

Travel & Tourism board looks to bring visitors

by Cindy Glasson

Hot Springs Travel and Tourism met on Tuesday to discuss their upcoming winter promotion to bring visitors to the area during the slow months of the year. The board also elected new officers.

Cindy Ellison is continuing as the board chair, seconded by vice chair Kevin Skates. Angie Guyon is the new board secretary and Sandy Newsome is continuing as treasurer.

"The Keys to the City" winter campaign is a simple one that will present off-season visitors with a bit more value if they come stay and play in Thermopolis. The campaign is simple.

When a visitor comes to Thermopolis and stays at any of the participating hotels or camp grounds, they are offered "The Keys to the City", a keychain that they may then take to local businesses for discounts on merchandise and dining.

Each visitor will also be given a card containing a list of the participating businesses.

The board hopes to run the campaign between Nov. 14 and Feb. 15 and are making arrangements for advertising to start on KTWO television as soon as possible.

During the campaign the board will track the number of key chains used com-

pared to the number distributed each month to monitor the success of the event.

It generally takes about three months for the lodging taxes collected locally to make their way through the state and back into the coffers of Travel and Tourism.

Tourism director Amanda Moeller distributed a graph to the board members showing a four-year history of lodging tax income, starting in 2012.

Just looking at the last two years, 2013 and 2014, for June, July and August, there appears to be something of a downward trend in the money coming back to the county through the lodging tax.

In June of 2013, nearly \$16,000 came in through hotel and campground stays while this summer that number was around \$14,500.

Numbers for July of 2013 showed a return of almost \$29,000 with this year bringing in a touch over \$25,000 for the month.

August, however, was a good month for tourism this year, bringing in nearly \$24,000 compared to just over \$19,000 in August of 2013.

The next meeting of the Travel and Tourism board will be Nov. 18 at 1 p.m. at the Hot Springs County Museum and Cultural Center.



Colorful Rad runners jogged, trotted and strolled to the finish line

Seventy-eight participants took part in the Color Me Rad run on Saturday, at Hot Springs State Park. It was an incredibly colorful event where participants were "brightened up" with non-toxic multi-colored corn starch at spe-

cific points in their run. Above, Cindy Messenger pushes her sleepy partner Karlee and Erika Klein and her colorful companion partake in the event on a beautiful day.

-Dennis Nierzwicki photo

State parks commission talks with residents about HSSP



Former Wyoming State Parks and Cultural Resources Commission member Barb Vietti addressed the group Tuesday at Big Horn Federal.

-Lara Love photo

by Lara Love

Members of the Wyoming State Parks and Cultural Resources Commission along with Director Milward Simpson met with members from the community Tuesday night to discuss issues relating to Hot Springs State Park.

The top issue discussed was the State's lease agreement with TePee Pools and the looming Oct. 31 deadline for an agreeable Master Plan to be in place for continued operation of the TePee Pools.

TePee Pools lease agreement was terminated by the State in April due to contract failure. The owners of the TePee and state officials had been unable to agree on the details of a required master plan for improvements and upgrades to the TePee. A six month extension was given on May 1. Since then, negotiations on a master plan to meet the lease contract obligations have been on going.

According to Simpson, several meetings have been held between the parties and their lawyers to discuss the details of the master plan.

A time line of communication was presented by Simpson including an outline of a proposed master plan submitted by owners of the TePee in June, a request for more specific details by the state in July and a discussion of confidentiality issues regarding financial information provided by the TePee Pools owners. Although the state believed the

master plan should be public information, they did agree to withhold some specific financial information.

Simpson said a letter was sent to the TePee owners in August request a detailed master plan. He stated a master plan was received on Sept. 23. The state responded with more questions pertaining to specifics of when certain of when improvements would be made. According to Simpson, a revised master plan was received by the state on Monday which the state is currently reviewing.

An emotional crowd of about around 40 citizens threw a number of questions at the commission. Dan Wichgrym voiced his concern about the Big Spring. He wants to sustain or increase the flow in order to help property owners north of Thermopolis. He provided a website of www.savethebigspring.com for more information.

Paul Galovich spoke of the importance of the TePee Pools to the cultural history of HSSP. He then went on to ask the commission "How many times the rules have changed in regards to the master plan?" He said he feels like the state is throwing rocks underneath the wheels of a private business owner's cart to prevent them from succeeding.

Dan Barks, president of the commission, defended the state's position saying they have been working with the owners of the TePee since 2006 trying to come up with an agreement both parties could accept.

According to Simpson, the lease signed in 2012 required TePee Pools owners to present an acceptable master plan. A big hang up for the state revolves around the Tepee owners being able to prove they have the financial capability to make the improvements requested by the state and the time frame for those improvements.

Simpson detailed the unique lease agreement being offered to the TePee Pools. If an acceptable master plan is agreed upon, beginning January 2015 the TePee Pools would pay the state 5% of their reported income, with the state giving back 4.5% to the owners to be used for maintenance and improvements.

A number of citizens spoke their concern for the TePee Pools being torn down to make room for a new water park. Banks responded that it is the state's goal to get the TePee Pools to the level of a first class facility. There was a lot of discussion as to what constitutes a first class facility.

Most community members present agreed the TePee Pools could use some upgrades and maintenance. They would like to see that vs. a new, first class facility.

Negotiations between the state and the owners of TePee Pools will continue until Oct. 31. If a master plan is not agreed upon by then, the state may give another extension or terminate the lease.