

TO: Yachats City Council  
FROM: Andrea Scharf  
DATE: December 6, 2013

## VISION

### Final Report and Recommendations:

First, I want to thank the city of Yachats for contracting with me to be the marketing director. It's been a learning experience all around, I think, but in the end, I believe it has benefitted the city, the south county area, and me personally.

I would like to take some time to review the past three years, look at the things that worked and the things that didn't, and make some recommendations for actions the city might take next.

#### Rural Tourism Studio:

I began talking to Susan Woodruff, mayor of Waldport, when I first started the marketing job, about applying for the Rural Tourism Program funded by the state's tourism marketing department, Travel Oregon. We worked together from the beginning, organizing a steering committee with representatives from Yachats and Waldport to prepare the application for the Rural Tourism Program. We were successful. Not only was our area chosen to be the fifth RTS participant, but we received very high marks for the quality of our application. The training sessions were valuable and were attended, over a five month period, by an average of fifty people at each session, from both communities, plus Seal Rock. All expenses were paid by Travel Oregon, including presentations by several highly regarded consultants in branding, event planning, and community visioning.

We received funding through the RTS program for two projects, the Oregon Coast Gravel Epic and the South Lincoln County Trails Map. This was not only matched locally, but an additional amount of approximately \$10,000 was received in additional grants connected to the trails map, plus approximately \$3,000 in our share of the sponsorships received for the bicycle race. There is still another \$2,500 "on the table" with Travel Oregon, awaiting plans for our third project. Support from all three communities has continued, albeit at varying levels depending on specific tasks and events.

In addition to the tangible financial support and training, participation in this project has increased our visibility with the state agency responsible for promoting tourism. I have written several articles about area attractions—Alsea Bay's Significant Birding Area, the new Ya'Xaik Trail, the Kayak Shack—all of which were published on Travel Oregon's website. We have received technical assistance to make sure local events are posted there. Sue and I have met with the representative of The Peoples' Coast several times and with Travel Oregon staff to develop a marketing plan. We received branding tools and a very well-designed poster for the Gravel Epic. Travel Oregon sent a crew out to film the Gravel Epic, which will be used as part of their efforts to publicize the RTS program.

The 2014 Oregon Coast Gravel Epic is set for August 23. Permission to begin advertising has already been granted by the US Forest Service. Sponsors are being lined up. The pre-event packet pickup will, again, be held at the Yachats Farm Store. Repeating participants, more familiar with the area than they were this year, can be expected to stay, eat and shop in Yachats. The long-term benefits of branding this area as a significant outdoor recreation area cannot be overestimated.

The Trails Map is in essence another marketing tool. Again, it enhances our brand as a great location for nature-based tourism, also a long-term effect.

Still to come is an evaluation by a professional consulting firm on development of a “wayfinding” campaign which will help draw tourists through the South County area, advising them on what to see and do. In everything, the goal has been to bring people to this area and encourage them to stay longer in order to take advantage of the area’s assets/attractions. Additional fundraising is anticipated through granting agencies such the Lincoln County Economic Development Alliance, the Ford Family Foundation, Siletz Tribes, and others—assuming someone is available to write the grants.

**Recommendation: The point I want to stress is that this program and the cooperation which has been generated among the three communities of South Lincoln County offers incredible support for marketing this area—to tourists, potential residents, and businesses. It is critical for Yachats to stay involved in these efforts. Although volunteers have made a huge contribution, having a paid marketing person working on this effort has made a significant difference. I strongly urge the Council to include funding for a marketing director in the FY14-15 budget and if at all possible, fund someone in the interim for at least one day a week to make sure the benefits of this program continue to accrue to Yachats. A possible funding approach might be for Yachats and Waldport to share the contract, much as they do for the planning director.**

#### Holiday Shoppers Raffle:

I tried several different ideas for increasing retail business in town, and this seems the most successful and enduring. The campaign includes signing up all the businesses that want to participate (nearly all of them), soliciting an item for the raffle from each, setting up the display at the bank, getting graphics done (includes an ad that runs for five weeks in Oregon Coast Today, posters in two sizes, and labels for the drop boxes, all carrying out the same graphic theme), getting the boxes and assembling them (available online; the small angled box is recommended and they can be disassembled and re-used), distributing the boxes and the raffle tickets (available from Staples). Press releases are sent to the usual distribution list. The raffle period is the day after Thanksgiving until Christmas Eve; the drawing is held one or two days after Christmas. All the boxes are picked up, the tickets retrieved and dumped into one big container, people invited to help with the drawing. Then the gift items are distributed. Efforts are made to coordinate with the Chamber’s Winter Celebration and whatever the merchants do. I’ve noticed that the winners are about one-third Yachats, one-third surrounding communities, one-third out of town. Other communities are doing this too, so we need to stay competitive, but it’s also a good idea and doesn’t cost very much—probably around \$1500 for graphics design, ad placement, and supplies. Merchants have indicated they want to continue this, but it is somewhat time-consuming and really does need a person to coordinate it.

The importance of helping to market the shops in town should be obvious. Shopping is the third-favorite tourist activity, according to the survey we did last year. Tangible support by the city is encouraging, especially during the off-season.

**Recommendation: Continue to support the shoppers raffle; work with the Chamber and merchants/business owners to develop other shopping-related, buy-local campaigns.**

### Yachats Center for Lifelong Learning

The concept was to develop on-going activities which would attract people to Yachats throughout the year, especially focusing on the shoulder seasons. Hands-on workshops in writing, crafts and fine arts, book discussions, and cultural diversity among other activities would be featured. I made some progress with this, but it clearly requires a bigger investment of time and money than was available at the time. The biggest event was the Festival of Japanese Arts & Culture, which took place in April, 2012. The Overleaf generously offered the Event Center for displays and sales. There were workshops and lectures on kimono, calligraphy, fabric dying, sake-tasting, and Japanese knotting. Fees were charged for the workshops which required a paid instructor; other workshops/lectures were free or had a small fee for supplies. The website graphics were designed by Barbara Shepherd, and Greg Scott set up the technology for listing classes and registration.

I also organized Depth Perceptions, a hands-on learning experience about deep-sea exploration and the psychology of learning. This involved a wonderful partnership with local writers, and teachers and faculty at the Hatfield Marine Science Center. This was not well-attended for a number of reasons mostly having to do with delays in getting the website up and running, but it was well-received by the people who did come, including families with children. Great potential here!

The Yachats Center for Lifelong Learning is not the same as the Yachats Academy of Arts & Sciences, which is very competently and appropriately arranging lectures on different subjects primarily for local residents. Clearly, these two activities could be complementary, with YCLL focused on attracting visitors from outside the community while also providing some exciting learning experiences for residents. I still believe this has tremendous potential—I looked at Sitka Center north of Lincoln City and Fishtrap Writers Retreat in Wallowa, as well as other similar entities all over the US. Grants could be available for some of the start-up costs. People, such as Sandy Mier of Bloom!, who already organize workshops, could be wrapped into the YCLL, providing them with students and YCLL with additional courses to offer.

**Recommendation: Develop a business plan and seek funding to establish the Yachats Center for Lifelong Learning as a marketing tool aimed at the shoulder season visitor.**

### Outreach:

During the past three years, I have written and distributed numerous press releases on events, individuals, and businesses in Yachats. Constantly keeping YACHATS in front of the public is a critical element in marketing. Even as the economy improves and people travel more—in fact, especially as they travel more—Yachats is competing with every other destination. Marketing is an ongoing function that means making sure people think of Yachats when they plan a trip. While the Chamber of Commerce and the city already do some outreach in terms of buying print and web ads, this should be a constant effort. Particularly important is reaching niche markets, including the foodies, the cyclists, hikers and kayakers, locovores, etc. The GoYachats Facebook page is a great way to target different market niches. When we have run the ads, the number of “fans” has increased dramatically; when we have suspended the ads for budget reasons, the increase is very small. I have also multiplied the effect of any articles I’ve written by posting them on the Facebook page either as a link or as the full story under the Yachats Beach Blog.

Outreach has also included attending the Governor’s Conference on Tourism which is put on by Travel Oregon. It’s a good source for marketing ideas and contacts. There have also been regional meetings of marketing people on the Central Coast and with the staff of The Peoples Coast—both invaluable for making sure Yachats and South Lincoln County are promoted effectively. Also included are contacts with travel writers who visit Yachats on “fam-tours.” This has been facilitated through my inclusion in their visits to Yachats.

**Recommendation: Continue outreach efforts. Make sure there is a point person available to write stories, attend conferences, meet travel writers, etc. Continue to fund the GoYachats Facebook page—either through an independent contractor or as part of the marketing director’s activities. My recommendation would be the former—an effective Facebook campaign requires dedicated time and specific skills and attitude.**

### Destination Marketing:

Included in this are all the targeted markets such as weddings and family reunions, small conferences and training programs, and special events. Although this was the original concept behind hiring a marketing director who would use the GoYachats site to conduct face-to-face meetings with potential visitors, it was probably the least successful aspect of what I have done over the past three years. Part of the reason was timing. Since this was the original idea, it’s what I did for the first year, which coincided with the economic downturn. I contacted directly every department head at OSU and University of Oregon, and every state agency literally from A to Z. The result was dismal—most did not have the money to do off-campus retreats or meetings. Those that did were keeping a low profile. There were a couple of organizations which conducted training workshops or board meetings, and one OSU faculty-student retreat. I would not say this is an impossible effort, and it bears renewed activity now that the economy has recovered somewhat, but increasingly, state agencies are looking at online training, professional organizations hold educational sessions at locations that are easily accessible, close to airports and freeways, bigger groups can’t find enough rooms in Yachats to accommodate the number of anticipated attendees, plus, unfortunately (or not) there’s not a whole lot to do in Yachats after hours, which is often a big part of conference planning. Another consideration is that this is really the role of our

local lodging industry. They have the direct financial incentive to do this type of marketing. They have the contacts and the expertise. The Adobe, for example, often sends people to bridal fairs because this is a big part of their business. A cooperative campaign might be workable, in which the city participates to provide an overall image of Yachats' attractions and facilities, but it's expensive and time-consuming—and again, the motels themselves are already doing this. In my opinion, with limited time and resources, this is not where the city's marketing efforts are best allocated.

There are a couple of exceptions, the Show N Shine car show being one of them. I have worked with the organizers of this event for the past three years and provided some financial incentives, including joint advertising, a donation to offset some expenses, and a trophy sponsorship. I make a point of attending the awards ceremony. Their advertising is our advertising—showing off Yachats in national car magazines. This year, a second car show chose Yachats for its event. Needless to say, the cars themselves are an attraction which can bring visitors to town in addition to those who attend the event itself. Plus, the attendees love Yachats! They feel welcome here and they talk about us. It's free (or nearly free) marketing outreach.

**Recommendation: Work with Chamber and motel owners to identify gaps in destination outreach efforts and direct marketing efforts to those specific areas. Evaluate to see if any bookings occur in order to decide if this is worth the effort. Budget some funds (between \$300-\$500) to encourage special groups like car shows to choose Yachats for their events.**

#### Marketing Advisory Committee:

In spite of a rocky start, the Marketing Advisory Committee has turned into a productive process for coordinating marketing efforts. Sandy Dunn deserves a lot of credit for coaxing this group along. The group includes representatives of the Chamber of Commerce, the Visitor Center, the city, retail businesses, and of course the city marketing director.

**Recommendation: Continue regular meetings of the Marketing Advisory Committee.**

#### Measuring Success:

As the city has moved forward with the marketing program, the continuing question is whether it is successful. At first, quite naturally because of the economy, the measure was “butts in beds” or, did the occupancy rate increase as a result of the marketing efforts? This was a natural reaction to concerns about the impact of the economic downturn on travel and hence on the city's revenues from the transient room tax. However, as I hope the City Council and its financial advisors have come to understand, the relationship between marketing and income in the tourism industry is not generally that clear and straightforward.

While individual lodging properties are able to track the results of promotional campaigns and advertising which drive traffic to their website, efforts to measure the impact of something like the development of the Gravel Epic event, for example, are much less accurate. If the only measurement is

“butts in beds,” one could call the event a total failure. Some participants did indeed find lodging in Yachats motels, but others stayed in a family vacation home, rented a house as a group, camped, drove in for the race and left immediately after, or stayed in a motel outside Yachats. These numbers will increase, if only because registration for the event (if similar start-ups are any indication) is likely to double next year and double again the following year. Occupancy rates should follow suit. But more importantly, the results of this event will grow in ways that just can’t be measured. The impression of the South County area will be positive and will result in repeat visits, longer stays, and recommendations to friends.

And that is a concrete event. How much more difficult is it, then, to measure the impact of an article on birding at Alsea Bay?

Organizing specific events such as craft shows, the Mushroom and Celtic Festivals, La De Da (obviously) and workshops such as might be developed as the Yachats Center for Lifelong Learning, will generate visits and measurable occupancy rates, but even here, the ripple effect forward in time cannot be measured. Visits to the GoYachats website might result in motel bookings, but it’s very difficult to measure that effect as well. And while fiscal prudence is always a positive thing, governments are not businesses. Their functions are different—they do the things that do not always have an immediate measurable outcome. That’s why we have governments!

I am convinced that the work I’ve done over the past three years has been money well spent. Having a marketing director will continue to have a positive impact on tourist visits to Yachats. The vision of working with Waldport in a cooperative marketing and development campaign is to strengthen both communities and help meet their respective economic goals. I hope that you, the members of the Yachats City Council, can share that vision, make a commitment to continuing the marketing effort, and fund a marketing director position either unilaterally or with the city of Waldport.