

Good afternoon Board,

First, thank you for the opportunity to attend the NH Governor's Conference on Tourism. I attend several conferences per year and my goal is to walk away with a few good and usable nuggets. I feel I achieved that goal at this conference.

It was requested to evaluate whether or not I thought this would be a good venue for the Chamber to be an exhibitor and the short answer is "no". This conference is geared heavily on tourism, so there was a representative from the White Mountains tourism group and NH Tourism, but there were no individual attractions or other Chambers exhibiting. This event is very "attraction" oriented for tourism reasons, so unless we had a way as a Chamber to focus on this area as a tourism destination, I'd have concerns about spending money here.

That said, I did reach out to my contact at the NH Dept of Tourism and ask specifically if there were any tourism development efforts underway for this region. I haven't heard back yet. I feel the Kearsarge Valley and the I-89 corridor could use some focus from the State and that was obvious in the content of much of the discussion on local destinations which was very much in the Lakes Region, the White Mountains and the coast.

I attended the Brand USA morning keynote presentation which focused on the overall efforts to drive tourism to the US from abroad. There was little of practical use there for us.

I attend the "Become a Delicious Destination" which focused on how to promote the food culture of an area. Representatives from San Francisco and Minneapolis talked about their food scenes and how their organizations have helped to grow interest through primarily producing original content. A few takeaways:

1 - Original content is still king. Whether for an individual business or a region, creating content unique to your mission using the written word, podcasting, photography and video is vital to the long term relevance to the tourist.

2 - Video is the moving trend. By 2025, it is anticipated that nearly 90% of all Internet traffic will be video. Getting in on the video trend now is critical for long term success

3 - Video production can be professionally handled for \$5000 to \$10000 per spot, or handled using local influencers for \$500 or so per spot. Find a theme for a season, run with it. Work one-on-one with local producers. Get the content out there under a unified heading.

Lunch was delicious. I was fortunate to sit with a couple of the folks from Waterville Valley and we traded war stories about dealing with our respective zoning and planning boards. I was proud to say that Warner had recently improved it's site plan application process and was making efforts to improve the speed at which business could get to a decision. They were impressed that any town was making this effort. This reinforced to me that improvements in our local memberships' town policies for business activity is an IMPERATIVE role of the Chamber of Commerce and for anyone with a passion and interest in business.

In the afternoon session, I attended the break out session on inspiring Cultural Tourism. This didn't go quite the direction I thought. I heard from representatives from cultural organizations in Vermont, Massachusetts and New Mexico. Some takeaways:

1 - New US administration and changes in public policy have heightened tourist concerns about international travel and in particular concerns about those coming to the US from abroad. It is expected that the majority of tourism in any state will be tourists FROM THAT STATE followed closely by tourists from directly adjacent states. This spelled out opportunity to me for our region as we would have destinations that would appeal to the local tourist, but might not to a New Yorker or someone from England.

2 - New Hampshire gets 1.7M tourists from the State of Mass each year compared to just over 700K to Vermont and 600K to Maine. We are in the top 5 of tourist destinations for the Mass tourist (#1 is Mass itself). Again, big opportunity for our region as we

are within an hour of the border!

3 - Culturally, regions MUST focus on what makes their areas unique and UNLIKE any other destination in proximity. To me, our area specifically, is about farming and agricultural assets. We have the maple producers and the Kearsarge Maple Festival. We have the Warner Fall Foliage Festival with the oxen pull and woodsman competition. My opinion after hearing this presentation was that we should dig deeper into agricultural tourism (horse riding, farm tours, farm stands, farm-to-table restaurants, rural lodging, etc) as this does appear to be different from the other marketing approaches from around the state.

4 - Themes and Branding are important for regional awareness. Each state really emphasized this in this session and the previous session. Branding leads hashtags and social media efforts and marketing pieces, etc. We came up with the Kearsarge Valley concept last Fall. I like it. At this point we just need something to build behind.

I did not stay for the final panel with the commissioners as I had a meeting to get to.

Overall, I think it was illuminating to attend this event. I'd like to think we could use this investment as a spark to ignite a regional effort to begin to shape the Kearsarge Valley as a destination. I know the Lake Sunapee Chamber has a focus on tourism information, but they also have a similar diverse membership like ours. Perhaps a collaborative effort between all the business interests in this region is the way to go.

I'm going to try to make it to the Lumber Barn BAH this evening. Also, feel free to ask any questions via email or stop by the shop. Thanks again for the opportunity!

Darryl

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