

Dr. Lynda Haverstock, C.M., S.O.M., Ph.D., LL.D.  
President/CEO, Tourism Saskatchewan  
Report on Operations, Fall General Business Meeting  
Wednesday, December 2, 2009  
Saskatoon Inn, Saskatoon

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, Board of Directors, staff, members of Tourism Saskatchewan, and guests. We appreciate you taking time from your busy schedules to attend our Fall General Business Meeting, and for your commitment to our organization and to Saskatchewan's tourism sector.

Last year, I had an opportunity to attend an address by the renowned Dr. Stephen Covey. His inspiring lectures and popular books offer valuable food for thought on a range of fields, from business to education to family issues.

The following statement by Dr. Covey is particularly meaningful, as we reflect on an eventful year for Tourism Saskatchewan:

"We may be very busy, we may be very efficient, but we will also be truly effective only when we begin with the end in mind."

Have we been busy? We have and we continue to be. Given our plans and the enthusiasm throughout our industry, the pace is unlikely to subside.

Are we efficient? The information outlined in our 2008-2009 Annual Report clearly affirms that, indeed, we are.

With sights set on the desired Ends, as articulated by Mr. Baker, our Chair – to promote, develop, advocate, and lead – we are confident of the positive impact of our work and the benefits to Tourism Saskatchewan members, partners, and industry stakeholders.

The Ends Policies that were revised by our Board provided guidance for strategic planning, as well as a clear direction in the design of our three-year goals. For those of you who have not had a chance to review our Business Plan for 2010-2012, the goals 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 of the industry through outstanding collaboration with partners;
5. Build impressive gateways;
6. Encourage sustainable practices; and
7. Double Tourism Saskatchewan's 2008-2009 budget.

Admittedly, these goals are ambitious. But given our Vision Statement, which reads: “Tourism Saskatchewan is the driving force in the development and marketing of a world class destination,” to strive for anything less would hardly serve our members and the people who are the “heartbeat” of tourism in our province.

Each of the three-year goals can be linked to the Ends Policies. Similarly, our Annual Report outlines highlights of the year, categorized by the themes of promote, develop, advocate, and lead. Referring back to Dr. Covey’s wise words, knowing what we want to achieve and staying true to our vision has and will continue to enable us to work effectively. What is the point of all of this if it does not yield multiple benefits for tourism in our province?

When it comes to preparing the semi-annual Report on Operations, I find it difficult to “pick and choose” which accomplishments, programs, even which challenges to feature.

Permit me to start with Executive Office. I am proud of my team and grateful to them for going above and beyond the call of duty. Executive Office is responsible for operational activities. Our department manages executive communications, corporate, community, and government relations, is engaged in policy development and special projects, and lobbies on behalf of the tourism sector. Human resources management was also moved into this area during the past year. It has been a pleasure to work more closely with Joan MacPhail. She is an amazing asset.

At the Spring General Meeting, I briefed members on five President’s Task Teams. Carla Gamracy joined us last March to assume the responsibility of co-ordinating the complex details of bringing together teams of business, cultural, and industry leaders. A number of these individuals serve on national and international boards. They are people who lead extremely busy lives. Their profound attachment to our province and understanding of the importance of our sector influenced their decision to agree to share their knowledge and expertise, and provide guidance on specific challenges that were identified during the *Saskatchewan Summit on Tourism* in 2007.

A successful model was in place for the Task Teams. The Tourism Labour Market Partnership has been functioning since 2003.

Four new Task Teams were created to examine: 1) provincial image, 2) product development and infrastructure, 3) resources and funding, and 4) quality assurance. A fifth group, the Cultural Tourism Task Team, reignited a previous committee that explored cultural activities and the links to tourism.

The energy, enthusiasm, and “brain power” in the room during meetings is rousing, to say the least. Task Team members are unafraid to say exactly what is on their mind. At the first meeting of the Quality Assurance Task Team, participants were more than pleased to know of our desire to implement quality assurance standards for the tourism sector. At the end of the day, having offered their unequivocal support and encouragement that we should “go for broke,” one particularly vocal team member expressed his pleasure in the form of a question. “Does this mean that mediocrity will no longer be acceptable?” he asked.

Prior to the second meeting of this committee, a review of quality assurance programs in jurisdictions across Canada, as well as successful international programs was undertaken by Jill Vandal of The Tourism Company.

Saskatchewan can no longer afford to ignore the competition. Destinations elsewhere are investing in quality assurance in order to “raise the bar” on service and product levels, and ensure that travellers, who are becoming increasingly savvy and sophisticated in their needs, are treated to exceptional experiences.

We know that this is not always the case. Executive Office handles all complaint letters. It is certainly disconcerting when the complaints involve one of our members. In each case, we ask to hear “both sides of the story” and make it clear that resources are available to them from Industry Development and STEC.

In some instances, business owners have been quick to respond and more than willing to take steps to improve service. In others, our correspondence is not acknowledged. Worst cases are when we receive additional complaints about the same property. Understandably, neighbouring businesses suffer. An entire community may be judged unfairly because of undesirable practices by a single property owner or manager. Tourism Saskatchewan must have a decisive way of excluding or removing inaccurate listings and non-compliant businesses from our publications and website.

One could discuss, at length, the topic of quality assurance. The issue touches all realms of tourism and could serve as a segue into any one of Tourism Saskatchewan’s departments. That said, I want to talk about Industry Relations, which strives to expand communication with the industry and on behalf of the industry. Event management, membership, advertising sales, corporate communications, our image library, and the Industry Matters website are additional responsibilities. And the Industry Relations team produces our travel guide series.

The department is currently under the command of Elizabeth Braitenbach, who is serving as Acting Director while Tracy Breher is on parental leave. Elizabeth joined

Tourism Saskatchewan last winter to manage a mammoth project – the total makeover of our Vacation Guide.

Careful consideration was given to recommendations from a detailed travel literature review, to the publications of other jurisdictions, and to research identifying the wants, needs, and patterns of key demographic groups.

We believe that the decision was to merge three publications into one is wise. The Vacation Guide, the Accommodation, Resort and Campground Guide, and the Events Guide are now a comprehensive, more travel-friendly digest.

Promotional copy is totally refreshed. All listing descriptions have been edited to achieve a consistent, professional tone. Regional marketing managers have been afforded an opportunity to review the content and provide input. Their contributions were certainly valuable to the quality of this publication and we are grateful for their assistance.

A significant increase in advertising sales not only speaks to the work of Bob Kadis, but affirms the industry's support for the changes to our travel literature. We anxiously await the delivery of the new *Saskatchewan Discovery Guide*.

Creating awareness about tourism and communicating facts that reaffirm the significance of our sector is among our mandated responsibilities. But, the industry also has a critical role to play when it comes to relaying our messages. Too often, when travelling through the province, I hear frustration about the all too common misunderstanding of what tourism is. Consider the difficulties for a community or destination when, for example, local accommodation properties or restaurants do not even see themselves as tourism businesses.

There are important statistics that everyone in our sector should know, should care about, and should be shouting from the rooftops:

- Saskatchewan's tourism sector contributed nearly \$1.6 billion to the provincial economy in 2008, exceeding the record spending in 2005, our Centennial year.
- Tourism is our province's fourth largest export industry, with export revenues exceeding \$522 million.
- In Canada, tourism generates economic activity equal to that of forestry, fishing, and agriculture combined. Last year, spending by business and leisure travellers amounted to \$74.9 billion dollars nation-wide.
- Approximately 1.86 million people work in the industry. This amounts to nearly 11% of all employment in the country.

- In Saskatchewan, approximately 57,000 citizens work in tourism. The mining, oil, and gas sectors employ less than half this number (25,600).
- Tourism creates jobs. Tourism drives business. Tourism enhances communities. Tourism reflects who we are as a province . . . The impression we leave can and will influence how much money lands in the pockets of real people.

At the end of each fiscal year, when we are measuring outputs and evaluating statistics, the Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council never fails to come through with impressive numbers of people trained, certified, or who have participated in STEC's valuable programs. Delivering training services and skills development products to nearly 4,500 participants in over 100 Saskatchewan communities, as STEC did in 2008-2009, is no small feat.

The work of STEC is far reaching – very far, in fact. By this, I am referring to involvement with the Saskatchewan Hotel and Hospitality Association and the Canadian Restaurant and Food Services Association to lobby for improvements to the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program. The labour shortage in the hospitality industry is acute. This is no secret to many of you. STEC and the aforementioned partners were successful in reinforcing this message to the provincial government and were pivotal in convincing the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour to expand the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program to include food-counter attendants, food and beverage servers, and light-duty cleaners. Bravo to Carol Lumb, Director of STEC, and to our Saskatoon colleagues.

Last month, an agreement was announced between the Canadian International Training and Education Corporation (CITREC) and the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council that will see the latter's *emerit* training programs for tourism occupations offered overseas. Our own STEC is involved in the assessment and certification aspects of this arrangement. I want to read to you from the news release that was issued on November 3<sup>rd</sup>. Mr. Ashwant Dwivedi, CEO of CITREC stated the following: "STEC is regarded as a premium human resource organization in the tourism and hospitality sector. CITREC is pleased to be associated with a tourism human resource organization that is committed to the provision of education and training that supports professional growth in Canada's tourism industry."

You will recall that in the spring of 2008, Tourism Saskatchewan received a long-overdue annual funding increase from the Government of Saskatchewan. The additional \$3.5 million brought us in line with the level of investment that we received in 1991. We provide a detailed account to the government of where these new dollars are expended. I want to share a few of the points with you.

- In addition to the full Travel Guide Review and the forthcoming publication of the *Saskatchewan Discovery Guide*, mentioned earlier, a new and improved golf publication, the *Saskatchewan Golf Tour Guide*, replaced the discontinued *Perfect Drive* previously published by the regions and city marketing organizations.
- No less than seven photography workshops to assist our industry were held throughout the province in participating regions. The focus of these sessions was to teach operators how to “capture the experience” and utilize images to enhance their web presence and marketing efforts.
- Meetings were initiated with the regions, Tourism Saskatoon, and the former Tourism Regina. Senior management met with board chairs, executive, and staff to discuss areas for collaboration. Opportunities for board training were on people’s “wish lists.” A workshop for volunteer board members was held in September.
- A new province-wide training initiative, *Create Curiosity, Sell Saskatchewan* was developed and piloted at no cost to participants.

I want to acknowledge Jonathan Potts and his team of Industry Development professionals, who earn mounting accolades for their leadership in the field of Destination Area Planning.

Increased government investment has enabled Tourism Saskatchewan to leverage funding from additional partners for the implementation of the Lake Diefenbaker Plan, projects in the Cypress Hills/Horseshoe Region and Prince Albert National Park Destination Area, as well as for the Trails of 1885 initiative.

Industry Development co-ordinated website workshops to assist members with enhancing their internet presence. This training proved popular and beneficial to the 84 participants who took advantage of the opportunity.

Commitment was made to pilot signage studies for the three destination areas. As well, a pilot GPS study of the Lake Diefenbaker Destination Area was initiated.

Research projects were conducted to identify, profile, and target new markets for outdoor operators, who have been “hard hit” by declining numbers of hunters and anglers.

Time permits me to comment on just a few of the highlights that Candace Phelps, Vice-President and Director of Marketing, and her department colleagues celebrated last year.

At the 2009 *HOST Saskatchewan* conference, we launched our *Woods and Water* video. It has earned praise from far and near and became a valuable enhancement to our marketing efforts. For the first time in years, we were able to have a television presence that became an influential component of our spring campaign in Alberta.

More high-definition video footage was captured this last fiscal year, with a focus on festivals and people. As well, we continued to add to our inventory of impressive still photography.

Feature print articles ran in the *Los Angeles Times*, *Canadian Geographic*, Air Canada's *En Route*, the *Edmonton Sun*, and with other key publications.

Our media program assisted more than 75 individual journalists or outlets, directly resulting in \$1.8 million in print and television exposure in Canada, the United States, and Germany.

A busy marketplace season saw our staff, along with representatives from the industry, at more than 20 consumer shows across Canada and North America. To reinforce our presence and "own" Alberta, we increased, by almost two-fold, the number of consumer shows in that province.

In response to direct flights that have been added to Saskatchewan from Denver, Tourism Saskatchewan attended agents events in Colorado. We are confident the nearly 100 new contacts from this area, along with our plans for capitalizing upon the convenient air links will reap rewards.

Last January, we launched our first product-specific website, [www.fishing-in-saskatchewan.com](http://www.fishing-in-saskatchewan.com). This proved a valuable addition to our online "toolkit." Total visits to our consumer websites last year numbered over 811,000, an increase of 37 per cent over the previous year. Almost 445,000 click-throughs to linked members and operators occurred.

The past year marked our "crossing the threshold" into the world of social media. Blogging and tweeting were added to the responsibilities of some of our marketing professionals. It is certainly interesting to witness this engagement by loyal Facebook fans and Twitter followers.

During the summer, our own Les Holmlund embarked on an 18-day cross-province tour. Along the way, he collected and posted entertaining video clips highlighting features and activities in Saskatchewan communities. Through online blogs, Les commented on the unique destinations that he was visiting, the remarkable hospitality that he

encountered, and the mouth-watering dishes that were “forced” upon him. His postings to date have been a hit, and we will continue to roll out more of his Saskatchewan adventures from the summer of 2009.

An appropriate finale to my report today is share with you a sample of the creative, inventive work of the clever people tasked with marketing Saskatchewan outside of our borders. But before treating you to some entertaining video footage, I want to acknowledge Kim Dumelie, Director of Finance and Administration, and her team of “number crunchers.” They are to be commended for their role in keeping operations running smoothly.

Support of our organization and sector by Government of Saskatchewan is deeply appreciated. In June, at the launch of Tourism Awareness Week, the Honourable Dustin Duncan made his “debut” as Minister of Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport. His enthusiasm to embrace “all things tourism” is certainly encouraging.

To Tourism Saskatchewan’s dedicated Board Members and to the special people in Regina and Saskatoon, of whom I have the pleasure of working alongside - I am grateful to all of you.

And now, I want to provide you with just a glimpse of what Albertans experienced one spring afternoon, when Tourism Saskatchewan instigated a “stampede” in downtown Calgary.     *(Pride Piper of Saskatchewan video)*