

The Alliance

From **Your** Rutherford County Tourism Development Authority

In This Issue:

- TDA Alliance Conference Date Set
- Training for New TDA Website
- Tourism Ambassador Class
- Calming the Upset Guest
- And More...

Save the Date!

**Rutherford TDA Alliance Conference
Slated for November 8th 2012**

Thursday, November 8th, 2012, the very first TDA Alliance Conference brings you access to tourism experts as they share their opinions, ideas and trends in full sessions and educational breakout and training workshops.



You will also have the opportunity learn about a myriad of new TDA opportunities, many to be unveiled at the conference.

The all day event will take place at The Foundation at Isothermal Community College, Spindale, NC. This conference is for everyone, at every level, in every part of our county's hospitality and tourism industry.

So whether you are involved with lodging properties, restaurants, attractions, event organizing, retail shops and stores, government or Chambers of Commerce, come and learn and network with your colleagues on this important day.

More details to come!

Updated TDA Website Gives You the Control February WebEx Session To Show Simple Steps

The TDA's website was recently updated, making it easier for potential guests and easier for you, our county's tourism stakeholders.

The update marks the first time that vendors (you) will be able to control and change the information and photographs you have on our site.

To find out how, you may go to our site, scroll to the bottom, and click on %Create/Manage Vendor Account,+or, even better sign up for one of three brief online training sessions. During these 3 webinars Stakeholders will learn how to properly manage their listing as to achieve maximum website presence. Some examples are updating hours of operation, contact information, adding pictures, etc. The duration would be around 1 hour and you can sign up for a session on

Wednesday, February 15, 22 or 29. All sessions will be at 2:00. Call David or Jackie to sign up at 287-6113.

There is much left to be done with our site · a good website is never completed · but we are excited about this initial update and

all the opportunity and ease it brings you and our potential visitors.

At the Alliance Conference (*see left*) we will introduce even more features and opportunities our website will offer you.



Tourism Ambassador Class: Tuesday, March 20th, 2012

Are you doing everything you can to encourage tourists to visit your resort, restaurant, or attraction? What could you do differently to encourage repeat visitors? The TDA is offering a Tourism Ambassador class for only \$15. Learn more about the Tourism Ambassador program and how you designated storefront.

Attending the Rutherford County Tourism Ambassador Class has been very beneficial to my retail business in Forest City.

— Brenda Watson, Owner of the Menagerie

After taking this course, your business will receive visitor information, special signage and other web and print exposure from the TDA. The next class will be held Tuesday, March 20th, 2012. Keep an eye on this newsletter and your email inbox, and we will keep you updated on time and location.

Be a part of improving tourist services in Lake Lure and the Blue Ridge Foothills. For program details and to register, contact Jackie Wallace at 828-287-6113 or by email jackie.wallace@rutherfordcountync.gov

ambassador program can become a visitor information

Industry News — Making Technology Work for You

Marketing today is less about finding guests than being found by guests. The Internet is the new telephone, and travelers are calling with questions about your business and destination.

You can let your competitors answer, or you can pick up and provide helpful, relevant information. Fresh content and social activity are two powerful new ingredients in search rankings. Not only does good content increase your visibility in search and drive traffic to your website, it converts travelers and will be remembered and shared.

Travelers don't want fluff, they want practical information. Good content comes in many forms: blog posts, news, articles, stories, reviews, FAQs, photos, videos. Mix content you design with content curated from guests and third parties (ask permission and give credit). Optimize with tags and titles and add icons to encourage sharing as well as feeds from your social networks.

Facebook and Twitter have emerged as customer service channels, where travelers go to make inquiries, share

experiences and voice likes and dislikes before, during and after trips. Complaining to the manager is so last year; today it's all about complaining on social networks.

It comes down to expectations. Travelers don't like surprises, unless upgrades and champagne are involved. That means less hype and more transparency in marketing: being upfront about pricing, services, amenities, location and reviews.

Alerts on Google, Trip Advisor and Twitter will help you keep track of the chatter.

Oh, and did I mention they want all this on mobile devices?

The use of mobile devices is proliferating at a staggering rate, and travelers are leading the charge. You don't need an app (the TDA is developing a Rutherford County travel app,) you need a mobile compatible site that provides basic content travelers can navigate on a small screen: pricing, descriptions, location info, photos, deals and booking capabilities. And don't forget a click-to-call option—some people actually use them as telephones too.

Calming The Upset Guest

Upset guests will always be a part of the hospitality and tourism industry. There are many ways to deal with them—but below are some of the best ways I have seen and used.

Listen and Acknowledge that you are Listening.

One way to calm upset customers is to demonstrate that you're listening. The best way to do this is to repeat back what they've said for confirmation. When you demonstrate that you've listened, the guest will be more apt to fully listen to what **you** have to say when it's your turn to speak. Consistent eye contact, nodding, and repeating key words also reinforce that you're paying attention.

Don't Interrupt

No matter how difficult it is to hear the whole story, avoid the temptation to interrupt. Even if you think you know where a complaint is heading, it's important to allow your guests the chance to express their concerns. Upset guests want to feel heard; you develop a psychological truth with them when you allow them to tell you all the details of why they are unhappy.

Use the Two-Second Rule

After the guest has finished telling his or her side of the story, count to two before you begin talking. This guarantees that the guest has time to finish and gives you a few seconds to prepare what you are going to say. If you are thinking of your response while the guest is speaking, you aren't listening carefully—that's a fact.

Speak Respectfully

Body language, voice tone and other nuances can make the difference between whether guests see you as respectful—or not. For instance, it's a natural tendency to sigh as you turn to walk away from an over-demanding guest. Chances are, the guest will hear or see you sighing—and that is sure to just make them even angrier.

Do you have any useful and interesting advice or tips that might help your peers throughout the county when they are dealing with guests/customers/diners? Email them to me and I'd be happy to share them in a future issue of the newsletter.
david.robinson@rutherfordcountync.gov

— David Robinson, TDA Internal Customer Services Manager

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Meet Jackie — An Invaluable Resource

35,000. It's a number which is one measurement of the impact the TDA's Jackie Wallace has on our tourism industry. 35,000. This is the number of brochures Jackie sends out each year to persons who have requested tourism information after seeing TDA advertising.

That is just the tip of the iceberg, though. Her title is Administrative Assistant, but in reality it probably should be something like: The-Lady-With-Her-Sleeves-Rolled-High-Who-Will-Answer-Any-Question-And-Cheerfully-Help-Any-Tourist-Or-Tourism-Business-In-Our-Area. But that wouldn't fit too well on a business card.

So, consider her an invaluable resource for you. If you have any question about area events, attractions, or lodging, or if you you're wondering if the TDA can help you with something, give her your first call. She will, as always seem to be the case, be glad to help you...or your guests.

—Michelle Whitaker, TDA Executive Director

TDA Board Members

A directory of the current TDA Board members can be found by following this link.

<http://rutherfordcountync.gov/dept/tda/2011-2012%20TDA%20Board.pdf>

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