



# Michigan Tourism Strategic Plan

*"a plan for the industry, by the industry"*

## Public Policy and Government Relations

IWT Report to the Council

November 4, 2006

### Section 1: **Overview**

The Public Policy and Government Relations Issue Work Team discussed background information regarding the project and expectations. A timeline based upon short-term vs. long-term concepts was identified at the Team meeting held in October. The make-up of the Team consisted of Co-Chairs Peter Fitzsimons, Petoskey-Harbor Springs-Boyne Country CVB, Cathy Pavick, Michigan Licensed Beverage Association and the following Team members:

- William Lobenherz, Michigan Soft Drink Association
- Matt Groen, Michigan Restaurant Association
- George Moroz, The Henry Ford
- Bill Sheffer, Michigan Association of Recreational Vehicles & Campgrounds
- Rich Studley, Michigan Chamber of Commerce
- Sam Wendling, Muskegon CVB
- Paul Bukowski, Small Business Association of Michigan
- Kellie Dean, Dean Transportation, Inc./Dean Trailways of Michigan
- Tom Ferguson, Michigan's Sunrise Side Travel Association
- Annette Rummel, PCT Liaison, Saginaw Valley CVB

### **Issue Work Statement**

State, regional and local politics affect all industries in Michigan. It is therefore critical that the tourism industry have a coordinated ongoing relationship with those political entities that impact it's growth and long term importance to the state's economy. To achieve that goal the industry should:

- Come together under an existing or new umbrella organization with an elected hierarchy. Incorporated within the organization will be:
  - An administrator/ lobbyist to represent industry needs and goals,
  - A communications system to keep the membership current on political issues and enable "call-to-action" when needed,
  - A system of coordinated tourism oriented committees throughout the state to assist with issues both regionally and in Lansing.
- Redefine/realign the priority of tourism and those departments/organizations responsible for its ongoing planning and development within the current state political model.

## Section 2: **Challenges and Opportunities**

The challenge is that if Tourism is to call itself an 'industry' then it should have a mutually agreed upon platform (mission/agenda) giving it a common 'voice' in the cluttered political and bureaucratic arena. What has been historically consistent is the perception by legislators that the Tourism Industry 'isn't organized' or 'can't get their act together' – until recently, our ability to 'rally the troops' has been abysmal. But we are at a unique point in our history where there is a convergence of successes and failures that can propel the stature of Tourism as an 'Industry' solidly into the future. Those include:

- the unification of efforts to preserve the minimal funding levels for Travel Michigan
- the success of the Uniform Post Labor Day bill
- the effort to secure a \$15 million allocation to the state promotion budget, and
- the cataclysmic change in the Michigan, lifeblood, manufacturing sector.

Prominence in the political and administrative arena is ours to lose if we don't act decisively.

We believe that complexity invites gridlock and would hope that the elements of this and other IWT's plans reflect simple applications that will engender meaningful results.

We believe that the collective wisdom of the state-wide association partners within this strategic planning process combined with the similar tourism related members of MSAE, TICOM and TIME coalitions should convene a caucus to undertake the process of developing a common agenda for Michigan Tourism. Furthermore we suggest that these groups serve as the representative leadership and continue to meet on a periodic basis to update/monitor such agenda.

## Section 3: **Recommendations**

Short-term (6-12 months):

- Examine potential revenue sources to support current recommendations
- Work together with the Industry Organization IWT to prioritize a list of the partners in the Tourism Caucus to develop the template for a common agenda for Michigan Tourism.
- Cooperatively articulate a tourism agenda with values as common as possible to all facets of the diverse tourism industry. This includes, but not limited to tourism promotion funding, transportation, environment, and return on investment research.
- Create an RFP to identify the role and needs of an administrator, a lobbyist and a public relations agency to effectively administer the plan.
- Employ an individual or firm to be the main contact for the industry in Lansing. The function of this main contact will actively involve themselves in the appropriations process and monitoring of legislative and regulatory tourism related discussions. They will further educate legislators, regulatory agencies, local officials and others on the value, role and benefits of tourism in Michigan and communicate back to the industry on relevant issues, alerts or 'calls to action'.
- We estimate that the annual cost of this program will be approximately \$75,000 to fund the administration, lobbying and communication costs.

Long-term (12 + months):

- Examine the relationship of Travel Michigan and the role of the Travel Commission within MEDC.
- Move from an advisory position to political action such as candidate evaluation, candidate development and PAC development for contributions to both local and statewide pro-tourism candidates and initiatives.
- Establish a long-term funding mechanism necessary to continue the elements of the plan.

#### Section 4: **The Process**

The basic 'talking points' for the committee was drafted by the co-chairs and distributed to the committee. The committee convened at a meeting in Lansing (with one member on phone conference) and worked out the basic principals of the plan. The elements were further validated and finalized via email correspondence.