



222 Main Street • Suite 335 • Annapolis, Maryland 21401

**Annapolis Business Association
General Membership Meeting
September 18, 2007
Harry Browne's**

Minutes

Clare opened the meeting and introduced our guest speaker, Connie DeSignore, President and CEO of the Annapolis and Anne Arundel County Conference and Visitors Bureau.

The focus of Connie's remarks was how the CVB promotes Annapolis to potential visitors to the area. She noted that at a Board of Directors' retreat two years ago, they decided several things. One was to support the flowers downtown. Another was to establish a position to serve as a liaison to the organizations in the community. They also decided to promote the area with the "Come Sail Away" brand. Eighteen months after implementing these decisions, the feedback is very positive. A recent study has shown that the "Come Sail Away" brand has created quite an emotional pull and $\frac{3}{4}$ of the people who saw those ads actually came to visit the area. Stephanie Duncan has been in the liaison position and has worked with many of the ABA members.

Connie also told us some of the specifics about how the CVB is promoting the area. They have shifted $\frac{3}{4}$ of the resources previously devoted to print advertising to the internet after learning that more people are planning their trips on line rather than coming into the visitors center once they come to the area. The print advertising that they are doing is more "point-of-view." The themes are: things are a little different here, and normal rules don't apply here. (Examples: "Look out. Colonials Crossing." "People here burn their socks in the spring.")

Another topic that Connie addressed was the proliferation of hotel rooms being built and that the market will not catch up to the supply for a few years. In the interim, the CVB has added one additional position in group sales, and they continue to promote the area to the overnight traveler who spends much more than the day trippers.

One of the points that Connie made was that with more resources, they could do more. The majority of their budget comes from a percentage of the county hotel tax that is paid on all hotel stays. The County receives \$14 million in hotel taxes. The budget for the CVB is \$1.3 million.



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There was a brief question and answer period. In response to one question from George Nassif, Connie said that a convention center does not usually pay for itself, but that it might fill hotel rooms.

Clare thanked Connie, who left for another commitment.

Clare reminded us that TasteBuds is October 30 from 6 to 9 at the new Westin Hotel. Tickets go on sale soon. This is the major fundraiser for the flowers downtown. We expect 25+/- food stations. Those businesses who have not contributed something for the silent auction were reminded to do so. Information about Taste Buds is on the ABA website.

Next we discussed the impact of the Annapolis Triathlon on businesses downtown. Business owners and managers were reminded to complete the Department of Economic Development survey if they had not already done so. Karen Gindes from the city said that results would be compiled very shortly. Most downtown business owners present said that business was down during the event. An exception was the Royal Folly B & B which was busy with guests here for the event. Someone noted that people who come to events don't eat and shop as much as general tourists. The fear of traffic congestion could have kept locals away. In fact, traffic congestion, not at the dock, but on the routes into and out of town, was the main complaint. Lack of coordination by police agencies seems to have been a factor. It was suggested that other cities have events and that we should contact some of them to see how they deal with traffic and how they get people into the businesses while they are attending the events.

Clare brought to our attention a handout concerning Governor O'Malley's proposed increase in the sales tax from 5% to 6%. This is part of his plan to balance the state's budget. The ABA Board has taken a position opposing the increase and we were encouraged to contact Senate President Mike Miller and House Speaker Mike Busch to express our opposition to the increase. Some present urged the ABA Board to meet with the politicians as well as writing to them or calling them.

Clare reported on the activities of the Marketing Committee. They have met twice and are developing a slogan to get locals to come downtown to eat and shop. Along with the slogan will be 10 reasons to eat and shop downtown. They had hoped to launch the campaign this fall, including a full-page ad featuring many businesses. This will probably be delayed until early spring while they refine the ideas.

Crime in the Historic District was the next topic. We discussed the recent rash of events and the fact that we have only two officers assigned to the area during each shift. Part of



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the problem is that there are 23 vacancies on the police force. Norm Crews reminded us to call the police department if we experience crime or if we see suspicious people in the area. It is important to document instances to reinforce the need for more police presence. Norm also reminded us that he had a handout with statistics on recent calls and incidents by street.

The Business Directory is in the final stages of being developed. Clare will contact any business that has an incomplete entry.

The last item of business was introductions. Each of those present gave a brief report on "How is business?"