

Team Tourism Summit Examines Key Travel Issues

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Lee VCB "Team Tourism Summit" examines key travel issues, trends and outlook for tourism industry for 2009

LEE COUNTY, FL-The Lee County Visitor and Convention Bureau (VCB) brought together industry partners and nationally-known hospitality experts to examine key travel issues during its "Team Tourism Summit" today at Sanibel Harbour Resort & Spa.

In addition to offering participants an opportunity to pick up cutting edge ideas from tourism leaders that will help strengthen their own efforts, the VCB also unveiled its 2009 sales and marketing plan, including its comprehensive co-operative advertising initiative.

Suya Davenport, VCB executive director, said the marketplace continues to offer the industry economic challenges and increased competition.

"Today's tourism summit addresses these issues and gives our industry a chance to come together with our team of experts to examine trends and how we will respond to these challenges. We know that we must be more visitor-oriented than ever before. In order to win our share of the market, we must partner at new levels and strengthen our collaborative efforts across the destination to maximize our efficiency."

In keeping with the customer service theme, keynote speaker Dennis Snow of Snow & Associates, addressed "Achieving Customer Excellence." With a 20-year career with Walt Disney World Company, Snow is a worldwide consultant on service excellence. While working with Disney University, he coordinated the Disney Traditions program, universally recognized as a benchmark in corporate training. He is the author of Lessons from the Mouse: A Guide for Applying Disney World's Secrets of Success to Your Organization, Your Career and Your Life.

"World-class service is not simply a matter of smiling employees who say 'please' and 'thank you.' It is an all-encompassing approach to making excellence business as usual. Everything that a customer sees, hears, or touches impacts the experience... everything speaks."

Snow's presentation included his four critical elements of service excellence: tools for helping employees see the operation through the eyes of customers; a process for ensuring consistent service behaviors across the entire organization; specific language for describing service excellence; and how to make that language a part of an organization's culture and mechanisms for involving employees in ongoing service improvement.

In the summit's general session, thoughts on "Travel Trends and Outlook for the Tourism Industry" were shared by Dennis Castleman, vice president Industry Relation for Travel Industry Association; Mark Brown, senior market research analyst at the U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Travel and Tourism Industries; and Frank "Bud" Nocera, president and CEO of Visit Florida.

Castleman reminded the industry that travel and tourism is a "\$740 billion industry that serves as the front door for economic prosperity and public diplomacy, ranking among the top three industries in every state."

Brown offered good news regarding the record-setting growth in the international market. He highlighted insights and facts regarding Florida's international visitors and how to increase participation in this profitable market.

Nocera, who was the founding executive director of the Lee County VCB, reminded the audience of the importance of measurable results.

"In today's economy, the tourism industry faces considerable pressure to deliver measurable results. Because of this, never before has the need for travel trends and research been greater. We cannot create marketing messages that resonate with travelers without understanding the trends that drive visitation."

Additional topics presented during afternoon breakout sessions, included "Customers and Green Initiatives" with Kevin Hanstad of Carlson Hotels Worldwide; "Getting the Most from Internet Marketing" with C.A. Clark, Nathan Huff and Melissa Bartalos of Miles Media; and "Taking Advantage of VCB Co-Operative Programs" with BVK and VCB staff.

For details and a summary of each presentation, visit www.leevcb.com.

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