

**Board of County Commissioners
Leon County, Florida**

**TOURISM STRATEGIC PLAN
WORKSHOP**



**Tuesday, September 8, 2009
1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.**

**Leon County
Department of Tourism Development**

**TOURISM STRATEGIC PLAN
WORKSHOP**

Agenda

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Recap of Discussions from Strategic Planning Retreat
- III. Strategic Plan Program of Work

Board of County Commissioners

Workshop Request

Date of Meeting: September 8, 2009

Date Submitted: September 1, 2009

To: Honorable Chairman and Members of the Board

From: Parwez Alam, County Administrator
Vincent S. Long, Deputy County Administrator
Lee Daniel, Director, Tourism Development

Subject: Workshop on the Leon County Tourism Strategic Plan

Statement of Issue:

This workshop will be conducted to present the first draft of the Leon County Tourism Strategic Plan and to receive further direction from the Board in the refinement of the five-year plan.

Background:

On July 14, 2009, the Board scheduled a workshop on the presentation of the Tourism Strategic Plan. The Plan was developed from discussions between the Board, the Tourist Development Council (TDC), and industry stakeholders at the Tourism Retreat held on June 3, 2009. This retreat was moderated by consultant Bill Geist of Zeitgeist Consulting of Madison, Wisconsin, who was contracted by Leon County to (1) conduct a tourism product assessment, (2) moderate the Tourism Retreat on June 3 and (3) to develop the Tourism Strategic Plan. All these items were part of the Tourism Development Transition Plan previously approved by the Board. Mr. Geist also reviewed the strategic plan that was developed by the Tourist Development Council and presented to the Board on November 24, 2008.

Analysis:

This workshop provides a format for the Board to review the first draft of the Tourism Strategic Plan and for Commissioners to discuss the related issues and provide additional direction to staff and the consultant for refinement of the plan. The first draft of the Tourism Strategic Plan (Attachment #1) is being provided for Board review and comment and will be presented by Mr. Geist.

The Tourism Strategic Plan will serve as the roadmap for staff and the TDC as they work to sustain and grow tourism now and into the future. The plan is divided into three main sections. The first section is an Executive Summary of the Tourism Strategic Plan. The second section contains a recap of the discussions from the June 3 Tourism Workshop and Retreat, and the final section contains the full Strategic Plan which is the program of work for staff and the TDC for their long-range future and includes suggested tactics.

As an additional deliverable in this process, Mr. Geist has worked with staff to develop an outline of a year-one Business Plan that will be used by the Tourism Development Department team and the TDC to begin implementing the Tourism Strategic Plan once the final version has been approved by the Board. Additional information on the Business Plan outline will be distributed at the time of the workshop.

The final Tourism Strategic Plan will be presented at the September 22 Board meeting. Upon adoption by the Board, all items on the Tourism Development Transition Plan will have been completed.

Options:

1. Conduct the workshop and provide any additional direction the Board deems appropriate for inclusion in the Tourism Strategic Plan.
2. Board Direction.

Recommendation:

Option #1.

Attachment:

1. Leon County Tourism Strategic Plan

LD/ksh

2009-2014
STRATEGIC PLAN FOR
VISIT TALLAHASSEE

DRAFT

August 2009

ZEITGEIST CONSULTING

ZeitgeistConsulting.com

2009-2014 STRATEGIC PLAN FOR VISIT TALLAHASSEE

GOAL ONE

ENHANCE THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH OF THE TDC & VISIT TALLAHASSEE

Objective A

Align the Priorities of the Board of County Commissioners, TDC and Visit Tallahassee in order to enhance the Tourism Economy of the Region, while maximizing the amount of Tourist Development Tax proceeds available to the TDC to carry out its Strategic Plan

Objective B

Complete the Merger of the CVB into the new Visit Tallahassee structure

Objective C

Enhance Resident & Business Awareness, Appreciation & Support of the TDC, Visit Tallahassee and the Visitor Industry of Leon County

Objective D

Reach out to Regional Partners to Enhance the Destination's Product Line

Objective E

Analyze Opportunities to become more Competitive by Increasing and Diversifying the Visit Tallahassee Budget

GOAL TWO

ENHANCE THE DESTINATION SALES & MARKETING OF THE REGION

Objective A

Strengthen Destination Brand Identity and Awareness

Objective B

Enhance Visit Tallahassee's Utilization of Technology and Social Media

Objective C

Identify and Maximize Niche Markets in which Leon County can Effectively Compete

GOAL THREE

ADVOCATE FOR DESTINATION DEFINING DEVELOPMENT

Objective A

Develop a Tourism-centric Master Plan for Leon County

Objective B

Communicate the Opportunities for Destination Enhancing Developments

Objective C

Analyze and Support Destination Development Projects as Appropriate

Objective D

Represent the Interests of the Visitor Industry on Public Policy Issues

THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Members of the Leon County Board of County Commissioners, the Leon County Tourist Development Council, members of the County Administration and almost 40 other industry and community stakeholders met on 3 June 2009 to plot the future growth and direction for the TDC, the CVB and the destination. The Strategic Planning Team identified the realities of the present and the dreams for tomorrow as they considered new ways to increase their effectiveness in achieving its Mission and Vision.

The following document was developed after a substantive discussion of present environments, threats and opportunities. The subsequent Strategic Goals developed during the Retreat are reproduced here to power future discussions with key community and industry stakeholders to develop support and collaborative opportunities.

On the following pages, stakeholders identified the issues before the TDC and the Destination... and then strategized ways for the Visit Tallahassee to expand its impact and benefits to the region. Pages 4 through 19 are the background for the destination's Strategic Plan, which begins on Page 20.

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This document is divided into three main sections. The first section is an Executive Summary of the Strategic Plan that can be shared with stakeholders as appropriate. The second section contains a recap of our discussions from the Strategic Planning Retreat, laying the groundwork for the identification of the Strategic Goals and Objectives. This section can be referred to for clarification or rationale for particular Opportunities. Finally, the full Strategic Plan is the program of work for the TDC and Visit Tallahassee for its long-range future and includes suggested tactics. While there is understanding that this is a public document, some of these tactics are competitively and politically sensitive and this section is not intended to be actively distributed outside the organization.

Once the TDC Board and the Board of County Commissioners have reviewed and adopted the final version of its Strategic Plan, the TDC Board Chairperson should assign specific responsibilities to Board Committees or Task Forces. Each committee then will begin the work of building the details of the strategy and implementing same, with committee updates provided to the full Board at the monthly Board meetings.

STRATEGIC PLANNING
DISCUSSION NOTES
3 JUNE 2009

IN THE YEAR 2017

The Leon County TDC started its Strategic Planning deliberations with Board, Staff and Industry Stakeholders envisioning what the destination would look like in the year 2017. Their responses, in no particular order, follow:

“Leon County is the higher education center of Florida, a large association community with a world class Performing Arts Center, and a five year old Convention Center Hotel (with 700 sleeping rooms) with state of the art conference and exhibit space.”

“A larger number of people are visiting Tallahassee as a destination...and not as a place to just stop by on the way to somewhere else.”

“A number of places to choose from for weekend entertainment (that have nothing to do with college). Many free/low-cost family entertainment activities to do on the weekends (other than merely going to the park). A grand mall with the best stores. The roads and infrastructure of Leon County have finally caught up with its population growth. A small-scale casino and even a small amusement park.”

“Thanks to the development of a Convention Center Hotel we have a regular schedule of moderate (300 person) meetings and conventions which has led to additional hotel and restaurant development downtown.”

“The Big Bend region is widely known for its rich historical, cultural, and recreational tourism opportunities. Specifically, Tallahassee is set apart as a capital city offering opportunities to visitors unparalleled elsewhere in Florida. Likewise, Tallahassee is a top destination for national and international travelers to Florida. There are travelers at our museums, restaurants, hotels, and art & science centers. Tallahassee is recognized as a green tourist destination.”

“In 2017, Disneyworld is noticing a decline in visitors as travelers choose the Big Bend over the Big Mouse. Visitors are coming to the REAL FLORIDA and are welcomed by Tallahassee’s smiling, hospitable, top notch members of the travel industry.”

“Revitalized African American Historic neighborhoods will be a vital part of tourism planning for economic development.”

“Leon County will be a place known for its eco-, heritage-, and cultural tourism resources, where people can get outdoors during the day but also have a more refined urban experience at night with more unique restaurants, retail shopping and much improved hotels that know how to provide quality customer service and are knowledgeable about our tourism resources. Restaurants and retail will not just be national chains that can be found in any other destination. There will be places where adults can find good musical entertainment and beverages without competing with the college or red-neck crowd. We will also have a quality convention facility with close proximity convention hotel accommodations.”

“Additional corporate headquarters have located here and support the additional hotel rooms that have been built. Sports events that were nurtured in 2008-2010 are now thriving. We enjoy an educated workforce from improved schools and universities. Airlines are offering more in-state and US flights, reasonably priced, competing with Jacksonville.”

“Basketball and football teams are ranked and doing well, which will drive big sports weekend to Tallahassee. The Mission San Luis will have global appeal due to the new airport.”

“The destination boasts a well-developed artist community, strong local businesses, an abundance of natural resources and vibrant historic corridors and neighborhoods.”

“Local natural and historical resources in Leon County and surrounding counties provide the focus for a thriving Ecotourism Industry.”

“The cultural organizations formed before the turn of the century are now stable and strong. Tallahassee and Leon County are uniquely known for the creation of “green jobs” related to tourism. The strength of partnerships between state agencies, local government, corporations, the academic community and the not-for-profit sector have resulted in a truly amazing tourism landscape.”

“There is a trolley tour on a daily schedule during core hours of 10 am to 6:00 pm to heritage destinations/tourist attractions leaving from strategic locations in the downtown area. There will be tourism hubs developed next door to Riley House on the now County owned lot, complete with a Visitor Center. Customized tours to other outlying destinations are available on a schedule. Tours are complete with guides dressed in appropriate uniform attire-trolley identifiable with catchy and inviting exterior paintings to signify “Get Out and See Tallahassee”. Downtown now has a grocery store, a Drug Store/Pharmacy, at least 3-5 ladies and men dress stores, a Starbucks, 3-4 inside/sidewalk gourmet style restaurants and another downtown hotel with meeting space. Gaines Street, from a completed Cascades over to Wahnish and Railroad Square, is a walking tourism hub. Historic buildings will be in adaptive use with tourism drawing programs such as art galleries and workspace. A multicultural resource center has been developed at Old Caroline Brevard.”

“The Arts Exchange is up and running, alive seven days of the week with music and theatre, jazz bars and unique film bars welcoming visitors from around the globe. Sports fans tack on extra nights to their football packages to stay and play here, with Football season passes/discounts available at local restaurants and retail. Eco-tourists spend their days discovering the nature of the other Florida at the Tallahassee Museum and Wakulla Springs, with evenings spent attending regularity scheduled special presentations of national leaders in the fieldhouse at FSU or the Black Box Theatre at the The Arts Exchange. Tallahassee takes its role as the Capitol very seriously, with hybrid shuttles linking downtown to area hotels. On board guides provide in-depth information on where to go, play and stay, pointing out the historic or cultural sites along the routes. Many annual festivals have grown to multi-day events, some even multi-week events.”

“Tourism is envisioned more regionally. The Landscape is shaped by a dominant tourism pillar, a la Branson or how the Mall of America serves as a tourism and retail driver for the Midwest.”

“We are hosting large groups at times other than the legislative session and football season. Tourists are enjoying the sites and cultural offerings in our community.”

“Leon County is recognized as a destination for cultural, historical, heritage and nature based tourism as well as a place for Florida Association meetings and sporting events.”

“If the tourism landscape is still being defined geographically as Leon County in 2017, then it will not be much different than 2009. The Tourism landscape for 2017 must have a regional flavor.”

“Recreation meets innovation.”

“The Tallahassee Region will be a successful amateur sports mecca.”

“There will be more children and family-based activities and facilities.”

“There will be bigger attractions and more musical venues.”

“Celebrities are endorsing the destination in our marketing messages.”

“Known as the Canopy Capital of the world.”

“Visitors (and residents) will benefit from better wayfinding signage.”

“ We will be marketing Tallahassee as a center of innovations, possibly with an innovation museum.”

“A destination defining event has become a magnet for visitors across the Southeast.”

“An aquarium and a year-round waterpark will have been developed.”

“We’ve become more adept at Packaging.”

“The Civil War Trails, the Emancipation Day Celebration and the Taste of Tallahassee are big draws.”

“The TDC/Visit Tallahassee will have reached out to St. Marks and included then in its more regional approach to destination marketing.”

“More interactive experiences will be available for visitors that want to immerse themselves in our heritage and culture.”

“The area is well known for birding.”

“Tallahassee will have maximized it’s older architecture through innovative adaptive re-use strategies.”

“No different than today.”

THE PAST 12 MONTHS

The Strategic Planning Team then assessed the events of the past year and considered whether these events moved the destination closer to or further from their positive visions for the future:

CLOSER TO

“We have made some efforts regarding the Performing Arts Center.”

“The recruitment of a professional director for TDC.”

“The lack of dollars and budget restraints have made this Council be more proactive in economic development issues.”

“An increased awareness of our resources (eco- heritage, cultural) and the subsequent allocation of marketing/promotional efforts toward them.”

“Increased Support for the Arts & Culture.”

“State designation as part of the Big Bend Scenic Byway.”

“The BCC is finally recognizing the importance of tourism as a vital economic engine.”

“A movement toward a more regionalized approach to destination marketing.”

FURTHER FROM

“The downturn in the economy.”

“The increased focus on heads in beds (as opposed to “tourists in town”). Political bickering, funding of pet projects/causes that have no tourism relationship.”

“Decline in State Funding.”

WHAT'S NEXT?

The Strategic Planning Team considered the infrastructure and attraction enhancements that could advance the destination to the proverbial "next level":

"More cultural and historical events that highlight the unique attributes of Tallahassee."

"An upscale mall and more mid to upscale independent restaurants."

"Enhance the Frenchtown Area and the Southside of town, adding specific landmarks and their historic significance."

"Improved signage."

"We need to capitalize on our existing assets and not try to copy what everyone else has done everywhere else, ending up with generification."

"Larger hotels with convention space, an 18 hour downtown, an enhanced performing arts venue and greatly expanded air service."

"Enhanced use of historic infrastructure, adaptive use of the existing buildings downtown with an emphasis on attracting local businesses, shopping and dining. Integrating existing bike trails to the coast into downtown with less emphasis on outskirt developments."

"Completion of Cascade Park, the Gaines Street corridor, and the development of Riley Legacy Park at South Meridian and West Pensacola."

"Multi-modal and Inter-County Transportation."

"Natural resources, historical resources and certified green guides."

"Arts Exchange!"

"A small convention center or conference center (in place of the Performing Arts Center) and a conference center hotel."

"A large capacity multi-sport complex. Connectivity to night-life, hotels and shopping."

"A comprehensive plan for the metropolitan area and a convention center hotel."

THE TDC'S STRENGTHS

The Strategic Planning Team looked inward and assessed the strengths of the Tourist Development Council:

- A diversity of private and public industry tourism, marketing and business experience combined with a passion to share the wonders of the Tallahassee area with the world.
- The makeup of the Council, with members from various interests who want what's best for the County, not what is good for their individual businesses.
- Leadership, vision and autonomy.
- Its relationship with the staff at Visit Tallahassee
- The revenue stream through bed taxes, existing under the umbrella of a major governmental entity. The TDC has cultivated state, regional, national and international ties to potential tourism entities and is using its local attractions/destinations to maintain, enhance and foster these relationships and cultivate new partners.
- The ability to provide funding assistance to local groups.

THE TDC'S CHALLENGES

Conversely, the Strategic Planning Team identified the challenges before the Organization:

- The BCC's historic lack of understand of and confidence in the TDC as well as what appears to be their belief that Tallahassee cannot be a tourism destination.
- The TDC doesn't have the necessary support staff (other than Visit Tallahassee) to work on the day to day efforts that bring in tourism business. Hiring and retaining staff with the expertise, knowledge and passion to sustain the program.
- To maintain autonomy and increase the budget to market the region and lead efforts to create destination events.
- Letting go of preconceived notions and finite definitions of what is or is not "tourism. Opening up to new ideas.
- Understanding that "cultural tourism" and "performing arts center" are not one and the same. Understanding that all kinds of cultural events can provide more opportunities to capture the tourism market.
- Marketing an area that has no beaches.
- To project a focused brand image of the Destination.
- Operating/acting/planning/creating/thinking regionally. To include and support entities that have not historically been at the table.
- Working together with the arts community as well as the hotel industry.
- Regaining its stature as a respected advisory board and reinstilling due process and accountability to the grant process.
- Finding a focus on the best use of funds and avoiding outside forces directing funds to low ROI projects.
- Overcoming drastic cuts in funding and staff.
- Creating reasons to visit Leon County other than for a collegiate event or Legislative Session.
- Marketing Tallahassee as a "destination" for tourists.
- To develop new approaches to tourism growth and diversify the current strategy which is focused on sports and government.
- Redefining its Mission and creating a new structure for Tourism Promotion and Development.

DESTINATION BRAND COMPONENTS

To better communicate destination uniqueness and desirability, communities around the world are attempting to understand their brand essence. While this is a complicated and sophisticated process, a destination brand is rooted in what locals and visitors already perceive a region to be. The Strategic Planning Team offered up what it thought the destination's key brand attributes are:

- Real Southern Atmosphere
- Charm
- Affordable
- Lush / Natural / Green
- Fun
- Flavor
- Warm / Friendly
- Hot
- Smart
- Historic
- Cultural
- Educational
- Capital Destination
- Football
- College Town
- Hospitable
- Quaint
- Eclectic
- Government
- Beautiful
- Intellectual
- Progressive
- Diverse
- Academically Innovative
- Sports

TOP ISSUES FACING THE DESTINATION & THE TDC

The Strategic Planning Team then turned its attention to the most critical issues before the Destination and the TDC:

- The role of Visit Tallahassee in relation to the TDC and how the two will work together in the future
- The future of regional destination marketing for exploration of natural and historical treasures
- How the needs of the arts community and citizens can be balanced with the resistance of the hoteliers (relative the the use of Tourist Development Taxes)
- The needs for a more global effort to protect the existing cultural infrastructure of our community
- Redefining Mission and Vision of the TDC
- How the different entities (TDC, Visit Tallahassee, COCA, Economic Development etc.) can work together under one umbrella to stretch and leverage the limited marketing dollars to promote tourism to the region
- The future of the Performing Arts Center and how that does or does not fit into the Leon County Tourism landscape
- How do we define success?
- City participation with the TDC and Visit Tallahassee
- How to better include our regional character (Florida's history, south Georgia plantations and seaside hamlets like Dog Island, Panacea, etc.) in our marketing strategy
- Determining long-term budget needs and identifying new revenue streams to power Visit Tallahassee marketing
- Support destination-defining development in the Tallahassee area
- Identifying what makes Tallahassee unique and marketable...and what regional assets and attractions can be utilized
- The role of the arts and Historical Sites as a means to enhance the economic stability of Tallahassee and the state
- The development of our brand and the re-establishment of our priorities of getting tourists to town and not fighting political battles for the use of the bed tax funding and what it was intended for
- Growing Leon County into a Sports Destination

DESTINATION ASSESSMENT

Lead Consultant Bill Geist toured Leon County with TDC Director Lee Daniel and Tallahassee CVB President Sharon Liggett in May of 2009 to better understand the dynamics of the destination prior to facilitating the Strategic Planning workshop for the TDC and its stakeholders.

Geist was immediately impressed by Tallahassee's compact downtown as it relates to walkability between key attractions. The proximity of the Old State Capitol, the Challenger Learning Center, the Historical Museum and the Brogan Museum of Arts & Sciences makes for a very impressive array of topline attractions that are easy to access on foot...an attribute that many destinations lack.

Other downtown sites that enhance Tallahassee's visitor appeal include the Riley House and the Knott House, which have been beautifully restored and are also within walking distance. Indeed, sites like these underscore Tallahassee's incredibly rich heritage, especially in the area of African-American history.

Once into the car, the attractiveness of the destination multiplied with visits to the sensational Tallahassee Museum, Mission San Luis and the Tallahassee Automobile Museum. All three have plenty of features for visitors in which they can immerse themselves for hours. Other attractive sites in Tallahassee included the stunning Maclay Gardens and Goodwood Museum and Gardens.

Further from the urban center of Leon County, the Natural Bridge Battlefield serves as the site of an annual reenactment of the battle that allowed Tallahassee to be the only Southern capitol that was never captured by Union forces. The sensational St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge is a fabulous home to over 250 species of animals. And the Wakulla Springs State Park is a favorite of adults and kids alike with glass bottom and river boat tours.

Throughout the destination are the beautiful "Canopy Roads" that feature "low sprawling oaks, draped with Spanish moss, creating dramatic emerald tunnels of dancing sunlight on these specially protected roads," as described by the TDC/CVB's website.

While some in the destination complained that the culinary offerings and nightlife availability were lacking, we were quite impressed with the quality and availability of both. While lacking a true entertainment "district," the options for evening activities are available.

The only infrastructure challenges we detected during our tour was a lack of attractive tourist-related destination signage and meeting/convention space. Directional signs that currently exist downtown are aging and lack a common look. Outside of the downtown, the lack of wayfinding signage works against the destination's attractions and likely causes some visitors to skip experiences they would have normally enjoyed. And, boasting the fourth largest collection of associations in the country, it would appear that Tallahassee is forfeiting a lot of potential meeting business without a convention hall of larger size than present meeting space options.

Over all, the Tallahassee Area is an extremely attractive destination with enough experiences for visitors to want to spend the night and make the region into more than just a day trip.

DESTINATION STRENGTHS

The Strategic Planning Team identified the Strengths of the Destination:

- Great sports facilities throughout the County
- The variety of attractions
- The State Capitol, bringing in state conferences and ongoing business travelers
- The unique landscape in relation to the rest of Florida and its natural resources, making us an eco-tourism destination
- Home of Unique Historic Properties such as Goodwood, Riley House, Knott House, Old Lincoln School, etc.
- Its physical beauty and its wealth of arts, cultural and heritage offerings
- Festivals around the region...like the Worm Gruntin' Festival, the Blue Crab Festival and experiences like "Swamp Gravy"
- Florida's history is here
- College football
- The amenities of being the Capitol City, home to 3 college campuses, southern traditions and hospitality
- The untapped and relatively unmarketed cultural and sports resources in the region
- Great weather most of the year
- Our Art Communities
- Rolling, beautiful lush hills and magnificent trees make Tallahassee different than other parts of our state
- Small town feel with urban diversity
- Our people!

DESTINATION CHALLENGES

Likewise, the Strategic Planning Team identified the Challenges facing the destination:

- Lack of sufficient Airport Lift and the high prices of existing routes
- Competing with the Beaches
- Perception by locals that we are not a destination
- No one knows where Leon County is (but they have heard of Tallahassee)
- The need for more activities outside of Football Season
- Lack of large meeting spaces
- Insufficient hotel space during prime season
- Lack of a competitive marketing budget
- Absence of a Destination Brand Identity / Platform
- Developing a year 'round appeal
- Transportation Infrastructure
- The redirection of funds that should be invested in destination marketing

ORGANIZATIONAL VISION & MISSION

Organizational Vision establishes an end Goal for the Organization and the Destination (the “what”). Organizational Mission focuses it on what steps it will take to achieve that end (the “how”). The Strategic Planning Team reviewed the TDC’s existing Vision and Mission Statements and made suggestions for enhancing them:

EXISTING TDC VISION

To be an Industry driven body that is a recognized leader regarding the effective use of bed tax funds.

PROPOSED TDC VISION

The Tallahassee Region will be an innovative and sustainable year-round destination that is recognized as a place to visit for historic, nature-based and cultural tourism as well as a hub for meetings, conferences, film and sports related activities as a means to enhance the Region’s Economy and Quality of Life.

EXISTING TDC MISSION

To Provide Oversight and serve in an Advisory Capacity for local government, to provide leadership, to represent the interests of local tourism stakeholders and to enhance Leon County’s tourism economy by increasing the number of overnight stays in transient lodging.

PROPOSED TDC MISSION

To spearhead and coordinate the tourism related marketing and management of the Destination through the coordination of the hospitality industry, local governments and the business community to sustain and grow visitor spending and job creation in the Tallahassee Region.

As the operations of the TDC and Visit Tallahassee merge over the coming months, we could expect the revised Vision and Mission Statements of the TDC would become those of Visit Tallahassee.

DEFINING SUCCESS

Accountability is more important today than ever before in the Destination Marketing field. However, every destination measures success a little differently. In the Midwest, three destinations, each an hour's drive from another, measure success very differently. In Madison WI, it's all about conventions. An hour away in Rockford IL, it's all about sports tournaments. And an hour away, in Galena IL, it's all about leisure traffic.

The Strategic Planning Team attempted to identify what "success" for Visit Tallahassee and the region's visitor industry would look like:

- Destination Brand Awareness
- Developing Cascade Park and the Performing Arts Center
- Driving Visitors to Existing Attractions
- Being Very Successful at Niche Marketing
- Building shoulder season business
- Maximizing stakeholder involvement
- Change local perception of the tourism industry as a non-important component of economic development
- Increased Awareness, Appreciation and Support of Visit Tallahassee and the Visitor Industry
- Increased Recognition by the Business Community
- Growth in the Tourist Development Tax
- Increased Visitor Spending
- Better packaging and marketing of our existing attractions
- Enhanced relationships with other economic development organizations
- When TDC and Visit Tallahassee goals match economic development goals
- Increased Job Creation
- Increased Airport Lift

OPPORTUNITIES

When polled, the Strategic Planning Team responded that the most exciting aspect of Leon County was its "Potential." That said, here are some of the opportunities offered by the Team:

- Developing a Regional intergovernmental agreement to market the area from the beaches to Savannah as a top Destination
- Maximize the International market and Cruises
- Develop a Brand Awareness
- Develop more Co-Op advertising vehicles with destination partners/stakeholders
- Reduce reliance upon State Government funding

2009-2014 STRATEGIC PLAN FOR VISIT TALLAHASSEE

2009-2014 STRATEGIC PLAN FOR VISIT TALLAHASSEE

GOAL ONE

ENHANCE THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH OF THE TDC & VISIT TALLAHASSEE

Objective A

Align the Priorities of the Board of County Commissioners, TDC and Visit Tallahassee in order to enhance the Tourism Economy of the Region, while maximizing the amount of Tourist Development Tax proceeds available to the TDC to carry out its Strategic Plan

Suggested Process:

- Board of County Commissioners to adopt the Final Version of the 2009-2014 Strategic Plan for Visit Tallahassee that includes goals and objectives that enhance the regions Tourism Economy
- Utilize the refined Vision and Mission Statements as cornerstones for policy decisions on Tourist Development activities
- Continue to engage the Board of County Commissioners in regular discussions regarding policy issues pertaining to the further development of a Tourism Economy
- Focus the allocation of TDC funds on only those initiatives that offer the highest Return on Investment possible

Objective B

Complete the Merger of the CVB into the new Visit Tallahassee structure

Suggested Tactics:

- Work with Visit Tallahassee staff to identify opportunities for future maximization of resources
- Identify and eliminate areas in which the two agencies duplicate programming and cost centers
- Attempt to transition the former CVB Board (and other stakeholders) to a TDC Advisory Committee

Objective C

Enhance Resident & Business Awareness, Appreciation & Support of the TDC, Visit Tallahassee and the Visitor Industry of Leon County

Suggested Tactics:

- Develop a uniform set of Talking Points for use in discussions throughout the County
 - The Impact of Visitors (Jobs Created/Maintained, Taxes Generated/Saved, Business-Starts Enabled)
 - The Impact of the Visit Tallahassee's Sales and Marketing Efforts
 - The Role that Tourist Development Taxes play in making Leon County a better place to live
 - The importance of Property Taxes that are paid by Visitor-centric businesses (and the vendors that supply them)
 - The importance of Festivals and Events to area charitable organizations that rely upon concession stand sales to generate funds
 - The negative impact that the recent demonization of meetings and travel has had on business to the region
 - Other impact stories as Identified
- Enhance Relationships with Elected Officials and Community Leaders
 - Identify and meet with the ±100 most influential leaders in Leon County
 - Provide Community Leaders with regular reports of the impact of Visit Tallahassee's sales and marketing efforts
 - Request regular Board presentations to County Board
 - Request Annual Presentations/Updates to Municipal Councils and Leadership
 - Meet with future candidates for County Board, State and Federal offices before the elections
 - Work with the EDC to encourage business leaders to add Tourism as a targeted industry for future growth and development
- Interface with Community Groups to Reiterate the Importance of a Visitor Economy
 - Consider developing a Speakers Bureau of select Board Members to carry the word
 - Develop a "Faces of Tourism" Video to tell the stories of the industry...not just the numbers
 - Schedule annual presentations to influential groups throughout the County
- Consider the Development of Groups and Events to Draw Attention to the Impact of Visitors and Visit Tallahassee
 - Create a "Thought Leader" group of community leaders to glean intelligence and advice
 - Stage periodic events to communicate the impact of the industry and Visit Tallahassee
 - Work with local governments to develop Tourism Week Proclamations
 - Develop a "Host it Here" program, encouraging residents to provide event planner leads to Visit Tallahassee

Objective D

Reach out to Regional Partners to Enhance the Destination's Product Line

Suggested Tactics:

- Initiate conversations with Regional Partners to analyze opportunities for joint marketing strategies
- Develop inclusive marketing plans to demonstrate how collaboration with Visit Tallahassee would be a win-win proposition
- Analyze results of joint marketing to determine the prospects for future expansion of regional initiatives

Objective E

Analyze Opportunities to become more Competitive by Increasing and Diversifying the Visit Tallahassee Budget

Suggested Tactics:

- Develop ROI scenarios and potential marketing plans for what Visit Tallahassee could do with an enhanced budget
- Work with the County to invest a higher percentage of Tourist Development Tax into Visit Tallahassee's program of work
- Work with Regional Partners to develop revenue streams in return for inclusion in Visit Tallahassee marketing and sales efforts
- Analyze Tourism-specific Business Improvement District examples to ascertain possibilities for Leon County
 - As an example: the Tourism-Specific Business Improvement District concept has doubled DMO budgets in California, Myrtle Beach and Rapid City, among others
- Investigate opportunities to generate revenues from other visitor industries
 - Golf Courses (as an example: \$1.50 per round assessment tripled Myrtle Beach Golf Holiday's marketing budget)
 - Restaurants (as an example: 25% of the Virginia Beach CVB budget comes from Food & Beverage taxes)
 - Outfitters
 - Admission Fees
 - Others as appropriate

GOAL TWO

ENHANCE THE DESTINATION SALES & MARKETING OF THE REGION

Objective A

Strengthen Destination Brand Identity and Awareness

Suggested Tactics:

- Convene a group of destination thought leaders to discuss potential partnerships to research the region's brand essence
- Perform research into brand perceptions that already exist
- Work with Visit Tallahassee's Marketing Agency to develop a brand platform that can be utilized by any organization or business that has a stake in marketing Leon County

Objective B

Enhance Visit Tallahassee's Utilization of Technology and Social Media

Suggested Tactics:

- Dedicate increased resources to online marketing and new social media strategies
- Enhance the Online Calendar of Events, making it available to all agencies that contribute data
- Consider developing a cable (or, at the least a hotel) TV channel
- Consider investing in a low-power AM radio station along the Interstate.
- Other tactics as identified

Objective C

Identify and Maximize Niche Markets in which Leon County can Effectively Compete

Suggested Tactics:

- Focus Meeting & Convention Sales on events of 200 attendees and less
 - Increase the ceiling if the soon-to-be-completed Turnbull Center is available to Visit Tallahassee for its clients
- Target groups that would have a natural affinity for meeting in the Tallahassee Area
 - Heritage
 - African American
 - Hispanic
 - Florida Associations
 - Reunions
 - Educational / Collegiate / Research
 - Government
 - Green
 - Religious
 - Others as identified
- Position Leon County as a top Florida destination for Amateur and Youth Sports Tournaments
 - Work with the Sports Council to identify new sports and new venues that could be utilized to attract tournaments
 - Identify activities that could be packaged for non-game time enjoyment
 - Work with Parks & Recreation Departments to develop policies on tournaments to enhance our competitiveness
- Market Leon County as the perfect Leisure Travel Hub for Viva Florida
 - Consider promotional tie-ins with other included locations, especially St. Augustine
- Emphasize Leon County's rich heritage in all Marketing efforts
 - The 5 Flags
 - Civil War Sesquicentennial
 - African American, Spanish and Native American Heritage
 - Others as identified
- Further develop and package tourism-related nature-based, cultural and heritage products and experiences
 - Develop recommended itineraries for each niche market
- Consider multi-lingual guides, brochures and website tools for the International Visitor
- Encourage area residents to invite their friends and relatives to visit

GOAL THREE

ADVOCATE FOR DESTINATION DEFINING DEVELOPMENT

Objective A

Develop a Tourism-centric Master Plan for Leon County

Potential Tactics:

- Convene groups of community Thought Leaders to identify and analyze destinational infrastructure opportunities
- Perform an Asset Inventory to identify weaknesses in the current visitor infrastructure
- Analyze all existing Master Plans from County, Municipalities and other development-specific organizations
- Search for commonalities between the plans with a special eye to developments that would appeal to the visitor
- Consider how each potential development would enhance the Quality of Life for residents
- Prioritize appropriate developments into a Master Plan

Objective B

Communicate the Opportunities for Destination Enhancing Developments

Potential Tactics:

- Utilize the Master Plan to initiate (or expand) conversations over thoughtful development in Leon County
- Schedule meetings with the authoring bodies of the original Master Plans to communicate the TDC/Visit Tallahassee's support for their projects
- Attempt to gain their support for the TDC/Visit Tallahassee Master Plan (as some of their projects will likely be included)

Objective C

Analyze and Support Destination Development Projects as Appropriate

Potential Projects:

- Convention / Conference Facility
- Additional Sports Facilities
- Performance Venues
- Wayfinding Signage
- Entertainment District
- Cascade Park
- Enhancements to Civil War / African American Heritage offerings
- Destination Defining Events (develop new or enhance existing)
- Trolley Service
- Florida Seminole Tribe Museum
- Enhanced Air Service
- University Projects
- Visitor Center in a high-traffic area
- Others as identified and appropriate

Objective D

Represent the Interests of the Visitor Industry on Public Policy Issues

Potential Topics:

- Assist in coordinating a Countywide wayfinding signage program
- Transportation Issues
- Utilization of Room Taxes
- Others as Identified