A Word from the Director: Nurturing Green Innovation

By Dr. Simon Hudson

When the Center of Excellence for Tourism and Economic Development was established in 2010, we were charged with conducting tourism and hospitality-based research that is relevant and directly applicable to South Carolina, ultimately leading to the creation of jobs. Performing research that leads directly to jobs is quite a tall order and almost impossible to measure. For that reason, we decided three years ago to set up a tourism incubator, the idea being that we would nurture entrepreneurs in the hope that they would establish successful companies, and make a real impact on South Carolina’s economy. The first company we welcomed into our incubator was Jah Roots, a hydroponics enterprise set up by one of our students, Scott Harriford, and his father, Chip. Their plan was to open a facility in Columbia with an agri-tourism component, where by visitors could visit the facility, learn about hydroponics, order a home-grown salad in the café, or buy freshly-grown vegetables direct from Jah Roots. A noble idea and one worth supporting. What in fact has happened in three years is that Jah Roots has morphed into something much, much bigger, and is now the largest indoor, wholesale hydroponic farm in South Carolina – with a new name: Royal Greens. Last month we attended the Grand Opening and ceremonial ribbon cutting for the company in Ridge-way, South Carolina. Royal Greens is now the largest indoor, wholesale hydroponic farm in the state. Still run by Scott and Chip, the company will produce a variety of specialty lettuce mixes, kales, herbs and tomatoes. The site will also house a public retail section that will offer locally produced jams, jellies, relishes and promote local art. Royal Greens promises to make a positive impact on the community and the state by creating approximately 500 jobs — a far greater impact that any of us could have imagined.

This story is a great example of innovation (the metamorphosis of Jah Roots) and entrepreneurship (the development of a business from the ground up — literally!) — two concepts that will provide the focus for an executive forum we are hosting in August. The forum promises cutting edge presentations and discussions led by industry leaders, government officials, business entrepreneurs and scholars from the Americas, the Caribbean, and Europe.

For more information about the forum and registration information, please see page 3.

Researcher of the Year

Dr. Simon Hudson, Director and Endowed Chair of the SmartState Center of Excellence in Tourism and Economic Development received the esteemed honor of being named the Patricia G. Moody Researcher of the Year on March 26th, 2015. The award recognizes those outstanding research faculty that have excelled in their contributions to research in their respective discipline. Congratulations to Dr. Hudson on this prestigious honor. Thanks to you for all that you do!
Naturally Carolina: Branding the Pee Dee Region

In 2011/12, the SmartState Center examined opportunities for tourism development in the Pee Dee region of South Carolina. The results showed limited brand recognition and a need for innovative marketing to increase awareness of the region as an attractive place to visit or relocate. Last year, in this follow-up project, the Center established a brand identity and marketing strategies for the nine-county region of the Pee Dee, a region plagued by high poverty and unemployment, low educational levels, and a high number of dislocated workers.

The branding study revealed a region’s identity that is strongly linked to the rural nature of the area and its associated outdoor activities. Marketing materials were then created to provide a foundation upon which a coordinated regional campaign can be built. Researchers also recommended that marketers in the Pee Dee region embark upon an internal marketing campaign in order to raise awareness and strengthen the Pee Dee brand image amongst its residents. The study revealed that visitors ranked the Pee Dee significantly higher on attributes such as ‘exciting’ and ‘fun,’ which would suggest that locals perhaps underestimate the attractiveness of their own backyard.

A Focus on the Hospitality-Tax in Columbia, SC

The City of Columbia and the SmartState Center have entered into a partnership to evaluate the effectiveness of the Hospitality tax. Each year the city collects a 2% tax on all prepared food and beverage sales and collections are used to promote tourism and increase the number of visitors with the goal of growing the city’s economic base. The funds collected are distributed to events, festivals and to the arts in Columbia. In 2014-2015, 96 organizations received grants ranging from $2,000-$280,000 for a total of $2.37m. The city is tasked with the job of deciding the best ways to disseminate the dollars to benefit the city not only economically, but also to improve the quality of life for the residents of the city. The study will evaluate past usage of the Hospitality-tax and provide recommendations for the future effective allocation of the tax dollars. The Center is collecting data from both resident and visitor attendees at Hospitality-Tax sponsored events from April to August 2015.

More Awards! Bluffton Project Report awarded Graphic Design of the Year Award

Congratulations to Sherry Simmons, graphic designer, and Two Monkeys graphic design firm. Two Monkeys was the recipient of the GDUSA graphic design of the year award for our Bluffton Project Report. Following the completion of the data collection and analysis, the SmartState team hired Two Monkeys to develop the design for the final project report. Sherry used her incredible creativity and not only developed an amazing report, but also produced an award winner. Kudos to Two Monkeys and Sherry Simmons!
In the fall of 2014, the Center partnered with Santee Cooper Country and Santee Cooper to assess the potential demand for tourism along the Santee Cooper waterway from the Congaree River in Columbia to the Cooper River in Charleston and including Lakes Marion and Moultrie. The project included a content analysis of waterway development and management, focus group sessions with area stakeholders, economic impact analysis, and data collection from current residents and potential visitors. Research team members visited several successful waterways in the U.S. and Europe to obtain the most up-to-date information regarding tourism infrastructure and facilities on and around waterways. The field investigations, focus groups and surveys highlighted a sense of pride for the natural beauty of the area, but participants recognized the need for more tourism related infrastructure and facilities, and the need to engage the community stakeholders and residents. The research team suggested that key stakeholders focus on attracting investment for new infrastructure and product development, develop new tourism-related activities on the water and shore, develop hospitality products such as hotels, restaurants and cafes that cater to the tourists, and conduct a comprehensive branding exercise to further define the future direction of tourism in the region.

The University of South Carolina is hosting the 2nd International Executive Forum on Tourism Innovation and Entrepreneurship on its beautiful campus in Columbia, SC. The forum promises cutting edge presentations and discussions led by industry leaders, government officials, business entrepreneurs, and scholars from America’s, the Caribbean, and Europe. Speakers will present innovative ways the Americas and the Caribbean can enhance entrepreneurship and tourism development in destinations, by examining a number of strategic issues in a series of specialized seminars focused on application of 21st Century technologies in tourism.

Kevin Kam Fung So earned his Ph.D. in Tourism and Hospitality Marketing from Griffith University, Australia. While completing his doctoral studies, Dr. So also pursued graduate studies in Statistics at Queensland University of Technology, Australia. His research interests focus on service brand management, with a special emphasis on service experience, customer engagement, electronic word-of-mouth, brand loyalty, internal branding, and application of advanced quantitative methods and analytical techniques in the tourism and hospitality industries. His work has appeared in leading academic journals including the Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research, International Journal of Hospitality Management, Journal of Travel Research, Tourism Management, International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, and Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing. He has participated in multiple funded research projects. Dr. So has received a number of awards for his academic achievements including the Griffith University Medal, the Emerald Literati Network Awards for Excellence: Highly Commended Paper Award, the Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing “Martin Oppermann Best Article of the Year 2013” Award, and most recently, the 2014 Emerald/EFMD Outstanding Doctoral Research Award in the Hospitality Management category.

Dr. So has five years of academic experience at Griffith University. Before entering academia, he gained extensive industry experience at the Sheraton Mirage Resort on the Gold Coast.
SmartState Center Establishes International Connections in Portugal and Ecuador

In the past year, Drs. Hudson and Cárdenas have successfully reached out to international partners and developed formal Memorandums of Agreements (MOA) with the European University, part of the Laureate International Universities group located in Lisbon, Portugal, and with the Universidad San Francisco de Quito, in Quito, Ecuador. The purpose of these formal partnerships is to develop innovative research collaborations to foster an international exchange of ideas and student learning opportunities.

“These types of partnerships cross borders, leverage existing resources and provide otherwise unavailable opportunities to our students. Without them, we limit the research and the student experience,” said Dr. Cárdenas.

Dr. Hudson is equally excited about the opportunities. “There are numerous ways that our institutions can work together,” said Dr. Hudson, “we have already discussed engaging in collaborative research on golf tourism and accessible tourism.”

The Center is anxious to broaden its reach by establishing similar partnerships with other international partners.

Industry Partnerships

Success Factors for Destination Branding: An Analysis of the Front Street Village Development

In November 2014, the team contracted with the Beaufort Hospitality Enterprises to conduct an analysis of the Front Street Village (FSV) development in Beaufort, NC. The primary objective of this project was to identify the key factors for success and failure attributable to becoming a leading (or losing) destination. To achieve this objective, the research team studied comparable destinations and waterways, domestically and internationally, through personal visits and content analysis of existing written documents and literature. In addition, past and current waterway projects were analyzed to glean essential indicators of success and failure in similar ventures. The team also identified existing resources and strengths in the Beaufort region and explored potential tourism products and packages that would complement existing businesses and help attract tourists to FSV. Finally, the research team conducted an extensive review of the current and future consumer trends in tourism in the U.S. and in major potential market source regions for FSV.
STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Congratulations Dr. Karen Thal!

The Center is proud to announce Dr. Karen Thal as our first doctoral candidate graduate. She successfully defended her dissertation, “Self-Determination Theory and Wellness Tourism: How Do Wellness Facilities Contribute to Wellbeing,” on March 26th, 2015. Karen was an integral part of our team and worked on several of our research projects including, but not limited to, The Feasibility of the Equestrian Park in Aiken, Water-Based Tourism Development in Santee Cooper, and The Branding of Bluffton. She will officially receive her doctoral diploma in May and we are confident she will continue to excel as a faculty member in higher education. Congratulations Dr. Thal!!!

Pei Zhang: Up and Coming Star

Pei Zhang is a Ph.D. candidate in the Center and the School of Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management at the University of South Carolina. Pei has very strong qualifications in both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies and data analytics. She is a valuable member in our team and has been actively involved in almost all of the funded projects in the Center by assisting in literature reviews, survey design, data collection and analysis, and project report writing. The projects include but are not limited to the Feasibility Study of the International Horse Park in Aiken, the Branding of Bluffton, Health and Wellness Tourism, Pee Dee Destination Branding, and Santee Cooper Water-Based Tourism Development. Pei has outstanding capabilities in research and teaching and will start her third-year in the program in August 2015.

VISITING PROFESSOR FROM DOWN UNDER: DR. DAVID WEAVER

Each year, the Center invites an international expert in the tourism field to visit the University of South Carolina’s College of Hospitality, Restaurant and Tourism Management. The purpose of the visit is to encourage the scholarly exchange of ideas, work on collaborative projects, develop manuscripts and inspire students. This year the Center was excited to host Dr. David Weaver. Dr. Weaver, a professor of Tourism at Griffith University in Australia has over 30 years experience in teaching and research. He has a special interest in ecotourism, sustainable tourism, and destination management. Dr. Weaver is a renowned international expert and has authored over 10 books and refereed more than 100 scientific journal articles and book chapters. While visiting, Dr. Weaver participated in several collaborative concept development sessions, delivered four guest lectures, met with key leaders and participated in several Center events including the Grand Opening of Royal Greens Farms in Ridgeway, SC. Dr. Weaver’s visit enlightened and inspired many and there are plans in development for future collaborations as a result of his visit!
Faculty and Staff:

Dr. Simon Hudson  
Director and Chair  
Email: shudson@hrsm.sc.edu  
Phone: (803)777-2705

Dr. David Cárdenas  
Assistant Professor  
Email: dcardenas@hrsm.sc.edu  
Phone: (803)777-5120

Dr. Fang Meng  
Assistant Professor  
Email: fmeng@hrsm.sc.edu  
Phone: (803)777-0631

Dr. Kevin So  
Assistant Professor  
Email: kevinso@hrsm.sc.edu  
Phone: (803)777-7620

Mrs. Madeline Broderick  
Grant Writer/Project Coordinator  
Email: madeline.broderick@sc.edu  
Phone: (803)777-6879

PhD Students:

Ms. Pei (Alison) Zhang  
Email: zhang355@email.sc.edu  
Phone: (202) 550-9560

Mr. Hengyun (Neil) Li  
Email: hengyun@email.sc.edu  
Phone: (803)238-6441

Ms. Rui Qi  
Email: rqi@email.sc.edu  
Phone: (803)348-3555

Outcome Report Links:

Naturally Carolina: Branding the Pee Dee: [http://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/hrsm/research/research_centers/richardson_family_smartstate/pdfs/studies/branding_the_pee_dee.pdf]

Bluffton: The Heart of the Lowcountry: [http://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/hrsm/research/research_centers/richardson_family_smartstate/pdfs/studies/bluffton_brand_assessment.pdf]

Santee Cooper: An Assessment of Tourism Development Along the Santee Cooper Waterway: [http://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/hrsm/research/research_centers/richardson_family_smartstate/pdfs/studies/santee_cooper_tourism_assesment_2015.pdf]

Let’s get social!

Follow us on Facebook at: Center of Economic Excellence in Tourism and Economic Development

Tweet at us or follow us at: @Toursim4sc

Follow our blog at: [http://scstatetourism.blogspot.com/]

University of South Carolina. College of Hospitality, Retail and Sport Management. 701 Assembly St., Columbia, SC 29208  
Phone: (803)777-4290  
Website: [http://sc.edu/study/colleges_schools/hrsm/research/research_centers/richardson_family_smartstate/index]