Welcome to our laboratory!

By Simon Hudson

“A flower waiting to bloom” was the conclusion of a team of consultants brought in several years ago to analyze the potential for the tourism industry in South Carolina. And as I read their report flying down to Columbia from the Canadian Rockies back in December 2009, I was already plotting how my Center could help that flower flourish. My mission from the beginning was to lead cutting-edge tourism and hospitality research that would be relevant and directly applicable to the tourism industry in South Carolina. In three years, I am proud to say we have done that and more.

A good example is a recent study we directed in Aiken where the Center was asked by the Chamber of Commerce to conduct a feasibility study for a $130m International Equestrian Center. It was an $80,000 project for my Center, and if the development moves ahead, it will have a significant impact on the economy and job creation in South Carolina—as well as raising the profile of our state internationally.

The Center has also worked closely with industry stakeholders in the rural Pee Dee region to develop tourism. We determined that the Pee Dee (like many rural areas of South Carolina) has the potential to attract tourists, but has little brand recognition. We are thus assisting the Pee Dee engage in a destination brand building exercise.

In addition to the research, I felt we could do more to create new jobs in the state and so I have created a tourism and hospitality business incubator. In alignment with USC/Columbia Technology Incubator, the new incubator will offer opportunities for tourism and hospitality entrepreneurs to turn their business ideas into a reality.

Three years is not long enough for the flowering process of South Carolina’s tourism to be complete, but it is being nurtured, fertilized and is propagating due to innovative tourism projects.

I hope you enjoy this first newsletter. We look forward to a productive year and wish our colleagues and industry partners the same.

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About the SmartState Center of Economic Excellence in Tourism and Economic Development

Established by the South Carolina General Assembly in 2002, the SC Centers of Economic Excellence Program (or SmartState) is investing in talent and infrastructure at South Carolina’s three research universities to drive economic development.

The tourism center was established in 2010 with a specific goal to encourage research directly applicable to tourism in South Carolina. The Center is housed in the College of Hospitality, Retail, and Sport Management at the University of South Carolina in Columbia. The Center’s director is Dr. Simon Hudson. In conjunction with industry, faculty and graduate students, the Center performs tourism and hospitality-based research and disseminates and grows the local knowledge-base through publications, public seminars, workshops and forums.
**Center of Economic Excellence in Tourism offers PhD assistantship**

The Center is seeking highly motivated highly motivated and qualified Ph.D. applicants for fall 2013 admission. The Center provides doctoral students with high quality education and research training. Students will have the opportunity to develop practical solutions for community partners, as well as contribute to the highest level of hospitality and tourism scholarship.

Admitted doctoral students will have the opportunity to learn and work on cutting edge research including tourism demand/supply, economic impact modeling, consumer behavior, destination marketing and management, and sustainable development. Applicants with strong research foci in economic and tourism development are highly encouraged to apply. Interested candidates must demonstrate a strong command of English, potential for scholarly writing, a solid foundation in quantitative research, and developed econometrics and analytical skills.

Doctoral research assistantships within the Center receive a highly competitive 9-month stipend of $18,000, plus paid tuition and health insurance. Students will work 20 hours per week in their capacity as graduate assistants. Starting from the second year of the program, qualified students may receive the opportunity to teach. The assistantship encompasses numerous aspects of the academic world enhancing the tools to excel in research along with gaining real teaching experience inside the classroom. The package offered is a wonderful foundation for those who are interested in research and teaching and helps to foster an outstanding future career in academia.

For information about the assistantship, please contact Dr. Simon Hudson at shudson@hrsm.sc.edu

For information on admission requirements and application process, go to: [http://www.hrsm.sc.edu/hrtm/graduate/PhD/default.shtml](http://www.hrsm.sc.edu/hrtm/graduate/PhD/default.shtml)

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**Columbia’s own idea factory**

We wanted to encourage innovation and create new jobs in the state and to this end, we have created a tourism and hospitality business incubator in downtown Columbia. In alignment with the existing USC/Columbia Technology Incubator, our new incubator will offer opportunities for tourism and hospitality entrepreneurs to turn their business ideas into a reality. The Center has just accepted the first business into the incubator - a new agri-tourism business in Columbia called Jah Roots, centered around hydroponics.

Tourism and hospitality start-ups generally, can be expected to benefit enormously from this kind of support. Successful completion of a business incubation program increases the likelihood that a start-up company will stay in business for the long term; historically, 87% of incubator graduates stay in business for more than five years, whereas approximately 40–50% of start-ups in the U.S. fail in their first five years of operation.

By Scott Harriford

Jah Roots plans to develop South Carolina’s newest most dynamic tourism, educational, and retail experience through the creation of an Urban Interactive Hydroponic Botanical Garden & Farm that will allow visitors to see high quality hydroponically and aquaponically grown produce, flowers and plants, in a completely organic and safe environment that include fish! Visitors will have an opportunity to see, smell, taste, and touch thousands of varieties of vegetables year round in a climate controlled area. The goal of the tourism center is to educate the youth about the future of farming and sustainable practices. To do this, the center will have free admissions for children. The center will appeal to children because we have many hands-on activities and programs unlike other tourism centers. The intent of appealing to kids is that we will draw in people from other states and countries, because there is nothing like this in the world. Where else in the world can you find plants that are always in season?! To contact: W.L. Harriford, IV - CEO scottharriford@gmail.com

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**HOW IT WORKS:**

Accepted tourism entrepreneurs are guaranteed fully funded office space (worth over $3,000) and business development support for a two year period.

Companies also have access to world-renowned tourism researchers in the College of Hospitality, Retail and Sport Management.

For more information go to: [http://www.hrsm.sc.edu/CoETourismandED/incubator.shtml](http://www.hrsm.sc.edu/CoETourismandED/incubator.shtml)

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**JAH ROOTS BRINGS AGRI-TOURISM TO COLUMBIA, SC**

**Scott Harriford (left) with Dr. Simon Hudson (right)**
Drive tourists: Getting them to stop would be a good start for the Pee Dee recent study suggests

Drive tourism in the U.S. is both enormous and complex, and it forms the backbone of domestic tourism in the country. Rural tourism, in particular, is heavily dependent on drive tourism, and rural and regional areas around the world are increasingly recognizing self-drive tourists as one of their most important markets.

But drive tourists are not necessarily an “easy” market to attract, and maintaining effective collaboration among geographically dispersed, small and micro tourism businesses is notoriously difficult. This study looked at the rural Pee Dee region of South Carolina and its potential to capitalize on the thousands of drive tourists that come through every year on their way to coastal destinations such as Charleston and Myrtle Beach. In addition to a stakeholder study, two consumer surveys were developed to examine the tourists’ perceptions of tourism in the Pee Dee region. The target population for the two consumer surveys were 1) potential visitors who had not visited the Pee Dee region but who were staying in tourist destinations within a three hour driving distance to this area, and 2) current/past visitors to the Pee Dee who were staying (or had stayed) there or had stopped in the region on their way to their main destination.

The survey respondents reported a very low awareness of the Pee Dee region. For example, the majority of tourists on the coast had no idea that the Pee Dee was a tourist destination and had no information about tourism offerings in the region. The same respondents had a low interest in visiting the Pee Dee and were willing to travel no more than 2 hours from the coast to visit rural attractions. Despite the limited interest, research showed that culinary tourism as well as festivals and events are most likely to attract tourists.

Potential tourists also expressed an interest in natural beauty scenic drives as an alternative way of reaching the coast. In terms of the barriers and constraints to visiting the Pee Dee, the major reasons respondents showed no interest in this region were the lack of information participants had about the area, and they did not know what to do and what to expect in the Pee Dee.

Not surprisingly, those potential visitors on the coast reported less awareness and more severe barriers to visiting the Pee Dee than those tourists already in the area. They also reported a less favorable image of the Pee Dee and showed less interest in visiting the region than current/past visitors. A multiple regression analysis highlighted three major factors which influence their visit intention: time/budget and interest, affective image, and overall perception of the destination. However, despite more negative responses than current/past visitors, potential visitors showed more interest in some specific tourism activities such as food/wine/culinary tours and outdoor activities.

Among the major study recommendations, improved destination branding was recommended to raise overall awareness of the region among state residents and beyond. Marketers in the Pee Dee were encouraged to engage in comprehensive destination brand building in order to develop a strategy that promotes a clear identity to potential tourists. Area representatives were also encouraged to become more aggressive in marketing to potential visitors. The most significant findings of this study were a lack of awareness, a very weak destination image, and little desire on the part of the tourists to visit the area. A multi-platform approach to marketing the Pee Dee including digital, print, and outdoor advertising was advocated.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The full report may be accessed at: http://www.hrsm.sc.edu/CoEETourismEndED/PDFs/STourismStats/DevelopingTourismInTheRuralPeeDee.pdf
Horses, history and high stakes development in Aiken, SC

In early 2012, the Center was hired to conduct a feasibility study for a proposed multi-use facility and international horse park in Aiken County, SC. The full report based on extensive research with respect to the economic, social and environmental impacts of the proposal can be accessed at the link provided below.

There is little doubt that the horse industry has played a defining role in the social and economic development of the Aiken area. Incorporated in 1835 as the county seat, the City of Aiken embraced the local equine community early on with the area itself coming to prominence in the 19th century when wealthy Charlestonians began spending summers in Aiken. Aiken became known as the ‘Winter Colony’ by the Northeastern elite. This prosperous group included many well-respected equestrian enthusiasts.

Today, at least 11 equine disciplines are represented at a variety of venues throughout the region. The current horse community is almost equally divided between competitive and pleasure riders, all of whom support this vibrant industry. Equine activities continue to bring in many visitors and out-of-town horse owners and riders. Revenue generated by this industry is substantial and includes hotel stays, restaurant patronage and equine services. Equine services include boarding, veterinary and farrier services and the purchase of grain and feed.

More recently, the idea for developing an international horse park in Aiken originated with Tourism Development International (TDI), an Irish consulting company commissioned by the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism (SCPRT) in 2008 to research the state’s tourism potential. TDI noted that Aiken’s attractive lifestyle and cultural heritage coupled with existing equestrian facilities and expertise suggested development potential both “rare and difficult to find in other equestrian centers in the USA.”

In the feasibility study conducted by the Center, reaction to the proposal was mixed. Local stakeholders in the focus groups and in-depth interviews conducted in Aiken recognized the importance of the equine industry. However, respondents had more reservations about the proposed horse park than they did favorable opinions. Major concerns, particularly from those already in the equine business, were the fears of losing the flavor and character of Aiken, and potential cannibalization of existing equine businesses.

Results from community surveys, however, were quite the opposite. Most of the Aiken residents believed that a new multi-use international horse park would encourage more visitor spending, increase jobs in the community, and provide economic benefits to local people. In fact, most of the respondents indicated that development of the horse park was ‘the right choice for the Aiken community’ and generally supported the idea. The results from the survey of equine tourists and potential visitors were also generally positive. Equine participants and spectators already have a high awareness and positive image of Aiken as an equestrian tourist destination and would welcome the opportunity to visit the new facility. Given the importance of the equine industry to Aiken both economically and as an integral part of its character and history, it was perhaps not surprising that reactions on both sides on the debate were heated and strong. As such, the final report recommended that stakeholders in Aiken proceed cautiously with a phased approach to development that would enhance rather than overshadow the existing community upon which Aiken’s appeal is so decidedly founded.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

http://www.hrsm.sc.edu/CoEETourismandED/PDFs/AikenReport/FeasibilityStudyAikenInternationalHorsePark.pdf
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Center seeks full-time grant writer and project coordinator

The Center is searching for a full-time grant writer and project coordinator. Primary responsibilities include but are not be limited to researching potential funding sources, preparing proposals, and assisting in administrating grants.

This person must possess good administrative skills, be well organized, have excellent writing and computer skills, be effective in creating and managing budgets, and be knowledgeable with multiple databases. He or she must work well under pressure, independently, and under time constraints as well as possess skills in editing, and developing grant budgets. Previous experience in university grant systems is desirable.

Duties and Responsibility:

- Research and identify potential funding sources
- Develop and write grant proposals
- Assemble and submit grant requests, including letters, proposals, budgets, and presentations
- Establish and maintain personal contact and relationships with funding agencies
- Maintain timelines to ensure timely submission of letters of inquiry, proposal deadlines, and reports
- Manage the day to day operation of the funded projects
- Prioritize funded projects to keep multiple projects moving in a timely manner, meet deadlines and ensure
- Assist in writing final reports

A competitive salary and fringe benefits are offered for this important position. Please direct all inquiries by email to Center Director Dr. Simon Hudson: shudson@hrsm.sc.edu

Visiting Professors’ Corner

In 2012 the Center hosted two visiting professors. The first was Dr. Lorn Sheehan (pictured at right) from Dalhousie University in Canada. Dr. Sheehan was on campus to discuss research partnerships, but also presented his tips on getting published to staff and graduate students. Lorn is an expert in destination management, and has also been a visiting professor and lecturer at the University of Molise, Termoli, Italy, Università G. D’Annuzio, Pescara, Italy, and the University of Las Palmas, Spain.

Dr. Richard Shipway from Bournemouth University in the U.K. also visited the Center in 2012. Dr. Shipway was here to discuss research collaboration and developing relationships between the two institutions. While he was here, he was fortunate to experience the passion for American football in this part of the world, attending a local Super Bowl party.

If you are interested in coming to South Carolina as part of our Visiting Professor program, please contact Dr. Hudson at shudson@hrsm.sc.edu

Recent publications: Customer Service for Hospitality and Tourism is a unique text and vital to both students and practitioners as it explains not only the theory behind the importance of customer service but also acts as a guidebook for those wishing to put this theory into practice. In essence it is the ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ of customer service. The text is easy to read, very current, and full of references to all the latest research from both academic and practitioner literature. Chapters cover topics such as the financial and behavioral consequences of customer service, consumer trends influencing service, providing customer service through the servicescape, the impact of technology and the importance of service recovery, and promoting customer service internally and externally.

For more information click on the image or contact: customerservice@goodfellowpublishers.com

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