and invited the group to tour the facility after the meeting.

**MINUTES**

**MOTION: MIKE TAYLOR motioned to approve the December 9, 2022 meeting minutes held in Salt Lake City. GLEN OVERTON seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.**

**MANAGING DIRECTOR REPORT**

**Vicki Varela**, Managing Director, Utah Office of Tourism

- First meeting for the Zion National Park visitor use planning process was held in December. Working with leaders and commissioners in Southern Utah, and the Public Land Policy Commission to find a path through the complex and cumbersome process. Will report back as plans develop.
- UOT has been awarded a Platinum Adrian Award from the Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMAI) for the Forever Mighty campaign.
- UOT Staff Update
  - Heather Zang joined Jan. 3 as Vicki's Executive Assistant/Office Manager.

- Kelly Day is now retired, and we will honor her in conjunction with Tourism Day on the Hill. A Utah picture book was available for the group to sign and will be given to her at the event.
- Celina Sinclair has done a fantastic job in setting up the Salesforce platform for programs. She will begin maternity leave soon and return back to work in May, when she will continue to run the co-op program.
- Kim Heys, our web coordinator, and Arianna Rees, who is over social media, have both moved from part-time to full-time status.
- Open staff positions
  - Community and Partner Relations Director – We received 118 applications, and plan to conduct interviews with qualified candidates next week. This is a high UOT priority.
  - Communications & Marketing Manager job is posted.
- Ryan Starks was named the Executive Director of the Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity. Vicki noted this is the first time the executive director has a tourism background.
- Utah Tourism Industry Association (UTIA) and Executive Director Natalie Randall will have an intensive year on Capitol Hill. Call out a great initiative by UTIA to start the TOUR caucus (Tourism and Outdoor Recreation) led by Representative Stenquist and Senator Anderegg. They want to bring more legislators together to discuss the importance of tourism and outdoor recreation and bring proactive legislative initiatives and budget ideas to build our industry.

Nathan Rafferty shared that Sara Toliver has been awarded the 2023 ATHENA Leadership Award, which will be presented to her on January 24. Sara noted that her mother also received the award 18 years ago - the first-ever mother-daughter recipients.

## **MARKETING COMMITTEE REPORT**

Southern Utah+ 2022/2023 strategy and budget request \$4,442,912

**Becky Keeney**, UOT Director of Strategy

**Jonathan Smithgall**, Love Communications Vice President Digital Marketing and Media

**Kylie Kullack**, Struck Head of Client Engagement

**Ben Cook**, UOT Director of Marketing & Communications

- Becky and Kylie explained the goals of the campaign: Promote Southern Utah travel by leveraging our Mighty 5® brand to drive quality visitors, promoting good planning and thoughtful travel behavior, and inspiring reasons to visit.
  - Ease the planning process for visitors
  - Introduce all the awe-inspiring, memory-making experiences so visitors may extend stays, book more activities, spend more money
- Continuous tracking of the campaigns key performance indicators (KPIs).
- Key campaign concepts are love and connection; leverage breathtaking scenery; vacation nostalgia; exploration being a balance of relaxation and challenge.
- Campaign to run 2/15/23-6/30/23 with emphasis in March and June.
- Includes specific effort for off highway vehicles (OHV) in Southern Utah and working with Tread Lightly!
- Ben defined earned media (public relations and social media) and owned media (website and email) versus paid media.
- Utah travel trends include family matters, spontaneity, mindful travel, epic experiences and embrace the outdoors and use these to pitch target media. (Public Relations)
- Use social media channels (Instagram, Pinterest, Facebook primarily) to showcase unique places to stop while traveling from SLC to Southern Utah, and educate on ABCs of visiting Southern Utah.

- Website (VisitUtah.com) will highlight articles, itineraries, how to visit responsibility and longer videos.

**MOTION: MIKE TAYLOR motioned to approve the \$4,442,912 budget for the Southern Utah+ 2022/2023 strategy. SHAYNE WITTWER seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.**

Ski+ 2022/2023 update

**Becky Keeney**, UOT Director of Strategy

**Jonathan Smithgall**, Love Communications Vice President Digital Marketing and Media

**Ben Cook**, UOT Director of Marketing & Communications

- Ski campaign currently running through March.
- Good snow brings travelers but looming recession makes travelers cautious when spending, and seeing this with internet search.
- December 2022 hotel bookings were lagging but since the new year, revenue has increased significantly.
- In December, Salt Lake designated market area (DMA) accounted for 28.8 percent of total hotel bookings compared to only 7.6 percent last year. But early January results show more even distribution of markets.
- Majority of hotel bookings came from ages 40-49 – the audience most confident spending.
- Paid social media campaigns are averaging \$1.50-\$2 per click from our focused audiences. Would like it to be closer to \$1 but only 10 days of data in January and think it will lower. Also hired Alana Nichols, travel influencer, coming in February. She is a Paralympic gold medalist and will create content to share with her followers (16K+) and we also can access.
- Earned media coverage from Forbes, Town & Country, Good Housekeeping, etc., has had a potential reach of 120M+ due to publications' circulation.
- Social media's Pow Cam (featuring powder snow) posting on Instagram receives up to 20K views. Ben explained one or two members of his team visits a resort on "Weather Wednesday" and captures footage with iPhone or GoPro cameras. Vicki extended the invitation to board members to join them.
- Nathan encouraged using the messaging that Utah's resorts have the top five deepest snow totals in the nation or world as long as possible. Evan Thayer at Wasatch Snow Forecast could assist with that research. Use of "the most" is a powerful message that people seem to like.
- Web traffic has an 18.53 percent conversion rate, which is 8 percent higher than average of other campaigns. Search engine optimization (SEO) results from Google are very good.
- Due to high snow totals, seeing massive increase in our website views that track back to Ski Utah - specifically the snow totals banner traffic and flight has increased 95 percent from this time last year.
- Nathan noted Utah snow total is 250 percent above average so far this year and as of January 15 passed the total snowfall amount from last year.

#### **UTIA UPDATE**

**Sara Toliver**, Board of Directors, Utah Tourism Industry Association

Noted the preparation for the legislative session has been very busy. Sara and Natalie Randall are preparing, and will share the legislative plans, updates, etc., at the UTIA membership and open to the public meeting on Friday, Feb. 10 at 9 a.m. It is at the Capitol with the exact room location TBA.

- Upcoming Legislative bills –
  - o Transient Room Tax (TRT) – HB 76 – Natalie and Des Barker are working with Tooele County Representative Jimenez. Intent is to support the recreationalist impact with priority on emergency medical services (EMS), and going after additional county TRT

funds. UTIA is trying to identify additional funding sources and opportunities to help fund other options.

- o Also TRT related, a bill from Representative Lyman addressing a specific language request from Grand County.
- o The League of Cities and Towns is looking at language for the county tourism TRT advisory board that would allow a city representative on the board if that city generates a certain percentage of the county's TRT.
- o Alcohol - Early session bill deals with NBA All-Star Game and adjustments needed for hosting, sponsor activations.
- o Also looking at bar licenses as the limit is a challenge for business owners in the state.
- o Another alcohol omnibus bill which reportedly will include items on restaurant portability, so you can carry your beverage from bar to table; hotel portability; new restaurant proximity to parks and libraries, but not churches; increased restaurant licenses; seltzer flavoring issues; heavy (high point) beer delivery to restaurants; and, curbside grocery pick-up to include beer brought to vehicles, currently you have to go inside and buy it separately.
- o Short term rentals (SRT) is a hot topic for many. Ogden Representative Musselman was assigned to create a task force, and Sara and Natalie both participated. His bill is still in draft but language will include a requirement for any SRT operator to have a sales tax license unless you rent exclusively through a big platform (VRBO or Airbnb) as they collect and remit sales tax for you. Give the state some auditing capabilities.
- o Cities have asked for clarification on language that says you cannot use SRT online listings as an enforcement mechanism.
- o Weber County passed an ordinance regulating SRT and Park City is holding on to theirs to see outcomes from the legislative session.
- Many municipalities are using a reporting/enforcement platform called Granicus. UTIA is exploring state wide investment into the platform so municipalities can enhance their subscriptions and tools that they offer. Would create a baseline address identification effort which could be helpful.
- Tourism Works™ Pact, including numerous UTIA board members, has been busy attending events and fundraisers pre-session to show our engagement, involvement and support. This includes Senate and House events for both parties.
- Tourism Day on the Hill is Friday, Feb. 10. The meeting is at 9-10:40 a.m., and Natalie and Des will prepare a legislative briefing document. From 11:15 a.m.–1:45 p.m. is the rotunda lunch with legislators. Natalie Randall and Des Barker will prepare a talking points document for industry partners. Outdoor Day on the Hill is that same day so it will be a busy day.
- TOUR caucus (Tourism and Outdoor Recreation) chaired by Representative Stenquist and Senator Anderegg. Intent is to provide education and awareness for legislators and key stakeholders around tourism and outdoor recreation issues and policy during the session, as well as during the interim. We want to showcase the variants and nuances between the two industries as well. The great caucus planning group includes Representative Albrecht, Senator Wilson, Senator Hinkins, Representative Owens and other state staff including Vicki and Patrick Purcell from the Utah Outdoor Industry Association. There will be meetings during the session at the Capitol and events outside the session where collaborate with regional partners to host the legislators in their communities. Caucus events are planned in January, May and September in various parts of the state.
- UTIA, with partner Love Communications, will send out quarterly surveys to UTIA members with questions about the trends you observed in the prior quarter. The Q1 survey will be sent out today to UTIA members, DMOs, private businesses, public businesses, and anyone input visitor economy. Gage trends, actions, results happening timely.

- Working on stakeholder engagement initiatives which will include a toolkit for DMOs, private industry partners to communicate with community stakeholders, elected officials, etc., on the value of the visitor economy.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT/ANNOUNCEMENTS**

No business was discussed.

#### **MEETING ADJOURNED**

*The next board meeting will be Thursday, Feb. 9, 2023, 2:30 p.m., at the World Trade Center Utah, 60 E. South Temple, 1st Floor/Training Room, Salt Lake City, UT*