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2008 YORK REGION TOURISM MARKETING PROGRAM - MID YEAR REVIEW

The Planning and Economic Development Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report dated May 13, 2008, from the Commissioner of Planning and Development Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be circulated by the Clerks Department to the local municipalities, the Tourism Advisory Group, the Chambers of Commerce and Board of Trade for information and engagement.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Regional Council a mid year review of the tourism marketing program activities implemented and proposed activities for the balance of the year.

3. BACKGROUND

Tourism marketing 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 promote York Region as a four season destination.

The initiatives implemented to date support and promote the business of tourism throughout York Region that were identified in the 2008 York Region Tourism Program approved by Regional Council in October 2007.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

The tourism marketing program was centred on promoting York Region by experience and by season and was directed at high yield travellers in the two key source markets of Leisure Consumers and Meetings and Group. The 2008 marketing program was developed based on key experiential product clusters, determined in part from the results of the Premier-Ranked Tourism Destination audit. These leading regional tourism products are: Recreation/Outdoors, Arts and Culture, Canada's Wonderland, Shopping, Urban/Rural and Heritage districts. Tourism marketing messaging in advertising and

promotions speaks to the key tourism experiences of Family Adventure, Shopping, Festivals and Events, Arts and Culture, Agri-Culinary and Golf. With the Internet playing an increasingly significant role in consumer travel patterns, a fully integrated web and media strategy has been incorporated into the 2008 marketing program. All marketing and advertising activities direct consumers to the website and additional web features will be incorporated to support ease of consumer planning and to maximize York Region's presence on the internet. Click through rates and web statistics are currently being compiled to measure the results from the on line advertising.

4.1 LEISURE CONSUMER WINTER CAMPAIGN – Dec 2007-March 2008

An awareness campaign to highlight winter activities and events with a strong emphasis on outdoor recreation and family activities was implemented from December through March 2008 with a focus on the GTA and York Region resident.

Print Advertising

Print advertising was placed in:

- Great Ontario Getaway (40,000 GTA circulation)
- Today's Parent (80,000 GTA circulation)
- City Parent (80,000 GTA circulation)

Online Advertising

- On Feb 7 a York Region winter themed e-blast deployed to over 19,300 Toronto Life subscribers
- Banner advertising with direct links to yorktourism.com was placed on:
 - the Ontario Tourism consumer websites of winterinontario.com and ontariotravel.net
 - todaysparenttoronto.com
 - cityparent.com
 - whatsupkids.com
 - torontolife.com

Radio Advertising

- Forty 30 second York Region commercials aired December 12 through Jan 31 on Jewel Radio 88.5.

Promotions

- York Region was one of five partners participating in the Snow Globe promotion with the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership. Twenty five thousand York Region winter themed bookmarks were distributed at signature consumer events being held

during January and February in Collingwood, Hamilton, Niagara Falls, Sault Ste Marie, Mississauga and Toronto

- 3500 Winter themed bookmarks and glow sticks were distributed at 10 community events throughout York Region
- Rink board advertising at the Ray Twinney Complex for 2008/2009 season plus an 8 page York Region feature in the Dudley Hewitt Hockey tournament program
- Continued distribution of the York Region sport supplement book through the International Silver Sticks Hockey tournaments

4.2 LEISURE CONSUMER SPRING/SUMMER

The Spring and Summer campaigns have been combined as several of the publications launch in Spring with a life span for an entire year. The target audience includes the GTA, Ontario, York Region, Upstate New York and Quebec. The advertising focus encourages these markets to experience the many tourism attractions that are located right in their own backyard building the impression that York Region is close and accessible.

Print Advertising

- Festival and Events Ontario Guide – 250,000 circulation
- AAA Going Places – 1.2 million Upstate New York households
- Explore Ontario – circulation through Globe and Mail
- CAA - 1.5 million circulation
- Harvest Ontario – collaboration with the York Region Farm Fresh Association to profile the Region's agri-culinary product and farmers' markets – 6,000 circulation through Home Hardware
- Ontario Travel Centres – annual poster display advertising at the provincial tourist information centres in Barrie and Atrium on Bay, Toronto
- 55+ Magazine, 100,000 circulation
- Wine Council of Ontario, Official Guide to Wineries of Ontario – 600,000 circulation through LCBO, Globe and Mail and Toronto Life
- Suburban Magazine – 210,000 GTA circulation
- Great Toronto and Great Ontario Getaways – 40,000 circulation per market of Ottawa, Buffalo, North Bay, Sudbury, GTA surrounding Ontario communities

Online Advertising

Online banner advertising with direct links to yorktourism.com was placed on:

- the Ontario Tourism consumer Family micro site and ontariotravel.net
- insidetoronto.com – supporting Great Toronto and Great Ontario Getaway publications
- CHFI - industry partners participating in Loyalty Club promotion and Wise Guy contest

- York Region Newspaper Group site yorkregion.com
- York Region logo and sponsorship advertising on rogerstelevision.com
- E-blast deployment on May Victoria Day weekend to 80,000 Ontario Tourism Partnership subscribers
- E-blast deployed May 13 to over 146,000 Globe and Mail subscribers

Radio and Television Advertising

- 80 Jewel Radio commercials to air June through September with 15 seconds of the York Region 30 second commercial being purchased by industry partners to promote specific tourism experiences
- 15 second commercials will run on all broadcasts of Rogers Television-York Region “First Local” to promote seasonal experiences and events during the Summer, Fall and Winter

Promotions

- Two Summer Contest *York Region Getaway* promotions – one exclusive to CAA members and another supporting the overall marketing campaign
- GO Train Commuters – 10 tourism partners participating in the York Region day at Union Station
- Distribution of tourism brochures at 4 York Region and GTA consumer shows
- Product development support provided to Distinctive Getaways, Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership programs, that define product for the discerning Ontario traveller seeking unique theatre, spa, golf and agri-culinary experiences

Marketing Tools

- York Region Discovery Guide – this is the cornerstone publication for the tourism program. 156 industry partners participated, generating \$87,325 in advertising revenue to support the production and distribution of 100,000 guides throughout Ontario with fulfillment to other locales channelled through consumer inquiries by phone and internet. This year the Guide increased to an 84 page publication with a pull out York Region map and 10 attraction discount coupons
- Seasonal experience themed bookmarks were distributed at various consumer shows to build awareness of yorktourism.com
- A York Region Golf feature section in the GTA Golfers Guide, Spring edition produced by CGT Management and distributed to 50,000 locations throughout Ontario

4.3 MEETINGS AND GROUP

To increase destination awareness, encourage group tour business and generate new business from the meetings and conference markets, the Region has renewed partnerships

with the Ontario Motor Coach Association, the National Tour Association and the Student and Youth Travel Association, the Canadian Society of Association Executives, Meeting Professionals International and the Independent Meeting Planners Association of Canada. Assistance is regularly provided to the tour and meeting planning professionals to facilitate site selection, connection to local tourism businesses and provision of destination services. To date, 6 potential meeting and conference leads have been generated and circulated to the Tourism Industry to quote on securing the business.

Print Advertising

- OMCA Road Explorer – circulation to 1600 Ontario and USA based Tour Operators
- Student Youth Travel Association – 35,000 circulation to Ontario and USA based educators and travel planners
- Meeting Planners International – Toronto Chapter – 3 insertions
- Convention Meetings Canada Directory – membership circulation

Online Advertising

Online banner advertising with direct links to yorktourism.com was placed on:

- The Student and Youth Travel Association – syta.org

Marketing Tools

- A York Region promotional brochure inserted with the Road Explorer Magazine distributed to 2500 Tour Operators in May profiled tourism experiences of interest to the niche market of student tour operators
- A York Region promotional brochure profiling meeting and destination services was included in the Meeting Planners International Canadian Membership Directory distributed to 1600 meeting professionals in May

4.4 INDUSTRY AND DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

Staff continues to consult and interact with tourism industry partners, community organizations, area municipalities and related associations with the goal of build and enhancing the Region's tourism profile into an integrated, four season destination. In the area of Industry Development, staff has provided the following industry education assistance, and shared learning opportunities through workshops and regular communication to local industry partners:

- Facilitated by the Tourism branch in partnership with the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership, an "Attracting tourists from the GTA" presentation was given at the Ogemawahj Tribal Council conference on February 26. Many Georgina Island businesses were in attendance

- *Celebrate Ontario* Grant Application Assistance was provided to region based festival and events including Windfall Ecology Festival, Whitchurch-Stouffville Strawberry Festival, Kingfest, Kleinburg BIA, Aurora Street Festival, Markham Jazz Festival, Unionville Street Festival and Resurgence Theatre. Markham Jazz Festival was a successful in securing \$37,000 in funding
- On March 4, a Hotel Partner Marketing Program and Strategy workshop was attended by 20 Hotel General Managers and Sales Directors
- York Region Tourism E-Newsletter – this quarterly communication vehicle is used to update tourism industry partners on marketing opportunities, promotions, trends and research

4.5 FALL AND WINTER SEASON

Continued implementation of the initiatives identified in the 2008 Tourism Program will engage the regional tourism operators in strategic marketing initiatives, advertising campaigns and in the development of niche promotional collateral that support audience specific advertising and promotional campaigns. This includes product enhancements to the key York Region Festifall brochure and increased exposure to York Region and GTA residents that will include a mailing of the Festifall brochure to all York Region households and online marketing campaigns throughout the GTA. Product development support will be given to the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership *Great Drives* that encourages discovery of York Region throughout the Fall season. Additional industry interaction and educational workshops will be held including the York Region Annual General Conference is proposed for November 6, 2008.

4.6 RESEARCH TRENDS AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Staff regularly consults with tourism industry operators, as well as, officials from the Canadian Tourism Commission, Tourism Toronto, Ontario Ministry of Tourism and the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership and Industry Associations to better understand the trends and issues facing the travel and tourism industry. Current performance measures include:

- An Overview of Tourism Activity in York Region – Research Resolutions and Consulting Ltd., has been contracted to provide the most recent overview of tourism markets, value and characteristics of visits to York Region. At this time, 2005 statistics are not yet available from the Ministry of Tourism and Statistics Canada.
- 1 888 0000 and tourism@york.ca – from January through April, 217 inquiries have been tracked through telephone and online information requests.
- www.yorktourism.com – from January through April - 16,000 unique visitors with over 2,600 repeat sessions. Marketing campaigns have generated a 32% direct referral rate to yorktourism.com.
- On line advertising click through rates and referral data information is being compiled to measure the results of the partnership.

4.7 RELATIONSHIP TO VISION 2026

The tourism program supports the Vibrant Economy and Enhanced Environment, Heritage and Culture goals of Vision 2026 and is a core component of the York Region Economic Development Strategy.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The tourism program initiatives are funded in the 2008 Economic Development and Tourism budget allocation and are augmented by \$300,000 in funding from the Tourism Toronto destination marketing fee initiative and industry supported co-operative advertising revenues.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The Region's tourism industry extremely diverse and consists predominantly of small to medium sized businesses. Visitor expenditures support the economic vitality of local tourism businesses, enhance employment opportunities and encourage sustainable growth.

The Region's tourism program is based on developing and promoting a range of tourism experiences that will impact all municipalities throughout York Region.

7. CONCLUSION

The 2008 marketing program provides the framework for the promotion and development of York Region as a four season destination. The tourism industry is provided with tactical partnership opportunities to enhance and grow their businesses and market reach. The marketing priorities build upon York Region's key experiences and strongest audience markets to maximize visitation and economic impact, while furthering the development and sustainability of the Region's urban and rural communities.

The tourism branch will continue to work collaboratively with members of local councils and municipal staff to ensure that the York Region tourism program recognizes local tourism objectives and supports a collective approach to tourism and destination development.

For more information on this report, please contact Brenda McGowan, Program Manager, Tourism Development at (905) 830-4444 Ext. 1553, or Patrick Draper, Director of Economic Strategy and Tourism at Ext 1503.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.