

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Nov. 13, 2009**

**Contacts:** Nancy Hamilton, Lee Rose or Katie Meckley (239) 338-3500  
Jackie MacKay, BVK, (407) 814-0014 or (407) 496-1770

## **Visitation rises 1.5 percent in Lee County for FY 2008-2009** *VCB reports overall positive year-over-year results*

LEE COUNTY, FL – The Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB) reported overall favorable results for its fiscal year 2008-2009, which ended September 30, 2009.

Visitation was up 1.5 percent year-over-year; and visitor expenditures were on par with fiscal year 2007-2008, with a slight dip of 0.2 percent. Available room nights were up 3.2 percent; and occupied room nights were up 4.2 percent, leading to occupancy rates just slightly higher than the same period last year, with a 1 percent gain from 51.94 percent to 52.48 percent. Average length of stay also increased 4.6 percent from 6.83 nights to 7.14 nights.

“Given the negative impact of the economy on the tourism industry, we’re extremely proud of our performance for this past fiscal year,” said Suya Davenport, VCB executive director, which markets the destination internationally to leisure and meetings travelers as The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel. “As the lifeblood of our local economy, the tourism industry continues to be one of the cornerstones of economic development in our community.”

As can be expected, Davenport said not all of the news was positive. Average daily rates were down 13.5 percent from \$138.44 to \$119.79, and revenue per room (RevPAR) dipped 12.6 percent as accommodations partners continue to face economic challenges.

Davenport reviewed the year-end numbers as reported by the VCB’s research partner Davidson-Peterson Associates (DPA), when addressing attendees at this month’s Tourist Development Council (TDC) meeting this morning.

At the meeting, she attributed the destination’s successful year-end performance to hard work by tourism industry partners and the VCB’s aggressive year-round marketing program. Stand-out initiatives she highlighted included: themed promotions such as *Summer Sanctuary*

**-MORE-**

## Visitation rises 1.5 percent in Lee County for FY 2008-2009/Page 2

and *Islands FallFest* that showcase special events and attractions and attractive partner offers, a successful e-marketing consumer campaign, *The Beach Brings Balance* online sweepstakes, an increased emphasis on supporting inland properties, heightened destination packaging among accommodations and attractions, and a successful lead generation program for meetings and groups.

“We are striving to continue our positive performance in our new fiscal year with a refinement of our marketing approach,” Davenport said to today’s TDC meeting attendees. “This approach is based upon an extensive and comprehensive analysis of a variety of data sources to develop a more precise way to evaluate key business performance measurements.”

The VCB’s business goal for 2009-2010 is to maintain Lee County bed tax collections at the fiscal year 2008-2009 level for fiscal year 2009-2010 by increasing room night revenues in paid accommodations. The organization worked with its marketing communications agency bvk to identify the measurable factors that directly impact visitation revenues and then used historical data to determine how these factors have recently trended over time.

The data helped the VCB determine a scenario that is the most realistic to achieve its business goal for the coming fiscal year and then translate this scenario into the business objectives for the 2009-2010 integrated marketing plan. These business objectives, in turn, form an organizing framework for the plan, so that marketing communications strategies are assigned to support specific targets.

In her remarks, Davenport also accented tourism’s economic impact on the local community. From January to December 2008, 4.7 million visitors to the destination spent \$2.9 billion, which equates to nearly \$8 million per day, \$332,048 per hour, \$5,534 per minute, and \$92 per second.

-30-

**EDITOR’S NOTE:** *The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel include: Sanibel Island, Captiva Island, Fort Myers Beach, Fort Myers, Bonita Springs, Estero, Cape Coral, Pine Island, Boca Grande & Outer islands, North Fort Myers, Lehigh Acres.*