

MALA Monthly Meeting Agenda

January 13, 2022

12:00pm Briquettes Steakhouse on Montlimar Dr.

Spike Blackinton – Renaissance Riverview	Patty Kieffer – Visit Mobile
Mya Douglas – Alabama Travel Council Intern	Rhonda Davis – USS Alabama
Cynthia Mitchell – Hampton Inn Dwntwn	Robin Perkins – Holiday Inn Airport
Stephanie Bondora – Hampton Inn Dwntwn	Abigail Baxter – Passage USA
Ross Peterson – Bay City Conventions & Tours	Danielle Miller – Passage USA
Duncan Millar – Hampton Inn & Suites I-65	Lynn Chronister – Univ of S AL
Danny Corte – Mobile Sports Authority	Gwynn Pitman – Residence Inn
Megan Murdock – Homewood Suites Prov Park	James Small – Residence Inn
Maggie Thrasher – Mobile Convention Center	David Clark – Visit Mobile
Alesha Whisenhunt – Springhill Suites	Tiffany Griffin – Springhill Suites
Diana Moorer – Springhill Suites/Hilton Garden Inn Mobile West	

I. Call Meeting to Order **12:26pm**

- Spike Blackinton

II. Approval of November & December Minutes

- November: Motioned by Margo Gilbert, Seconded by Judi Gullledge
- December: Motioned by Spike Blackinton, Seconded by Megan Murdock

III. Financial Report

- We have roughly \$1,500 in the account. Invoices for membership have not gone out yet for the year.

IV. Work in Mobile App Update

- There are still some kinks being worked out but they are being worked on.

V. MALA 2022 Board Vote

- We were one vote short in our December meeting. That proxy vote was received the next day. The board is still in place (Spike, Margo, Diana, and Shannon).

VI. Bylaws Update

- It has been about 12 or 13 years since we looked at and updated our bylaws. Based on what we have experienced in the last year and what we will continue to experience, we probably will update them.

- It has been hard on us to get a quorum to vote on anything. Right now, it is 50% of the membership.

VII. Goals/initiatives for 2022 Review

- We will look at transportation again. Uber and Lyft did help us quite a bit but we are not completely out of the woods when providing transportation to our guests.
- USA Scholarship: A different fundraiser besides the golf tournament.
- Beltline Crime
- Marketing Fund Committee: Will probably look at our bylaws. It has been difficult fulfilling a Tillman's Corner position.

VIII. Guest Speaker: Abigail Baxter – Passage USA

- She is a professor of special education at the University of South Alabama. With help from Ms. Chronister, she has been successful getting two federal grants to provide integrated college experience for young adults with intellectual disabilities at South Alabama. They have a program at South called Passage USA. Each of the letters means something. It stands for preparing all students socially and academically for gainful employment. That gainful employment at the end is the most important part to them. For people with intellectual disabilities, the unemployment rate before covid was 85%.
- Their program is targeted at young adults between the ages of 18 to 28 who have completed their time in the public schools. We're going to hear about projects search next month who serve students like they serve but while they are still in school. They're kind of like the next version of that.
- They have a two-year program and a four-year program. They come to school at South. They take special classes focusing on living skills and employment skills. Danielle Miller came onboard and she is their employment coordinator. She teaches those classes. She coordinates internship experience. She helps supervise those students.
- They also have students take classes with the rest of the South Alabama undergraduate population. Some of the very popular classes with their students are in South's wonderful hospitality program. They are one of their biggest partners. They have students that take the intro class such as tourism classes and food & beverage classes. They take the classes and do the work. They don't get academic credit but they do the work at their level. They've had kids pass the Safe Serve certification. They are learning those skills.
- What has been difficult for them especially since covid was getting students work experiences. In their program, they run first-year students through multiple university offices to find out what they like and they don't like. In the second year,

they really want them to have them working in real jobs in the community that will hopefully turn into jobs once they are out of the program. That has been hard because of covid. That is why they're here. To see if some of their students could work with us.

- The students will come to employers with a person who is called a peer mentor. This will be another South Alabama student who has volunteered to work with the student and help them learn the skills they need to do at that job. When the student learns those jobs, they will fade that mentor out with the employer's approval.
- They see this as an academic experience. So, they are not necessarily looking for paid jobs for them while they are in the program. It is an internship that can be paid or cannot be paid. If we wanted to pay them, then we could. Most of their mentors are doing it to get volunteer hours. It is an important part of their curriculum at South. Some of them are paid by them because they expect them to provide them with better data.
- Their students get the experience. Employers get an employee that once trained will be with them for a long time. Their students aren't going to leave their jobs to get \$0.50 more an hour somewhere else. One of the things they know about people with intellectual disabilities is that once they learn the task they do it forever.
- They had their first set of graduates in the spring of 2019. They had their first cohorts of 6. They are now close to up to 20 graduates by now. Right now they have 19 students enrolled.
- One of their first graduates actually did an internship with the Riverview Plaza. He decided that quite wasn't right for him. So, he went to Publix his last semester in the program. He is still there. He is the management training program. They have students that are also working in childcare centers. They have students working in other offices. One of their former students has acted in multiple movies. It's made a difference in these kids' lives.
- Covid was hard on them. They had to go into online instructions. Which was amazing because their students could do it. After covid, parents came to them and told them about their kids going out and getting their own job based on what they learned from the program
- The length of the mentorship is based on the employer. They look at data that shows they are capable of completing the task independently without support. Then they will come to the employer to ask if they are good with them pulling the mentor. It doesn't mean that Ms. Miller isn't going to come back to check on them every week for a while to make sure everything is going smoothly.
- One of the things they're going to push this summer with students is to find summer employment. They realize that the students need to understand work isn't just during school time. Out of the 19 students they

have right now, about 10 of them would be ready to be interested in areas like this. They have placements for them right now but open if a better deal comes along. A lot of it is not in the area that they want. Most of their students are local. They have a few that are from Montgomery and the south Mississippi area.

IX. CVB Update

- David Clark
 - Alabama Governor's Conference on Tourism Awards
 - The Exploreum – Attraction of the Year
 - Emily White with Grand Bay – Welcome Center of the Year
 - Janet Cobb with the Battleship Memorial Park – Executive Tourism of the Year
 - Patty Kieffer – Tourism Employee of the Year
 - Africatown, SCAD, City of Mobile, County of Mobile, Alabama Historical Commission, & Visit Mobile – Partner of the Year
 - Partner Portal: can post your Senior Bowl and Park & Cruise packages if you have a login.
 - Save the Date: February 9th for a big time national website optimization event happening with Miles Partnership. The time and place will be shared.
- Patty Kieffer
 - The sales team is traveling when it is safe. Couple of shows they have coming up are religious conference management association, Travel South, and cruise shows. We are still expecting our ship back March 5th.
 - In a couple weeks, Jared might be going to Montgomery. You can always partner with us sales managers to go on sales calls around the region and some of the other Association luncheons around here such as Louisiana Society Association executives, Mississippi, Georgia and then MPI. They have different chapters in the area. They are really focusing to travel regionally.
 - We do have a new sales manager. Tracey Adams comes to us with extensive experience. She was the DOS at the Perdido Beach Resort for fourteen years. She has been on board with us for about a month.
 - We want to do our hotel DOS meeting sometime in the next month or so. We want to see what works best for y'all. Is it early in the morning or later in the

afternoon? It will probably be a Zoom call for the next one. We will send out a Zoom invitation. We'll try to get that on the books in the next couple of weeks.

X. Sports Update

- Danny Corte – Mobile Sports Authority
 - It is kind of a quiet time for Sports in January. It's after Mardi Gras when it really gets going. They have 9 or 10 events between middle of February and middle of May including volleyball, basketball, golf, softball, and track and field. We're pushing with what we have in terms of our facilities. We did add a volleyball tournament Easter weekend. Last year, they had record numbers for their volleyball and basketball tournaments. They think that's going to continue.

XI. Open forum: Attractions/Associates updates

- Rhonda Davis – USS Alabama
 - Introducing Mya Douglas. Mya is going to be interning with the Alabama Travel Council. Her job is going to be updating the membership list. She will be reaching out to you as she goes through this project to make sure she has all the correct point of contacts, all the correct billing and cycles. That way you will be receiving information from the Travel Council such as membership information, the rack cards, and all the things that the Travel Council offers with their membership. Mya is a senior at the University of South Alabama and in the Hospitality and Tourism Management program. She was one of the scholarship winners at the Alabama Governor's conference.
 - The battleship on January 1st had a slight increase in the admission fee. New rack cards are available for everyone. If you have old rack cards at the hotel just throw them away. Also available are buy one get one free coupons for the snowbirds that are in the rack cards. They are good through April. February is going to be a big month. They have the living history crew drill in February. Every Thursday at 11, they are starting a new series called Life at Sea. That is included in admission. The ship is open every day except for Christmas. They'll be open Mardi Gras weekend if any hotel guests are interested in things to do between parades or if they're passing through.
 - The parking fee went from \$4 to \$5. Children under 5 are free. Children 6 to 11 are \$6. Children 12 through adults aged 55 went from \$15 to \$18. Seniors and veterans are \$15.
- Ross Peterson – Bay City Conventions & Tours

- An email was sent out last week about reigniting the Azalea Trail Festival. David Clark has some really good ideas and insight when it was discussed with him back before Covid. They also had some good meetings with the mayor about it as well.
- It is a coordinated effort to brand spring for Mobile. It is not reinventing the wheel. There are some wonderful activities already happening during March and April. They want to pull them together, put them under one umbrella, and market it as “Spring Fest”. They would like to really get some momentum going for next year.
- Ask for the hotels, they are not expecting any \$40 room night but looking more for an amenity you can offer such as a free cupcake or a drink ticket when you check in. They have talked about ways to track it. Think about maybe linking up with the Visit Mobile website.
- Information was sent out by Diana earlier today.
- Festival of Flowers is happening downtown again on March 12th.
- Maggie Thrasher – Mobile Convention Center/Civic Center/Saenger Theatre
 - At the convention center, Gulf States Horticultural Expo is coming. They're moving in on Sunday they'll be here all of the following week.
 - Senior Bowl week will be present at all three venues.
 - Covid testing, treatments, and vaccinations have been over at the Civic Center. That is moving as of January 21st. That will no longer be at their building. It is moving to the USA campus.
 - At Saenger Theatre, be on the lookout for some big announcements. They have four big announcements coming next week. One of them you just to be really excited about. Currently we have Katt Williams at the Civic Center. Also coming up at the Civic Center are Mercy Me, Kevin Gates, and LOL Surprise. At the Saenger, we have Cody G tonight and tomorrow. Tomorrow is sold out. Tickets for tonight are still available. Kenny G is coming to the Saenger Theatre.

XII. Adjournment **01:03pm**

XIII. Future Meetings:

- February – Project Search (candidates for employment)
- March – TBD
- April – TBD
- May – TBD

- June – TBD
- July – TBD
- August – TBD
- September
- October
- November
- December – FUN!

Megan Murdock won the \$40 prize incentive from the December minutes. I have a new one for you. The guest speaker discussed a certain partner they work with that has been very beneficial for them that pays their students. Email me 3 things, the name of the partner, the age range Dr. Baxter mentioned, and how much they pay the students. If you were not at the January meeting or don't remember it now, then feel free to reach out to Dr. Abigail Baxter. Be the 1st to email DIANA N. MOORER @ Diana.Moorer@marriott.com with **all 3 correct answers** and receive **\$40** at the next meeting. **You MUST attend the February 2022 meeting to redeem the money.**