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2007 YORK REGION TOURISM MARKETING PROGRAM ANNUAL REVIEW

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated January 8, 2008, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that this report be circulated by the Tourism Branch to local municipalities, chambers of commerce and board of trade and the York Region Tourism Advisory Group.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Regional Council with a review of the 2007 York Region Tourism Marketing Program.

3. BACKGROUND

Regional Council approved the 2007 York Region Tourism Marketing Program in October 2006 and in May 2007 approved the York Region Tourism Marketing Mid-Year Review report. The report provides an overview of the tourism program for 2007.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The initiatives implemented in 2007 were developed based on research, results and consultations with the tourism industry and partners. It supports the goals of the tourism program: to attract tourist visits, generate overnight stays, increase revenues and strengthen urban and rural communities by supporting the development growth and sustainability of the local, tourism industry and York Region as a four season destination.

The Marketing Program centred on promoting York Region to high-yield travellers in the key source markets of: Consumers Leisure (Visitor and York Region Residents) and Meetings and Groups. As well, industry relations and destination development were components of the 2007 tourism program.

4.1 Marketing Initiatives

4.1.1 Consumer Leisure Marketing

From a marketing point of view, 2007 was a year focused on new initiatives and year round multi media activities including:

- The Summer advertising campaigns targeted the Michigan, Upstate New York and Ontario markets through CAA, AAA, Ontario Travel and the Globe and Mail.
- The Fall advertising program targeted the same markets and publications and also included Harvest Ontario and a cooperative web promotion on CHFI.com which generated an average of 5000 unique web visits per week and resulted in over 200,000 media impressions for each of the 8 tourism partners.
- The Winter 2007/2008 campaign focussed on York Region and the Greater Toronto Area consumers with magazine and newsprint ads, Jewel Radio and extensive web based campaigns with Ontario Travel, Toronto Life, and family oriented web sites including City Parent, What's Up Kids and Today's Parent.

The marketing campaigns directed consumers to seasonal landing pages on www.yorktourism.com as the main call to action increasing the site's popularity and driving traffic to online tourism partners. Consumer entries for both the summer and fall contest campaigns increased 58% over 2006.

4.1.2 Meetings & Group Marketing

Initiatives to build awareness and generate new business from the Meetings & Conference market included renewing partnerships with the 3 key organizations (Canadian Society of Association Executives, Meeting Professionals International and the Independent Meeting Planners Association of Canada), and attendance at 3 tradeshow (Incentive Works, Meet Canada North and the Canadian Society of Association Executives) and support of the National Meeting Industry Day (April). Assistance on a regular basis is provided to the meeting and conference planning profession to facilitate site selection, connection to local tourism businesses and provision of destination services. New for 2007, was a "Meet Local" mail campaign directed to 1500 York Region corporations.

Activities intended to build awareness of the York Region's sporting venues included communications to national and provincial sports organizations and participation in the Ultimate Sport Adventure Familiarization tour held in September. Results to date include a request for proposal for the Magna Centre in Newmarket to bid on the Ontario Lacrosse Championships proposed for August 2008. If the bid is successful, 1000 hotel rooms will be required to host the lacrosse attendees. As well, the confirmed bid by the City of Vaughan Pee Wee Baseball Championships will generate 500 room nights in August 2008.

To increase destination awareness and encourage group tour business York Region implemented a combination of advertising, membership to the four key industry

organizations, attendance at two industry conventions (Ontario Motorcoach Association, the Student and Youth Travel) sponsor of an event at the Ontario Motorcoach Association convention, and conducted an invitational tour on February 16-17 for Ontario Tour Operators. Results to date include inquiries from Hanover Holidays and Ontario Fun Connections for assistance in planning tours into York Region. In addition, seven student Tour Operator familiarization tours in June and September, hosted in partnership with Tourism Toronto, resulted in the development of programs by student tour operators Éducatours and Voib.ca.

4.2 Promotional Development

www.yorktourism.com

A new and expanded tourism website launched in July 2007 which provides for new features, expanded search capabilities and better showcases York Region 's tourism product in streams appropriate for the 3 key users – visitor, local resident and group planner. Continuous industry contributions to the site make it a resource of choice for consumers interested in York Region.

York Region Visitors Guide

The 2007 Visitors' Guide marked the second year production in the 4x9 format with a circulation of 150,000 copies. A 23% increase in advertising partners from 2006 resulted in the publication size increasing from 64 to 80 pages.

Festifall Publication and Postcard Drop

The FestiFall magazine was the main promotional and fulfillment piece for the Fall advertising campaign. With industry partner support, 20,000 copies of this magazine profiling fall events, driving tours and activities was produced. Supporting the Fall campaign and new for 2007 was a postcard mailing to 285,000 York Region households encouraging residents to be resident tourists and invite family and friends to York Region. This mailing generated almost 10,000 consumer inquiries, requests for information and increased traffic to www.yorktourism.com

Meeting & Conference Insights Guide

This inaugural Guide was developed to profile York Region's unique areas, innovative venues and corporate education programs available within York Region. This publication was mailed to York Region business executives and 7,000 copies were circulated through the Ontario meeting planner subscribers of the M& IT Magazine.

Touring York Region and Student Experiences Guide

Two promotional lures were developed to profile York Region as a tour destination for the motor coach and student group markets.

4.3 Partnerships and Product Development

Success in leveraging partnerships and product development activities include:

- **Tourism Toronto** – the destination marketing program funding partnership of \$300,000 with Tourism Toronto and the Greater Toronto Hotel Association continues to enhance York Region’s marketing, product development and promotional reach in all markets.
- **Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership Corporation** – aligning York Regions’ tourism product with the Ontario Tourisms’ product development and marketing initiatives resulted in a better positioning of York Region product and tourism partners at the provincial level. Initiatives included:
 - The Great Summer Drives and Great Fall Drives programs heightening the seasonal product, events and packages unique to York Region.
 - Distinctive Getaways program profiled Golf product and supported partner driven participation in the other Distinctive Getaway segments of Theatre, Spa and Culinary
 - Promotion of York Region as the 5th Ontario Golf Destination in provincial marketing through the formation the *Toronto Highlands*, an industry-led golf sector partnership.
- **Canadian Open and Golf Partners** – Tourisms’ sponsorship of this international event provided an opportunity to forge new partnerships centred on York Region’s golf product and increased visitation at area hotels, restaurants, attractions and events. A special golf website www.yorkgolf.ca was developed with the York Region Media Group specifically to support the Canadian Open and promote York Region as an emerging golf destination. A partnership initiative with Golfers’ Guide and Ontario’s Golf Town stores resulted in the production of a *Golfing in York Region* guide.
- **Fishing** – assisted the Town of Georgina in securing the Insights Sports and World Fishing Network Pro-Am Tour Bass Championship for July 4-6, 2008. Also partnering with the Ontario Ministry of Tourism to establish an alliance of partners with an interest in evolving the fishing product into an available tourism attractor.
- **Union Station Promotion** – in June 7 tourism partners interacted with Go Train travellers and distributed over 70,000 brochures at York Region Day at Union Station.
- **Celebrate Ontario** – assisted 9 York Region festivals and events prepare grant submissions for the provincial Celebrate Ontario funding. The Kingfest Musical Festival was a successful recipient of \$97,000.

4.4 Industry Development

The development of new opportunities to benefit the York Region tourism industry is key to growing York Region as a tourism destination. The following initiatives were facilitated through industry involvement and support:

- On March 27, a workshop on arts and culture funding and development was presented to 22 arts organizations in partnership with the Ontario Trillium Foundation.
- Quarterly communication to the tourism industry through a new e-newsletter.
- Initiated the York Region Tourism Destination Development Study.
- Introduction of the new Character Customer Service program.
- Partners Working Together workshop was held on March 22, with over 60 tourism industry partners in attendance.
- York Region Tourism Annual General Meeting held on November 23, with over 90 industry partners in attendance.

4.5 Media Relations

Two media tours in June assisted in raising the profile as York Region as a destination with mass appeal and niche experience potential. Media coverage for 2007 valued at more than \$250,000 which was a 40% increase of free editorial coverage from 2006.

4.6 Relationship to Vision 2026

The activities outlined in this report support the Vibrant Economy and Enhanced Environment, Heritage and Culture Goals of Vision 2026 and are a core component of the York Region Economic Development Strategy.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The tourism program initiatives were funded in the 2007 Operating Budget allocation of \$461,700 and were augmented by \$300,000 from the Tourism Toronto destination marketing fee and \$121,600 through industry supported cooperative advertising programs.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Region's tourism marketing program is based on developing and promoting a range of tourism experiences that will impact all municipalities throughout York Region. The tourism program provided opportunities for local municipalities and respective tourism businesses to maximize their tourism potential, enhance job and wealth creation while contributing to the quality of life for residents.

7. CONCLUSION

The 2007 marketing activities continued to raise the level of interaction with the tourism industry and partner businesses while collaborative opportunities avoided duplication of efforts, focused resources and expanded market reach. The marketing priorities built

upon York Region's key experiences and strongest audience markets to maximize visitation and economic impact.

For further information about this report, please contact Brenda McGowan, Program Manager, Tourism Development at (905) 830-4444 ext. 1553 or brenda.mcgowan@york.ca.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.