



Visit Sarasota County Covid-19 Response

Fiscal Years 2020 & 2021 – North Port City Commission – June 4, 2020

Swift and Sudden Fall for Tourism

- January & February 2020 Tourist Development Tax (TDT) collections best ever
- Final, full recovery from 2018 red tide and partially absorbing new hotel room inventory
- First two weeks of March 2020, lodging occupancy in the mid-80%. Last two weeks of March, lodging occupancy in the mid-teens
- March TDT collections down 50% from last March
- Direct visitor spending for March 2020 dropped by 52.8%
- Just under half of the TDT collected in Sarasota County comes from condo and apartment vacation rentals which have been shut down by the Governor on April 1 and finally re-opened May 21

Swift and Sudden Fall for Tourism

- April 2020 visitors to Sarasota County dropped 94.6% going from 132,700 in April 2019 to 7,200 this April
- Lodging occupancy went from 75.2 in April 2019 to 9.2% in April 2020
- Lodging average room rate dropped to 94.92 in April 2020 compared to \$201.92 in 2019
- RevPAR which stands for revenue per available room went from \$151.84 to \$8.73
- Rooms sold dropped by 92.9% from 289,600 to 20,700
- April Tourist Development Tax collections expected to drop from \$2.2 million to \$275,000

Swift and Sudden Fall for Tourism

- TDT collections for FY2020 expected to drop from estimated \$24.5 to \$20 million
- TDT collections for FY 2021 expected to further drop to \$16 million (VSC's estimate is \$15 million)
- Pressure on FY 2021 TDT promotion budget because of Covid=19 & Ed Smith Stadium repairs. Promotion drops 37.6% from \$6.4 to \$4 million
- Pressure on FY 2022 TDT promotion budget because funding for Mote Aquarium comes from promotion, which could mean funding at 2003 levels

VSC Actions on Remaining FY2020 Promotion Plan

- Building an initial response plan with an assumption of lifting of non-essential orders by mid June with built-in flexibility to change start date.
- Reduction of most planned activities for remainder of FY2020 with an initial estimate of \$1.3 million in savings. Reduced VSC staff from 20 FTEs to 15.
- VSC goal is to end FY2020 without having to tap into TDT promotion reserves
- Re-calculation of VSC private sector revenue for remainder of FY2020 with an assumption of minimum revenue after April 1.

Fiscal Year 2021 Promotion Budget Assumptions

- Based upon an estimated Tourist Development Tax Collections in FY2021 of \$15 million (County using \$16 million number)
- Continue to use internal VSC personnel for functions previously accomplished with vendors and three vacant positions. For existing vendors, reductions in contract amounts. Greatly reduce the number of freelance writers and videographers by doing in-house.
- Reduced hours for all Visitor Centers once we receive OK to open.
- Reducing Professional Services fee in contract from \$1.185 to \$1 million with VSC personnel savings coming from staff salary reductions, continued vacancies and in addition to President's 18% pay cut initiated in FY2020.

Listen to our Customers

- 5 waves of consumer sentiment surveys in cooperation with Lee County.
- Consumers in Atlanta, Tampa Bay, Miami/Ft.Lauderdale, W. Palm Beach, NYC, Orlando & Chicago.
- First 2 waves completed
- CDC is the most trusted source for telling consumers it is safe to travel.
- Compared to first wave, consumers are feeling safer going to a beach, staying in a hotel, going to an outdoor attraction and going to a restaurant.
- 3 in 5 consumers plan to take a vacation or getaway within a month of “Covid-19 passing”
- Half of the customers believe it may be safe to travel in mid to late summer and half do not believe safe until after August.

Moving Forward: Phased Recovery

VSC will monitor macro and micro data signals-from search demand to consumer sentiment to assess the appropriate time to move to the next phase of recovery messaging and tactics

Phase 1: Maintenance: Local Focus

- Focus on locals, get them eating out again, expanding activities etc.
- Help revive local economy

Phase 2: Recovery

- As consumers become more comfortable with travel again, reach out to drive markets.
- Generate lucrative overnight visitation
- Air travel might not be recovered, but consumers willing to drive longer distances

Phase 3: Back on Track (sort of)

- Reaching all of the key out of state markets
- Supporting air service into SRQ

VSC Brand & Visitor Experience

FY2020

- Utilizing no cost social media solutions to keep the Sarasota County brand top of mind; from virtual experiences, to-go/curbside dining; arts/culture, eco and wellness.
- Programming for Summer 2020 still underway
 - 15th Anniversary of Savor Sarasota-TO-GO Restaurant Week (Revised to promote to-go/curbside)
 - Sarasota Big Pass (Summer Deals)
- Visitor Centers Closed; answering questions via online and phone and fulfilling Visitor Guide and Relocation Requests. Regular communications with our volunteers.
- Partnered with Lee County for Regional Consumer Sentiment Research Study
- Advertising will be IMPORTANT as lots of regions in Florida will be marketing to the same drive market.

FY2021

- Continue to measure consumer sentiment towards travel; Aim to launch phases 2 and 3 in Recovery Plan. Heavy focus on digital – and placements that influence groups.
- Rebooked Florida Outdoor Writers Association (FOWA) Conference to be held in Venice from Summer 2020 to Summer 2021.
- Earned media opportunities remain incredibly important to tell authentic story of destination; heavy efforts to pitch qualified media/influencers.



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North Port, Florida



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☀️ #MySarasota #Lovefl #SarasotaNature

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The unique architecture of St. Sava Serbian Orthodox Church turns heads along "church row." (Photo: Robin Draper)

Experience North Port's Rich Eastern European Culture

Authentic food and tradition of Eastern European cultures that have become prevalent in Sarasota County's southern City of North Port.

Robin Draper

North Port, in Southeast Sarasota County, is a short 30-minute drive from Sarasota. A little-known fact is that it is considered the hub of the Ukrainian community in Southwest Florida. European accents and languages can be heard everywhere – in restaurants, shops and markets – it's a microcosm of Eastern Europe. Here you'll likely meet Ukrainians, Russians, Serbians and Poles – to name a few.

So, why North Port?

Historically, Europeans have always prized the artesian springs of their homelands, subscribing to the belief that the healing minerals of the bubbly waters contribute to wellness. As Eastern European visitors discovered North Port's Warm Mineral Springs and the healing minerals of the 65-degree bubbly water, they spread the word.



Warm Mineral Springs (Photo: Robin Draper)



VSC Sales Response Summary

FY2020

- Limited Participation in Sales Tradeshow Activities
- Brought UK & German representation In-House
- Sourcing & .Sending leads to area hotels for future group business
- Delayed planned international campaigns
- Honoring incentive commitments for events rescheduled for same FY, to be paid after event is complete

FY2021

- Prioritize utilizing third party online destination sales and marketing channels to generate group leads
- Significantly reduce International market development spend, recognizing that international travel will be very slow to return
- Participate in industry tradeshows which connect VSC with our target markets.
- Create a multi-year incentive option to secure repeat group business.

VSC Sports Response Summary

FY2020

- No funding dispensed to cancelled events
- Honoring funding commitments for events rescheduled for same FY, to be paid after event is complete
- No additional travel or sports marketing spending
- Cancellation of Braves event in Atlanta with Delta Airlines
- Funding for potential new events for FY20 will be evaluated based on hotel room night generation
- Submitting bids and working with facilities on new events for fall 2020 and beyond

FY2021

- Allocate 90% of sports budget to direct event support – prioritizing immediate recovery efforts
- Significantly reduce sports market development spend. Will utilize previous relationships and lower cost business development tactics.
- Reevaluate Grant and Major Event programs to ensure highest ROI for funding distributed

Visit Sarasota County is DMAP accredited



Questions?

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