



Tourism expert says Harbor Country has promise

On June 3, the Harbor Country Lodging Association hosted an Annual Membership meeting that should have been attended by every member of their group and the chamber as well. Dr. Rich Harrill, a senior associate for the Georgia Institute of Technology's Economic Development Institute and Tourism and Regional Assistance Centers, was the guest speaker. He is also the author of "Guide to Best Practices in Tourism and Destination Management." If our entire business community ever needed a shot in the arm and a hearty pat on the back, this is the time and Harrill provided both.

Though Harrill only had a cursory tour of Harbor Country before the meeting, he did have a two-hour overview from lodging president AJ Boggio during the trip from Chicago's O'Hare Airport. If you know AJ Boggio, you know he is the untiring spokesman and fulltime cheerleader for Harbor Country and all it stands for.

"You have the building blocks in place for a great tourism destination," Dr. Harrill said at the start of his presentation. "You now have to build your organization and marketing. Along the way you have to remember to protect the community for the local residents, but develop tourism as an economic development tool. Tourism is economic development!"

In his book, Harrill categorized the studied "best practices" into six categories: research, funding, professional development, information dissemination, advocacy, and web marketing. The author is a firm believer in tracking outcomes in order to determine success. Of the 58 potential case histories studied for his book only 16 were selected. That selection process considered the broad applicability of the case to other areas, the ability to indicate innovation, evidence that there was an ongoing program, a willingness to participate, and evidence of an outcome.

Though two of the case studies included Michigan

programs, Harrill likened Harbor Country to the Finger Lakes (New York) Wine Country Tourism and Marketing Association. "For a long time this area was struggling along without a tourism identity," he explained. "The area was a very popular destination with fishermen, hunters and campers, but they didn't spend any money. They brought everything they needed with them."

Funded by the local communities and supported by local corporate giant Corning Industries, the area began marketing itself as a wine country destination as well as a nice place for outdoor recreation. From seeing no return on their previous investments this group began seeing a yield of \$21 back to the area for every dollar invested in marketing.

Harrill gave a number of good examples of what makes a tourist say, "We had a good time." He reviewed the research by the San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau that looked at "Foodie" and "Joy" studies. Both of these studies looked at the feeling of contentment aroused by a visitor to the area. ("Foodies" are the latest and hottest demographic segment that identifies people who are passionate about food in all its manifestations from selecting ingredients and venues, cooking or just dining out.)

Bringing the presentation back to Harbor Country, Harrill felt that we need to expand our presentation of beach and open land as being the most important ingredients of the area's marketing thrust. He also said that being part of the community is a big part of tourism and we should never lose sight of that. He suggested that

everyone in the community should be invited to be a tourist for the day, just to feel what it's like. That's similar to a program developed by the Greater Lansing (Michigan) CVB called, "Be a Tourist in Your Own Hometown."

He identified the internet and web marketing as one of the most significant tools any CVB could have at their disposal. He

encouraged its use to personalize the information seeking by potential tourists from booking a room or a table at a restaurant to tickets to a concert once they arrive.



"You have the building blocks in place for a great tourist destination,"

Dr. Rich Harrill about Harbor Country

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Talent needed

by Don Jackson, Chamber President

This month we welcome back a former board member and say goodbye to a current member. After five years on the board, Roger Harvey has stepped down from the board. He will be greatly missed. His expertise in art and graphics have been integral to the success of the chamber. Roger has had his pen and ink on so much for the chamber it's any wonder that the well hasn't run dry. His handiwork touches the Harbor Country Guide, the Town Posters, our logo and stationery, and our banners. He has given so much to the look and feel of the Chamber. We can never thank him enough, nor fully appreciate all that he has given to our Chamber. Thank you Roger!

But all is not sad; we welcome Chuck Garasic back to the board. After sitting out a year, he has returned. He must have missed us. This is a true blessing to the board. Chuck brings an enthusiasm and energy to the board that is a real asset. He has been put back to work on the Community Development Committee. Thank you Chuck for accepting the challenge of finishing out Roger's term. We need your experience.

Now we're calling all members! We need your expertise. June is the month to announce the openings on the board of directors. This is especially important this year. Under the bylaws of the Chamber, a director can only serve two terms. This year we have 3 directors who have completed those two terms. This creates a need for new directors to bring new ideas and even more enthusiasm to the board.

The following positions are open:
Boat Rocker - This position has been held by Kathy Snyder, attorney at law, Fifth Third Bank Vice President, for six years. She has done an excellent job of always raising questions and with her legal background has kept us on our toes. This will not be an easy position to fill. But if you have strong opinions and

are willing to voice them, this is the position for you. We could use somebody to represent Three Oaks here.

Idea appraiser - Marti Arney of Dunes Antiques comes from the far northern border of Harbor Country. With her departure, Sawyer will lose a valuable representative to the chamber. Sawyer is a hidden jewel of Harbor Country with many wonderful shops, restaurants and businesses that are all thriving. We need someone on the board who will remind us that Harbor Country doesn't end in Harbert!

Web spinner - Gary Ramberg has been an icon of the chamber for many years. From internet guru to past president, Gary has pushed and prodded the chamber forward. His services have been invaluable to the membership as a whole. We should not depend on the same people year after year to do our bidding. We need a member who is ready to step up to the plate and give Gary a well-deserved and earned rest from the monthly meetings. We'd like to consider somebody from the New Buffalo area.

All organizations evolve and change over time. That was the intention of the bylaws in implementing term limits. A successful Chamber needs to have fresh views and ideas. This is a member organization, dependent on volunteers. If you have ever thought that you should give back to the chamber and your community, or thought the chamber should be different or just wanted to get more involved in this wonderful place called Harbor Country, now is the time to get involved.

Petitions will be available at the Chamber Office beginning July 15th. They must be returned by August 1 with 20 signatures. Each candidate must be a chamber member in good standing (you paid your dues) and must agree to accept the responsibilities of a directorship, must have been a member for at least one year; must attend at least ten out of twelve monthly Board meetings, attend at least half the mixers; and be on at least one committee.



GARASIC

Preview of a makeover

Work is steadily underway on the development of the official Harbor Country® site, www.harborcountry.org. As with projects of this magnitude we are faced with several challenges. The most glaring has been finding appropriate images that reflect the spell and romance people fall under when they discover Harbor Country.

LightSky, Inc. our web developers, have been most proficient at providing the technical know-how to make it all happen on a timely basis. However, our own challenge is the ability of our team members and contributors to meet regularly (given all our busy schedules) and make appropriate decisions for the outcome of the site.

When it's all said and done, we'll

have a totally new look and feel to the site. It will look professional, yet be dreamy and wonderful, as we like to call our little corner of Michigan. There will be great improvements in technology behind the scenes, like an internal search engine. Anyone previously frustrated with finding a local plumber, or favorite merchant can simply type in a keyword at the top of the page, and relevant businesses will show up on a results page. A visitor can look specifically for a place with a fireplace, near the beach - or dining with a specific cuisine in mind.

The main page will be free of clutter. No ads. A new section called "Harbor Country Living" will be the only editorial content on the home page. This is a featured spot for inter-

views with local people, their stories about living and working in Harbor Country, their business successes, or unique contributions to our area.

People are always looking for deals, and it generates traffic! So our free Hot Deals posting service to our members will continue, and will be part of the site's main navigation. Members will submit their postings through a new "Members" area, via a password protected page.

This will be the third generation of the Harbor Country site, and with each evolutionary cycle, there comes newfound wisdom. All this is the result of professional research and many people putting their heads together. Thanks to all who are making this possible.



Ed Homolka (center) of The Financial Resource Group gave a brief description of the business services offered to area companies. He is flanked by Janet Clark and Ken Gosh.



Chamber Treasurer Karen Gear won the door prize, an electronic organizer, presented by Homolka.

Financial planners host mixer

The Financial Resource Group, 139 N. Whittaker, New Buffalo hosted a Mixer with a Twist of Business on May 15. District office manager, Matt Dilts, told chamber members, "It's a great world, but a tough world for business." Utilizing the talents of local representative, Ed Homolka, the company offers personal and small business financial planning. For more information call 269-469-6377.

Harbor Country® Connection

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His recommendations for the group were to run the association (and chamber) like a corporation, evaluate accountability and programs, diversify funding methods and sources, and be more involved in the political arena. He felt that the area could benefit by the collection of hard data and statistics that indicated what works and what doesn't. "You need someone, quite possibly someone with outside objectivity, to help you. You need someone who can dedicate all their time to this process."

In a question and answer session that followed the presentation, Harrill talked in more detail about an objective campaign to analyze what the chamber and lodging groups have done or are doing as part of their marketing plans. He was asked about how we could set up educational programs to

train hospitality employees, the benefits of an executive director, and the key to good internet marketing.

Harrill's book is available for \$40 from the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute, www.ei-ahla.org or by calling 800-344-3320 (Visa and Mastercard accepted). Dr. Harrill can be reached at 404-894-3852 or by email at rich.harrill@edi.gatech.edu. For more information about how you can get involved in the local lodging association or chamber of commerce call Sue Harsch at 269-469-5409.

HCC

Music in the Park

There is live music every Saturday, 7 p.m. in Dewey Cannon Park, Three Oaks. Most events are free. Bluesfest/fireworks at Watkins Park, July 5.

**new
members
may
2003**



How can I keep up with all the meetings and events going on in Harbor Country?

Sue Harsch, Harbor Country Chamber and Lodging office manager, said the answer to this question was a snap-- or maybe a few clicks away. "The best way to keep track of meetings and events is to go to our web site," she said. "All you have to do is type www.harborcountry.org/calendar."

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