

**Dr. Lynda Haverstock
President/CEO, Tourism Saskatchewan
Report on Operations
Spring General Business Meeting
Sunday, March 14, 2010**

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Greetings, one and all.

After many months of planning, another showcase of our industry is underway. Today and tomorrow offer enlightening presentations and valuable networking sessions. There will be opportunities to acknowledge leadership in our sector. For example, tomorrow morning four Saskatchewan businesses will receive the designation *Employer of Choice* after completing an intensive pilot project managed by our education division, the Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council. The “icing on the cake” for many will be the spectacular Tourism Awards of Excellence Gala. I want to thank everyone who has gathered for Tourism Saskatchewan’s Spring General Business Meeting and for the *Host Saskatchewan* conference.

This assembly provides members a chance to engage Tourism Saskatchewan’s management and staff in discussion of key issues and activities. Should you have questions for any of our team, we are eager to hear from you.

I want to acknowledge the Board of Directors and extend a public welcome to the new faces at the board table. The commitment of these individuals to our organization and to tourism is deeply appreciated.

To our government partners, we say “thank you.” It is our pleasure to “share the spotlight” this afternoon with the Ministry of Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport. We look forward to Ken Dueck’s presentation.

Both the Government of Saskatchewan and the Government of Canada deserve acknowledgement for their contributions as our nation hosted what many are claiming to be the most successful, exciting winter Olympic games of all time.

Tourism Saskatchewan was directly involved during the planning stages of the Saskatchewan Pavilion. And we had staff “on the ground” at “Sassy Haus,” as the Pavilion was lovingly referenced in a Wall Street Journal article on March 1st.

The response to the Pavilion was astonishing. Numbers soared beyond anyone’s predictions. No one anticipated that each and every day there would be lineups of people waiting for the doors to open. We knew that the venue offered significant opportunity to host throngs of people and “wow” them with the wonders of our province.

But did we expect 120,000 to cross the threshold? No! Did we anticipate that thousands of copies of our new travel guide would disappear quickly and that we could have handed out at least another thousand? We did not.

As you can imagine, staff returned home exhausted. At the same time, everyone has been so excited about the contacts made, the new friendships forged, and by the possibilities that stem from enticing travellers from afar with a taste of Saskatchewan hospitality. I am confident that our Olympic “performance” will yield multiple benefits for our province. Candace Phelps, Vice-President of Tourism Saskatchewan, will present more specifically on our Olympic initiatives at tomorrow’s luncheon.

“Moving day” for our Regina office is quickly approaching. You may recall that our ten-year lease with Canwest for office space at 1922 Park Street (the Leader-Post building) expired on December 31st. During the decade that we shared quarters with the Leader-Post, Tourism Saskatchewan and our government partners benefitted from a lease that was exceedingly “tenant friendly.” An attractive rent averaging \$5 per square foot with minimal common costs (no taxes or utilities) resulted in savings that helped to offset some of the challenges that occurred from being chronically underfunded.

In 2008, we began exploring the limited options available in Regina’s “hot” commercial real estate market. Consideration was given to negotiating a new lease with Canwest and remaining at the present site. The reality was that our costs would escalate significantly regardless of whether we moved or “stayed put.”

In our search of alternate properties, we found only one. It was the former Superstore building at Albert street and Dewdney Avenue, which has been transformed into an office complex by Century West Development. Initially, it proved far too “rich” for us. However, last fall, Century West re-approached us with an offer for a fifteen-year lease at a more reasonable rent considering the location in downtown Regina and along the busiest thoroughfare in our capital city.

After much deliberation, the Board of Directors accepted the offer to lease space at Regina Centre Crossing. By the end of February, contractors were “on site.” We anticipate settling into our new home in June.

Obviously, in order to accommodate our new financial obligations, we have had to make adjustments to expenditures. Be assured that we will strive to deliver the best service possible with minimal disruption.

At our Fall General Meeting in December, I spoke about the ambitious goals that were identified in our Three-Year Business Plan. They are as follows:

1. A defined provincial brand for tourism;
2. Three recognized destination areas with a strong product/market match;
3. Implementation of a Quality Assurance Program;
4. Strengthening the industry through outstanding collaboration with partners;
5. Building impressive gateways;
6. Encouraging sustainable practices; and
7. Doubling Tourism Saskatchewan's 2008-2009 budget.

In order to give these goals the necessary attention, some restructuring of management positions has occurred. Candace Phelps, who has served as Vice-President and Director of Marketing for three and a half years, has moved into Executive Office in an augmented vice-presidential role. In this position, Candace will concentrate on the internal requirements necessary to "hit the mark" with the seven aforementioned targets. As well, she will lead our current round of strategic planning which, in its preliminary stage, has identified additional priority items that will advance our sector.

The direction and activities of our marketing team are continuing "on track." Department updates will be communicated to members and to the industry in the upcoming weeks.

The activities of the President's Task Teams support the goals of our organization and are aligned with the requirements of our ends policies – to promote, develop, advocate, and lead. Task Team members are exceedingly knowledgeable, experienced individuals who provide insights and guidance to Tourism Saskatchewan.

Lengthy discussions have taken place around a Quality Assurance Program for Saskatchewan's tourism sector.

Before moving forward on this front, it was necessary to put our own "house" in order. One of the first steps was establishing a procedure for dealing with complaints.

Understand that much of the feedback that we receive from travellers is positive. But occasionally, we hear of unfortunate, less-than-stellar experiences and substandard service. Consumers have expectations that their concerns will be addressed. The official Complaints Procedure that we have drafted involves several steps. To begin, we acquire permission from the complainant to share their correspondence with the business in question and relevant third parties. Next, an effort is made to hear "both sides of the story." Contact is made with the subject of the complaint and copies of the

original correspondence are provided. As well, appropriate government ministries, organizations, tourism regions and CMOs are kept apprised of the issue.

Furthermore, we emphasize that Tourism Saskatchewan and STEC are most willing to provide assistance on matters related to human resources and customer service.

In the event that three legitimate complaints are received and remain unresolved within an 18-month period, the issue will be forwarded to a Complaints Review Committee comprised of industry representatives. Upon their recommendation, Tourism Saskatchewan will remove the business or property from online and travel guide listings, marketing programs, and brochure display opportunities. If it happens to be a Tourism Saskatchewan member under scrutiny, the appearance of our logo in their materials or on their website will not be permitted, and links to our website will be forbidden.

Tourism Saskatchewan will provide notice of our decision in writing, along with conditions that must be met before participation in our marketing programs can resume.

I want to take a few moments to emphasize some recent highlights. “Picking and choosing” is always difficult. With so many people in the room, however, it is a must to introduce the most recent addition to our promotional resources – the new *Saskatchewan Discovery Guide*.

Responses to the guide have been hugely favourable. We are considering how to build upon its positive features and make improvements. One suggestion was made to profile Tourism Award of Excellence recipients and businesses that have earned *Employer of Choice* designation.

Once *Host Saskatchewan* is complete, the Industry Relations Department will take another deep breath and dive head first into work on the 2011 *Discovery Guide* and preparations for *Tourism Awareness Week*.

Industry Relations endeavours to foster strong lines of communication with members through Industry Updates, our newsletter *Going Places*, and various means. Just last week, we were struck by the effectiveness of online survey tools. As we have done in the past, Tourism Saskatchewan e-mailed a survey to members, who were asked to reply in less than three days. We received 204 completed surveys, which is a very significant response rate. This speaks volumes, considering that three to five percent is the average for a non-incentive online poll. I want to thank everyone who took time to answer the questions and provide helpful feedback.

As always, our Saskatoon office is bustling. STEC team members are presently engaged in three *Ready to Work* projects – in Lloydminster, Saskatoon, and Whitewood.

Carol Lumb shared with me some very encouraging news. STEC anticipates a record number of certified professionals this year, possibly three times the average! A key factor in this increase is the transforming the *Tourism Workforce Initiative Project* that has received funding from Human Resources & Skills Development Canada under the *Workplace Skills Initiative*. We are truly grateful for this support. These newly certified workers are extremely valuable assets. Their leadership and gifts will yield positive outcomes for employers and businesses.

I want to take time to comment on some of the pursuits of Industry Development. In addition to consultative work in destination area development and community tourism planning, team members have been involved in the *Trails of 1885* initiative. A fascinating line up of activities is scheduled to mark the 125 anniversary of the Northwest Resistance. Tourism Saskatchewan is proud to play a role and looks forward to events that will unfold in the months ahead.

Another round of *Tourism Keys* workshops is scheduled for April. These sessions are designed to assist businesses and operators in website design and construction, and provide tips on how to enhance your web presence. Entry level and advanced sessions will be offered. We appreciate the co-operation of the Regions and City Marketing Organizations to bring these workshops to Candle Lake, Moose Jaw, Regina, Saskatoon, and Yorkton.

Time permits me to highlight but a couple of the activities of our Marketing Department. There is a saying that “a picture is worth a thousand words.” What then, I ask, is the measurement for a clever promotional piece? I want to share with you an enticement from our “Pure Saskatchewan” campaign that is running in Alberta and in Denver.

(demonstration of promotional item – record-size fish)

Our efforts to “wow” Albertans include a project known as “Station Domination” that is underway in Calgary. Picture yourself in the city . . . You are waiting to catch the C-train. To your amazement, one completely “wrapped” in colourful, wondrous images of Saskatchewan pulls up. You step into the train . . . Photographs of our province are displayed throughout the interior. You reach Calgary’s Southland station. There, too, breathtaking Saskatchewan images are displayed all around. With our television ads that are penetrating the airwaves, there is no escape for Calgarians. We are banking on their being defenseless against this bold, calculated strike on their senses.

As I mentioned, our Directors – Candace, Carol, Kim, Jonathan, and Tracy are all here today. A number of staff are present. There is a strong contingent from our Marketing Department. They would be delighted to talk to you about the work that is underway.

It is no secret that Tourism Saskatchewan has a demanding mandate. We treat each of our responsibilities seriously and strive to deliver impressive results. I want to take time today to comment on policy development, which is aligned with our third Ends Policy to “advocate on behalf of Saskatchewan’s tourism industry.”

The issue of the post-Labour Day start to the school year was raised at our Fall General Meeting, and at a very candid discussion that we had with the Northern Tourism Region in December.

Some of you will recall that during our Fall GM we heard from Hubert Mesman, President and CEO of Travel Manitoba. He commented on the success of his province in advocating this issue and bringing about change that has benefitted Manitoba’s tourism sector.

In reviewing the extensive file of correspondence and information amassed on this issue, there is evidence of action by Tourism Saskatchewan to resolutions passed in 2002 and 2005. Letter writing continued into 2006. Changes in management occurring in 2006 and 2007 resulted in less focus on this issue. Now that this has been raised again, it will receive renewed attention. Obviously, it requires a degree of work, research, letter writing, and public statements by many to make the case.

It is important that individual members of the Legislative Assembly and school boards are fully informed about the economic impact of that period from the end of one school year to the beginning of the next. Tourism Saskatchewan would be grateful if you would copy us on your correspondence to key decision makers. We will begin gathering more details at our end, such as information from our neighbouring province to the east where the school year begins after Labour Day.

I will now end my remarks, three minutes and 52 seconds shorter than anticipated. Why? I want everyone here to be treated to the colourful sites, alluring sounds, dazzling performances featured in the second chapter of our video services, aptly titled “People and Places.” Enjoy!

Thank you for your kind attention.

