

Dear Valued Member of the Tahlequah Chamber of Commerce,

I want to provide you with an informal update of some recent Chamber activities.

Update on criminal investigation: Wednesday, August 13 and Monday, August 25, 2014, the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation provided me with a brief update on the investigation regarding funds taken from the Chamber. Investigators from the OSBI, State Auditor and Inspector, and the Internal Revenue Service are reviewing records and documents from several years, conducting interviews, and issuing search warrants for additional records. The investigators are optimistic that the investigative phase could wrap up in 4 to 6 weeks, however, there is still much to do. The investigation will determine (1) the total amount of funds taken or misused, and (2) the remaining liability for unpaid federal and state payroll taxes.

Tahlequah Area Tourism Council report: Wednesday, August 13, 2014, I met with representatives of the Tourism Council including Dana Boren-Boer, Donna Tinnin, and Ed Fite for the purpose of discussing their recommendations regarding the Tourism Director and the future collaboration between the Chamber Board and the Tourism Council. Anna Knight, Chamber Director also attended the meeting. Keep in mind, both the Chamber Board and Tourism Council were asked to review all available options, without passing judgment prematurely on any option, about the path forward. Our discussions were focused on developing processes that ensure accountability, measure employee performance, and incentivize productivity based on increased tourism tax revenue. We also discussed the market competitiveness of the salaries for the Tourism Director and the Chamber Executive Director. A list of area Chamber Executive salaries from 11 cities was shared. The conclusion was that the current salaries for the Chamber CEO and the Tourism Director are competitive within the industry. We also concluded that there is more than enough work for two people if accountability and performance measures are implemented. Dana Boren-Boer, Chair of Tourism Council presented the Council's recommendation earlier today.

Note: Today, the Chamber Board accepted recommendations from the Tahlequah Area Tourism Council, including:

- Restructure the Tahlequah Area Tourism Council into a Convention and Visitors' Bureau and redefine the organizational structure.
- Enhance communication with the Chamber.
- Update the Chamber board on goals and achievements.
- Select and direct staff to fulfill the strategic mission of the Chamber.
- Develop job descriptions and performance measurements for all positions.
- Develop a compensation schedule based on quarterly performance.
- Increase the hotel occupancy rate from previous years.
- Increase hotel/motel tax revenue from previous years.
- Increase the number of new conventions, conferences and meetings held in the Tahlequah area.
- Create new revenue streams to support the convention and visitors bureau through relationships with county lodging establishments and publications.
- In consortium with the Chamber, report the Tourism Director's goals and objectives annually.
- Increase the economic impact of tourism on the Tahlequah area.
- Craft a destination marketing plan with measurable goals, focusing on group sales and overnight stays.

Mandatory Chamber Director training: Monday, August 25, 2014, in accordance with the revised bylaws, the Chamber Board of Directors completed the mandatory training session (See Photo: Facilitator Kim Lynch in orange on back row). The training was held in the President's Dining Room at Northeastern State University. Kim Lynch of the Non-Profit Resource Center in Muskogee, led the training. We covered the roles of directors of non-profit organizations, the difference between a IRS 501(c) 3 and a 501 (c) 6 designations, open meeting laws (Title 25 O.S. Sections 301 – 314), executive session laws (Title 25 O.S. Section 307 A and B), committee structures and roles of Vice-Presidents, overview of Chamber annual events, review of required annual reports,

required annual audits, and the budget. Mayor Jason Nichols presented an overview of the tax revenue received from the city for tourism and the reporting requirements. Additionally, all Directors signed the Statement of Understanding, Responsibilities, and Engagement (S.U.R.E). Two Directors were unable to attend and will complete the training in a makeup session.

Chamber Officers for FY15: The Executive Committee met on Monday, August 18, 2014 to finalize the remaining list of officers. We are pleased to welcome new Directors Matt Meredith, Todd Mutzig, and Jodeen Worth. We also want to welcome Jerry Cook, who will serve as NSU's *ex officio* representative to the Chamber Board.

Executive Committee, Officers and Directors confirmed at the August 26 Regular Meeting are:

Dr. Steve Turner, *President*

Stanley Young, *Past President*

Glen Elliott, *President- Elect*

Stephen Highers, *Treasurer*

Anna Knight, *Secretary*

Ed Fite, *VP of Tourism*

Keith Davis, *VP of Membership Development*

Angela Tinsley, *VP of Community Development*

Jasen Wright, *VP of Economic Development*

Jodeen Worth, *VP of Organizational Development*

Isabel Baker, Director

JoAnn Bradley, Director

David Dick, Director

Matt Meredith, Director

Todd Mutzig, Director

Denver Spears, Director

Stephanie Isaacs, Director *ex officio*, Cherokee Nation

Jason Nichols, Director *ex officio*, City of Tahlequah

Jerry Cook, Director *ex officio*, Northeastern State University

Today, we are also pleased to report that the 2015 Leadership Tahlequah Class will begin in September, a committee was formed to complete the Bi-annual Chamber Guide, the Chamber payroll and remittance of required taxes will be completed by the Non-Profit Resource Center, and we are exploring ways to improve the Chamber Website.

Lastly, from my perspective, I believe we hit bottom about 4 weeks ago and the Tahlequah Chamber of Commerce is once again on the way up. Certainly, there will be some public revelations from the investigation that will create bumps in the road ahead. Undoubtedly, some of these may hurt a bit and even make us angry at the same time. This is to be expected because the Chamber and the Tahlequah community have been impacted by criminal conduct that spans several years. I am certain that we will weather this season of uncertainty and emerge a stronger organization and community.

Thanks for being a member of the Tahlequah Chamber of Commerce. Our future is bright!



--
Steve Turner Ph.D.
President
Northeastern State University
(918) 444-2000