



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA
PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT

AGENDA DATE: August 25, 2010

TO: Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: Business Services, Parks and Recreation Department

SUBJECT: Overview of Department Marketing Plan for Fiscal Year 2010 and Fiscal Year 2011

RECOMMENDATION: That the Commission receives a report on the Department's marketing efforts in Fiscal Year 2010 and Fiscal Year 2011.

DISCUSSION:

Introduction

The City of Santa Barbara Parks and Recreation Department has a myriad of programs, services and facilities that serve both youth and adults in our community. Last Fiscal Year (FY), the Department served more than 100,000 youth and adults in its programs—free and fee based. A total of 10,343 program registrations were received, and 17,294 facility rental bookings were made for indoor facilities, sports fields, parks, beaches, and picnic site rentals with 1.8 million attendees. In FY 10, the Recreation Division was budgeted to bring in more than \$2.9 million in revenue from program fees, services, and facility rentals; in FY11 the revenue commitment is \$2.8 million. In order for the Department to successfully continue to serve large numbers of people in our community and realize its revenue commitment to the General Fund, the Department must develop and implement a comprehensive marketing plan annually. This marketing plan must work to retain our current customers and devise new and creative ways to “get the word out” to potential new customers about our programs and services. Marketing is critical to the continued success of our Department programs, and it plays an important role in keeping our organization in the forefront of the recreation providers in our community.

Background

The Parks and Recreation Department has traditionally made the public aware of its classes, programs, and facilities through the bi-annual publication of the *Activity Guide*, press releases, brochures, flyers, radio and television campaigns, and other traditional forms of media, primarily printed matter. In the past few years, creating a web presence along with email campaigns, blogging, Facebook, and other e-marketing methods have become equally if not more valuable in reaching the local audience. Many of these digital avenues are free or low cost, which is helpful in a budget-conscious environment where costs have been reduced in the areas of printing, postage and advertising.

The Department has a Marketing Coordinator, Kathy Sullivan, who spends 95% of her time marketing the Parks and Recreation Department, and 5% of her time marketing the Department's Golf Course. A Marketing Plan is developed each year by the Marketing Coordinator with input from the Recreation Marketing Committee. The Recreation Marketing Committee is comprised of Recreation Supervisors, Coordinators, and Managers along with the Marketing Coordinator. The group meets bi-monthly to discuss and plan marketing strategies and campaigns based on registration, revenue, and programs that might need increased participation or visibility. In addition, the Marketing Coordinator works directly with the Parks and Recreation Director, Director of Golf, Mulligan's Restaurant owner, and Golf Advisory Committee Members to develop and implement a marketing strategy specific to the Municipal Golf Course. More specifics about golf course marketing will be addressed at the end of this report.

The following describes the marketing efforts just completed for the Recreation Division in FY 10 and provides a preview of the marketing plan for FY 11.

Components of the FY 10 Marketing Plan

Advertising Campaign

The Department's annual Marketing Plan includes a schedule of advertising campaigns. Because the size of the advertising budget does not allow for continuous advertising year-round, advertising campaigns are scheduled to coincide with the following relevant events:

- Publication of Activity Guide (March & August)
- Summer camps and sports clinics (March-July)
- Back-to-School youth programs (August-October)
- Winter and Spring Break camps (December and March)
- Winter Adult programs (December-January)
- Wedding issues (Jan/Feb & July-September)

There are a number of advertising methods that are the foundation of the Department's annual marketing plan. They include:

- Bi-annual *Activity Guide*
- Print: display ads
- Online ads
- Press releases
- RecreAction e-newsletter using Constant Contact
- Social Media and Blog
- City News in Brief and City website
- Department Website
- City TV
- Targeted marketing brochures
- Program flyers

There are also a number of secondary marketing methods that staff have utilized to highlight special campaigns, the opening of a renovated or new facility, or to target special populations.

- Seasonal television campaigns on KEYT and Cox Cable
- Radio campaigns
- Fairs, trade shows, wedding fairs

The Parks and Recreation Activity Guide

Traditionally, the 42-48 page bi-annual *Activity Guide* has been printed and distributed throughout the Santa Barbara City area, including parts of Goleta and Montecito, in August for fall and winter offerings and in March for spring and summer programs. This has been common practice for most Parks and Recreation Departments across the country. Over the years, distribution methods have varied depending on the budget available to include insertion in local newspapers (50,000 copies), to distribution to every household in the City (35,000 copies), to targeted distribution to specific carrier routes in the City (20,000 copies).

In order to realize a significant cost savings in FY 10, the Department chose not to print the *Spring & Summer Activity Guide* in March 2010 and instead created an online, web (digital) version only. Numbers of Parks and Recreation Departments were moving in this direction in FY 10 because of reductions to their budgets, and many have found that with a targeted marketing plan, moving to the digital guide could prove successful in retaining customers and reducing costs. A portion of the savings in printing and postage costs were used to print and mail targeted brochures to specific audiences via best carrier routes. In the spring, both a targeted summer camp brochure and an adult programs brochure, featuring special offers on adult programs, were distributed to 20,000 households in the best carrier routes in the City.

Moving to the online *Activity Guide* had a number of advantages in addition to the cost savings:

- Ability to use four-color photos throughout the guide
- Easy to update information; delete or add pages
- Links can be interactive (web addresses, emails, table of contents etc)
- User can print out just the page(s) he/she wants
- Easy for customer to email to others

To increase awareness of the *Activity Guide's* online only presence, staff utilized a mixed media approach using targeted e-newsletters, blogs, press releases, web links, and print and online ads created in conjunction with the ads for summer camps and other spring and summer programs. This plan proved to be quite successful. We acknowledge that there are a number of our customers who do not have computer access and still desire a printed version of our program guide. As a result, staff did have xeroxed copies available in all offices.

New Media Highlights

Marketing staff has utilized a few new media strategies in that past two years that staff would like highlight for the Commission.

E-Newsletters

The Department has been able to utilize e-newsletters very successfully in the last two years. Our customers' email addresses are collected with each program registration and facility reservation. Staff has found that sending emailed newsletters is an easy, effective, and very affordable way to keep our customers informed and coming back to us by staying in regular touch with them and building strong customer relationships. These newsletters are fast and inexpensive to create. E-newsletter programs also provide some valuable features. Staff can schedule the email delivery for a time when our customers are most likely to check email, increasing the likelihood that they'll read it and take action. This program can also tell staff who opened the email, who forwarded it, and even who clicked on the links, and what link they clicked on. This information helps staff to better understand what our customers are interested in reading about, and tailor our content and programs to get a better response and more business. Staff is also able to segment our customer database and create smaller customer lists based on their interests. For example, we were able to send updates on the Los Baños Pool project just to those customers who participate in programs at the pool and updated news to participants in the tennis program regarding upcoming tournaments, new instructors, and maintenance schedules. Studies show that when customers receive more relevant and targeted messages that they will be more likely to respond and act on those emails.

Department Blog

Bloggging is just another marketing tool to promote the Department. Many people today choose to read blogs to get much of their information about news, programs, companies, personal commentary, you name it. There are more than 112 million known blogs. With the assistance of a local social media marketing company, Marketing staff created and now maintains a blog for the Department that is part of the Department website. Included in the blog are regular entries about programs, facility rentals, special events along with a photo or some other graphic. These "blogs" are shorter in length and faster to produce than an e-newsletter. Recreation staff also has the ability to blog about their programs on the site. Visitors to the Department website can choose to subscribe to the Department blog, so they receive an email each time a new entry is posted.

Facebook

Most businesses, organizations and Parks and Recreation Departments are using social networking sites to get out information on their programs to the public, the most popular being Facebook and Twitter. Facebook is the most used social networking website with more than 500 million active users. Users can add people as friends and send them messages, and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves. Additionally, users can indicate that they "like" a certain company, product, or personality and receive regular updates from that company on their Facebook page. Currently Department staff maintains two Facebook pages—one for the Department and another for the Concerts in the Parks program and, in the first eight months since their launch, these pages have almost 1,500 fans that receive regular program updates and comment and ask questions about programs and services.

Budget

Like many budgets in the Parks and Recreation Department, Marketing has taken some reductions in the last few years. The total spent on marketing including just advertising, printing, and postage in FY 10 was \$66,300, a decrease of 27% over the FY 09 budget. In FY 11, the budget has been increased to \$68,800, a 4% increase. Given these limited resources, staff has been creative in their use of more no cost and low cost marketing strategies provided by the use of the internet.

Results of Department's Marketing Efforts

In determining the success of the Department's annual marketing efforts, one can look at program registration and facility rentals as an indicator. There were a number of factors that could have affected program registration and facility rental negatively in FY 10 including the closure of the Carrillo Recreation Center, the struggling economy, and perhaps that program specific brochures were mailed to customers instead of a more comprehensive *Activity Guide*.

Given the economic challenges and decreased revenue to the Department in the last two years, staff decreased the Department's revenue commitment in FY 10. Despite the reduction to the Division's revenue commitment, the Department was still 8% short of achieving its revenue target in FY 10 with the largest revenue shortfalls being in facility rental revenue and Carrillo Recreation Center program revenue. On a more positive note, a total of 10,343 program registrations were received in FY 10, an increase of 3% or 292 registrations over FY 09. Summer camp registrations were only down by 2% or 44 participants over FY 09, and due to some fee increases, revenue from summer camps increased by 4% or \$20,524 over the previous summer. Despite the fact that camp registration is down slightly, staff are very pleased with our program registration numbers considering the continued downturn in the local economy. Staff concludes that there haven't been any negative effects to program registration numbers based solely on the digital *Activity Guide* and the distribution of smaller, targeted brochures.

Plans for Recreation Marketing in FY 11

In FY 11, marketing staff will continue with the successful marketing efforts pursued in FY 10 and continue to build on the use of social networking media. A special focus will include the marketing of the newly renovated Carrillo Recreation Center and the myriad of new programs and facility rental opportunities in that facility. Increased facility marketing will also be a focus with increased participation in local wedding fairs and the creation of a facility rental brochure. Since training budgets have been cut, staff will continue to take advantage of the variety of low-cost and no-cost webinars available regarding the latest trends and studies in recreation marketing.

Marketing for Santa Barbara Golf Club

Due to a large and ongoing construction project at the course during most of FY 10 combined with the economic downturn, golf rounds were dropping as frequent users went to play elsewhere or had stopped playing as often. In fact, FY 10 rounds were down a total of 16%

over FY 09 (11,455 rounds total). Increased marketing efforts began in January to encourage local golfers to come back to "Muni" and to increase awareness of the course and its benefits to tourists through hotel participation. Most of the marketing efforts listed below began at the end of FY 10, so it is too soon to determine what affect they might have on increased rounds. Total spent on advertising in FY 10 was approximately \$13,000 and has been increased to \$20,000 for FY 11. Staff hopes that the following marketing efforts will increase the number of rounds at the golf course in the coming year.

- S.B. Axxess Book: Special offers for card users
- Cox Cable Television: 30-second spot produced by City TV on five networks
- Hotel rack cards distributed to over 40 local hotels with offers for visitors only
- SB Convention & Visitor's Bureau: membership, web listing and ads in "Go Outdoors" e-bulletin issued three times a year to 6,000 email users
- Greater SB Lodging & Restaurant Assn: Golf Director creating partnerships with local hotel managers and concierges to provide local rates to their guests
- Online ads Presidio Sports (website featuring local sports) which include links to four golf tutorial videos featuring Chris Talerico, Golf Director
- Monthly e-newsletters re the course and Pro Shop
- Yellow page ads and iGoogle ads

Summary

Having an effective plan for marketing our programs, services, and facilities is critically important for the City of Santa Barbara Parks and Recreation Department's continued success as one of Santa Barbara County's leading providers of recreation services. With that in mind, staff will continue to gain the knowledge necessary to develop and implement a marketing plan utilizing the latest marketing trends and work with staff to implement that plan.

- ATTACHMENTS:**
1. August 2010 RecreaAction E-newsletter
 2. Summer with the City Brochure
 3. Adult Programs Brochure
 4. Facility Rack Card
 5. Golf Rack Card

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