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**City of Mt. Vernon, Illinois
Joint City Council & Mt. Vernon Convention & Visitors Bureau Advisory Board
Workshop Meeting
Thursday, April 26, 2012
MINUTES**

The Mt. Vernon City Council and the Mt. Vernon Convention & Visitors Bureau Advisory Board held a Workshop Meeting on Thursday, April 26, 2012, at 8:30 a.m. in the large conference room at the Municipal Building West, 200 Potomac Blvd., Mt. Vernon, IL.

In the absence of Mayor Mary Jane Chesley, City Clerk Jerilee Hopkins called the meeting to order. The first order of business was to appoint a Mayor Pro Tem. Nominations were opened. Council Member Todd Piper nominated Council Member David Wood. Second by Council Member Dennis McEnaney. There being no further nominations, the nomination for Mayor Pro Tem was closed. Yeas: Council Members Ron Lash, Dennis McEnaney, Todd Piper and David Wood. Mayor Mary Jane Chesley was tending to important City business in Springfield. Council Member David Wood is appointed Mayor Pro Tem for tonight's meeting.

Roll call showed present: Council Member Ron Lash, Council Member Dennis McEnaney, Council Member Todd Piper, and Council Member David Wood. Mayor Mary Jane Chesley was absent. Also present: City Manager Ron Neibert, City Tourism Director Bonnie Jerdon, City Clerk Jerilee Hopkins, and Roger & Jane Brooks from Destination Development, Inc. of Seattle, WA, www.destinationdevelopment.com.

Keynote: The Art of Branding a Community

Council Member David Wood welcomed everyone to the joint meeting and introduced the City Tourism Director Bonnie Jerdon and she stated, "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm," by *Ralph Waldo Emerson*. She uses the quote a lot, and Roger Brooks, today's speaker, lives by the motto. Roger's keynote speech is entitled: *The Art of Branding a Community*. Roger and his wife Jane arrived in Mt. Vernon on Monday and have spent the week touring Mt. Vernon as secret shoppers. A photocopy of the PowerPoint presentation is attached to these minutes and can be viewed at www.destinationdevelopment.com. The following is a synopsis of the keynote presentation.

The future of Mt. Vernon starts today Mt. Vernon, Illinois. We are in the midst of the biggest shift in North American history.

There are two types of brands: 1) the "feel good" generic community brand and 2) the economic development brand.

This is about cash. The whole idea is to import more cash than you export. This is “balance of trade.”

The four ingredients of change —

1. Communities are looking for their “second act.” There are nearly 20,000 counties, cities, towns, and villages in the U.S. Nearly every one was founded on either transportation...close to major freeways...or railways...waterways...or they were founded on natural resources...timber...fishing...mining...agriculture ...or manufacturing. The industrial revolution is over. **Period.** We are now living in a global economy. Every year hundreds of communities in the U.S. start working to diversify their economies.

2. The U.S. demographic is changing. The baby boom generation: 1946 – 1964. The **percentage of ‘travel spending’ by boomers is 80%**. Demographics of the boomers: 350,000 people turning 50 every month...for another three years (just turning 50!)...They control 70% of North America’s wealth...their mindset: Individuality, emphasis on youth, & self-absorption...They will pay more for quality - but still want a good deal. They are savvy travelers...TripAdvisor is at the top of their list...They are looking for new business opportunities. The **Boomers Mantra:** “We may be aging but we are NOT growing old.” So what do these folks want? Culinary tourism: Visiting chefs, restaurants, education; Art: Artists in action, learning new hobbies, education; Ethnic events: Learning and experiencing other cultures; Home & Garden: Education, training, garden tours, public markets, farmers markets. Public markets are the #1 revitalization tool for a downtown. They are hugely popular. Grandparents now making time with grandkids a top priority...Including local sporting events, music recitals, etc. But grandparents prefer local lodging instead of staying with the kids and grandkids. **This is the age of reconnection:** To each other, our roots, the environment, and our communities. **NOTE:** The top 15% of accommodations - in terms of quality - command 85% of the leisure business with boomers. The echo boomers or millennials 1977-1994. Experiences embraced by echo boomers: Culinary tourism: Visiting chefs, restaurants, education; Art: Artists in action, learning new hobbies, education; Ethnic events: European, Scandinavian, Cajun, Indian; Environment: Kayaking, climbing, canoeing, extreme recreation; Public markets, farmers markets - add entertainment. Core attributes of both groups: Independent with high expectations but want specifics, not generalities. Think activities, not places. They are moving into downtowns - the hub of activity. They look for videos, photos, third-party reviews. TripAdvisor. Yelp. Twitter. Facebook. Flickr. YouTube. UrbanSpoon.

3. The Internet has changed everything. 90% of Americans have immediate access to the Internet. 94% of Americans use the Internet to decide where to travel, where to work and where to establish a business. Location is second to the “primary draw” - that one thing that puts you on the map. To win you must quit marketing geography First. It’s always second to the experience. 70% of Americans are frustrated with planning via the web. 86% of searches don’t go past the second page of results. Have you ever gone anywhere because they “have something for everyone”? If you want new business, residents, or visitors, it starts in front of a computer screen. The web should be your number one marketing priority. But remember: It must be good enough to close the sale.

4. We are drowning in advertising overload. Billions of dollars are spent each year marketing communities - Chambers of commerce, destination marketing organizations, economic development agencies, cities, downtowns, counties, districts, regions, states & provinces.

The challenge? We are drowning in marketing and advertising overload. We are now exposed to 5,000 marketing messages a day. This has created a situation where **97%** of community-based marketing is ineffective. This includes: Your brochures, Websites & Internet advertising, Fliers & posters, Radio & television ads, Print ads, Billboards and outdoor advertising. Why? Because we filter out everything not directly appealing to us. And just about everyone is saying the very same thing. We tune it out. The big question? What do you have that I can't get or do closer to home?

If I live as far away as St. Louis, Indianapolis, Nashville, Evansville, Louisville or even Effingham or Marion, what do you have in Mt. Vernon that I can't get - or do - closer to home? 461,000 residents live within a 50-mile radius of Mt. Vernon. The world is at our fingertips – in seconds. So what sets you apart from everyone else? Why should I invest in Mt. Vernon? Why should I move here? Why should I visit you? Whatever it is that makes you DIFFERENT or clearly better you should hang your hat on that. The Challenge: Competition has never been more fierce. Communities and business have been forced to specialize...yet most are still stuck in the mire of the "group hug mentality." For communities it's the "membership mentality." In this age of differentiation you must outwit, outplay and outlast to be a Survivor. It's a brand new game.

How do you stand out from the crowd? How many places can have "**something for everyone**"? There are more than 1,100 counties, cities, towns, and villages in Illinois. WELCOME to the era of the brand – the art of setting yourself apart from everyone else. The ten things **YOU** need to do to win:

- 1) Don't get hung up on logos and slogans - they are not brands. They are just marketing messages used to support and reinforce the brand. Your slogan is simply an exclamation point on your key marketing message. Brand identities - or logos - make up **2% of a brand** but ALWAYS get **98% of the political attention locally**.
- 2) **You MUST jettison the generic.** Brands are specific. "Discover the wide-open spaces, gracious people, and picturesque landscapes that characterize Greenfield, Illinois. Each season holds the promise of a new adventure and an incredible memory. Come join us in Greenfield and discover the scenic and recreational opportunities that await you." NOTE: You are NOT doing anything wrong. You're just saying the same things everyone else is also saying. You MUST jettison the generic. Look at your taglines & logos. Look at your brochures & website. Read your introductory text. If it can fit anyone...Toss it and start over. The Rule: Don't be all things to all people. Promote the primary lure. Find your niche and promote it like crazy. The narrower the focus, the stronger your success will be.

Example: Stew Leonard's Supermarket in Connecticut. Staff dressed as cows and chickens. They brought in a Farmyard zoo, had displays that go "moo", offered free ice cream if you spend \$100 or more. "Profit is the applause of happy customers. THE BRAND: fall fresh produce and dairy, fresh baked goods. THE RESULT: Highest per square foot retail sales of any grocery store on earth! Stew Leonard's now has five stores. You MUST jettison the generic. Something for everyone will result in mediocrity & ultimate failure. Memberships can kill your branding efforts.

Avoid these words & phrases:

- Explore
- Discover
- Outdoor recreation
- Unlike anywhere else
- So much to see and do
- The four season destination
- Where the seasons come to life
- Historic downtown

- Center of it all
- Best kept secret
- We have it all
- Experience...
- Visit (name of town)
- Beauty & heritage
- Naturally fun
- Gateway
- Close to it all
- Right around the corner
- Your playground
- So much history
- Purely natural

- The place for all ages
- ...and so much more!
- Home away from home
- A slice of heaven
- It's all right here
- Recreation unlimited
- The perfect getaway
- The place for families
- Start your vacation here
- Recreational paradise
- Take a look!

Zeeland, Michigan's marketing pitch:

- Close knit community
- Historic homes
- Small home-town feel
- Short walk to downtown
- Neighbors look out for one another
- Merchants know you
- We ride our bikes as a family
- Enjoy going to local parks
- Playing in the back yard
- Children like the Zeeland Bakery - the cookies
- Great community to raise a family and spend time in

Could this be Mt. Vernon?

YOU MUST JETTISON THE GENERIC!

THE RULE: Don't just market what you have. Market what will close the sale. The days of marketing lists are over.

3) A brand is a perception - What people think of you and not what you say you are.

HOW PERCEPTIONS CREATE A BRAND:

- Visual cues.
- The people and attitudes.
- Word of mouth.
- Publicity/Social media

Case History: Asheville, North Carolina. Population: 70,000. Claim to fame: Along the Blue Ridge Parkway. Challenge: The Parkway is 500 miles long.

The brand before: "Asheville - Where altitude affects attitude".

The brand after: "Asheville – The hippest place to be in North Carolina - "Unscripted" any way you like it". RESULT: THE destination along the Blue Ridge Parkway; National attention as a hip arts community; Nightlife drawing people from 100 miles away; Tourism \$1.7 billion in just the county; Frommer's Travel Guide says - One of the 12 global must see destinations.

- 4) Work to make sure your name is synonymous with your brand – WORD GAMES:
 Music Theater Capital - Branson
 Gambling/adult fun – Las Vegas
 Kids & family - Disneyland/Disneyworld
 Country music capital - Nashville
 Graceland/Elvis - Memphis
 Winery capital (U.S.) - Napa Valley
 Frozen tundra - Green Bay, WI
- 5) Champion the cause for product development. Successful brands are built on product, not marketing. Product development never ends. You can never rest on your laurels.
- 6) Never, ever use focus groups. Focus groups are never the way to build a brand. Creative services usually don't get it. Cute and/or clever rarely work. **You NEVER do branding by public consent. Period.** Keep it simple. You cannot do branding by public consent.

THE 7 PHASES OF A PUBLIC PROJECT

Enthusiasm
 Planning
 Disillusionment
 Fear & panic
 Search for the guilty
 Punishment of the innocent
 Praise and honors for the non-participants.

- 7) You build your brand on feasibility, not just local sentiment.
- 8) Make sure you never “roll out” a brand until you're ready to “deliver on the promise”. Sometimes there's a negative perception.
- 9) Don't let local politics kill your branding efforts. Many great ideas die due to politics and a top-down effort. A by-product of “for the people” branding is the committee that compromises and kills a potential brand home run. This is why you never see statues of committees in public parks — you see brave leaders! There are three kills of any branding effort: local politics; lack of champions; and lack of money (private & public). You cannot do branding by public consent. Branding should never be a top-down exercise.
- 10) Great brands always start with a plan. Branding — what is it you want to be known for? Development — what you need to do to “own” the brand. Marketing — how to tell the world. And Action Plan — the to-do list.

Repeat after me...

I promise to promote only what's TRULY unique.
 I promise to be different.
 I promise not to repeat things other people say.

THE FOLLOWING ARE ROGER BROOKS' OBSERVATIONS ABOUT MT. VERNON:

Mt. Vernon exports more money out of the City/County than it imports. That's not good.

- It's important to embrace the City's history but this is about the "next" history which starts today. Don't look back at the historical society. Always go forward. This is the first day of the rest of your City's life.
- These observations are not just about tourism but about drawing population to the City.
- Tourism is the front door to your non-tourism economic development efforts.
- **Priority #1 — Way finding system - signage** to direct visitors to downtown. There are many signs to tell visitors how to get out of town (Interstate Highway system) but none to tell visitors how to get into town. Eighteen (18) \$600 way finding signs placed strategically in a community in Wisconsin increased their retail sales by 20%. It is an INVESTMENT and not an expense. It builds community pride. It is as much a science as it is an art. IT IS NOT A PUBLIC WORKS PROJECT!
- The outside of Times Square Mall needs to be "spruced up."
- Saw the Historical Village sign on Broadway but needed more time to maneuver in traffic to make the turn on 27th Street. A visitor information brochure holder should be stationed on the front of the Village office and include information on a self-guided tour. A donation box made a still on a concrete pad would be a good idea.
- The Visitors' Center at the Municipal West Bldg. should be open 24/7. Bonnie noted that the QR code is on the front door of the Visitor's Center. Most people want a map or a visitor's guide to follow. Perhaps build a gazebo or some other structure to house visitor information to be accessed 24/7. Kiosks (information station) never sleep. The City should have two or three kiosks around town. Local fraternal clubs could construct the information stations.
- Mt. Vernon's internet speed is barely 3G and should be upgraded ASAP.
- Traveled right through downtown and wasn't sure where it was – need signage.
- Very impressed by the Airport. Clean, nice, and Roger was shocked that we have such a nice Airport. Visitors don't care about the City limit boundary. Nice restaurant. A walking/biking trail would be great.
- Green Hills Golf Club needs to add curb appeal. Curb appeal can account for 70% of first-time sales at retail shops, wineries, golf courses, hotels, B & B's. Need signs to tell a visitor when the swimming pool will open, where the restaurant, club house, etc. Tennis courts were a disaster. Don't promote something in your brochures that you can't deliver.
- Residential areas have beautiful homes in the neighborhoods. One doesn't get a very good first impression of Mt. Vernon. You can't always judge a book by its' cover.
- Found Indian Hills Golf Course but sign was so small could hardly read. Also need signs designating what services they offer.
- Looked for the 3rd golf course promoted in the City's 2012 Visitors' Guide. Crooked Creek Golf Course is closed. Don't promote if you don't have it.
- Interstate 57 Rest Stop information Center is closed. Ask if the City can have volunteers there during peak periods of time or the weekends to inform visitors about Mt. Vernon and/or Rend Lake. At the very least place City brochures there.
- Rend Lake Artisan Shop is world class facility. Need signs for upcoming events.
- The Wayne Fitzgerald State Park is a beautiful place that hosts about 3 million guests a year. How many of those are coming to Mt. Vernon to eat, shop, stay, or purchase picnic and camping supplies?

- Genkota is great, has good wine and entertainment, but needed GPS to locate because there were no signs or signs are faded and he thought the winery was closed.
- Beautiful, well-maintained neighborhoods.
- The downtown beautification program looks great, but the City is doing it backwards but it needs a focus. Why do I want to walk in one of those businesses? What do you want to be known for and fill those empty buildings downtown?
- Site selectors judge the health of a community by the health of downtown. Can you guess the perception of Mt. Vernon economically when you have 40% vacancies and the buildings are in disrepair?
- There has been talk of building a convention center. Large Corporations hold conventions where there is something to do after 6:00 p.m. Attendees don't want to attend the convention all day and then go back to their room to watch television. They want entertainment - something to do. A convention center will never work in Mt. Vernon until you have something to do after 6:00 p.m. That's why conventions are held in Las Vegas, Dallas, and San Antonio...
- Considering that Mt. Vernon is at the crossroads of two major freeways, why is Mt. Vernon in the hole of the regional donut? Why is downtown Mt. Vernon the hole in the middle of Mt. Vernon?
- The potential for downtown is there, but we don't have a good business mix.
- **Find your focus!**
- If we want Mt. Vernon to be a destination we must follow the Ten Ten Ten Rule — in three lineal blocks there must be ten places that sell food, ten destination retail shops, and most important – ten places open after 6:00 p.m. — Mt. Vernon has the potential to accomplish this and downtown will come alive.
- Downtown needs anchor tenants. They are the primary lure.
- Businesses are known to do seven times the business when they are grouped together. People are drawn to critical mass.
- 9th Street Grill is our strongest anchor tenant but they can't do it by themselves. Best restaurant in town.
- Dish on the Square would be considered an anchor store but there are no others downtown.
- Sometimes you must orchestrate the effort.
- The Granada Theater could be a third anchor, but not sure what the downtown focus will be.
- Downtown is work on 'window dressing' and not putting businesses in these buildings.
- Seventy percent (70%) of all consumer spending takes place after 6:00 p.m. Are you open? That why Wal-Mart is open late in the evening.
- Example: Sparks, NV — their farmers' market was open every Thursday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and an average of 500 people attended. They expanded the hours from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and the average attendance went to 1,000. When they expanded the hours from 11:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. their average attendance went to 10,000 people. They added entertainment and music and it grew and grew. People are looking for something to do after 6:00 p.m.
- People are living in safe downtowns. There is great potential for lofts, apartments, and artists' work space downtown.
- Every successful downtown starts with one (1) block. Concentrate your attention on one block at a time. It may take three or four years to accomplish, but guarantee that the next blocks will follow.
- Solving the parking dilemma. Two (2) hour parking dramatically reduces spending and repeat visits. Angle parking will increase sales by 20%.

- Women account for 80% of all retail spending.
- Roger feels sorry for Dish on the Square because of the 30 minute parking in front of their store. You're killing your downtown by doing this.
- Why is the City marking tires for violating the 30 minute parking rule? Are you kidding me? It's not like there is a major shortage of parking around the courthouse. Parking time limits are suicide for downtown. Parking fines were never intended to generate revenue. We should be doing everything we can to increase the value of downtown.
- What is the Lincoln Heritage Trail? Everyone asked about it didn't know what it was or where it goes. Take down the sign if you don't know what it is.
- Instead of municipal parking ahead just say public parking one block.
- To be successful a town must be pedestrian-friendly. Mt. Vernon is not.
- Crosswalk buttons don't work and are confusing. Downtown is a mess, and it has so much potential.
- If you want young people back in Mt. Vernon you need to have public gathering places. We're not talking about taverns – we have those. We're talking about sidewalk cafes.
- Build a public space downtown. Street trees are great. They are an investment.
- Perpendicular (blade) signage is a must. If you have an ordinance against it, then change your ordinance. They should be no lower than seven feet, no higher than nine feet and no wider than 42 inches.
- Where is all the retail signage? There are some lovely buildings downtown, but we don't know what's in them.
- Signage says a lot about you. It is soooooooooo important.
- For a business, always promote what you are selling before the name of the store.
- 70% of first time sales come from curb appeal. We all say these words, "That looks like a nice place to eat."
- You have three choices when looking for a good restaurant: 1) Ask locals where is a good place to eat; 2) it's where the most local cars are parked; and 3) curb appeal. Everyone Roger asked said 9th Street Grill and that was where all the local cars were parked.
- The City should be responsible for the curb side of the street — merchants and property owners should be responsible for the facade side. Beautification is an investment with a powerful return. First impressions are lasting impressions.
- Put your money where the tax base is located.
- Roger understands that the revitalization of downtown is a "work in progress."
- **In Roger's opinion, Mt. Vernon's top priority is to build a new high school.** Make a big new sign with a picture of the new high school stating when it will open. The entire school system is judged by first time visitors on curb appeal and boarded up windows gives an impression of a bad school system.
- Cedarhurst is a world class facility. Wouldn't Segway vehicles be 'cool' on their 90 acres with guided tours, etc.? It is easily Mt. Vernon's best visitor attraction.
- The old Armory could be an indoor/outdoor public market. It's such a 'cool' building that it could be an anchor for downtown.
- Love the residential areas. Mt. Vernon behind the scenes is very nice. It's a great, great community, but it's not obvious.
- Mt. Vernon should promote the "best of" list

Two different worksheets were distributed for the attendees to complete. Roger hopes to have 500-700 people to complete the online survey/questionnaire that can be found at www.mtvernon.com. DDI and the Brand Development Committee will compile the results.

DDI will return to Mt. Vernon June 12-15, 2012 to share the research results. The committee will create an action plan – not a strategic plan. The future of Mt. Vernon starts today! Mt. Vernon — the next generation!

Motion by Council Member Lash to adjourn. Second by Council Member McEnaney. Yeas: Lash, McEnaney, and Wood. Council Member Piper left before the Workshop concluded. Mayor Chesley was absent.

The meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jerilee Hopkins
City Clerk