



## **DiscoverIE director stresses collaboration at tourism summit**

By JENNIFER DENEVAN, Needles Desert Star

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NEEDLES — Brian Tucker, executive director for the Inland Empire Tourism Council and DiscoverIE, focused on collaboration and having a voice as he spoke to various groups and individuals who attended the DiscoverIE Tourism Summit last month in Highland.

Jan Jernigan of the Needles Economic Development Corporation, Georgia Breault of the Needles Downtown Business Alliance and Susan Alexis of the Needles Chamber of Commerce attended the summit. All three community members expressed interest in what would be presented and what could be brought back to Needles and have plans to share the information with those local nonprofit groups.

The summit featured various guest speakers talking about tourism to California and more specifically to the Inland Empire. Many of the speakers talked about how tourism remains a big industry despite economic woes but to get that dollar, communities have to be proactive.

Tucker said the summit is a prime example of what the tourism market is all about — collaboration. It's about understanding what message to send out to tourists and to larger marketing groups, such as Visit California, so as to reap the benefits, he continued.

He talked about the Inland Empire Tourism Council and its marketing arm, which is DiscoverIE. He gave some background about the council and what DiscoverIE does for the council and other Inland Empire communities.

The council was founded in 1988, he said. It's a 501(c)6 membership organization and is funded through partnership dues, advertising revenues and matched marketing dollars from the state of California. That money is what goes into DiscoverIE.

Tucker said the main focus of DiscoverIE is to educate visitors on the amenities available to them in the Inland Empire and the unique experience to be had in this region. It is also to encourage longer stays and return visits, he added. Return visits and longer stays create a positive impact on local economy.

“We’re not here to be second best,” Tucker said. “We want a voice at the table.”

Tucker said being vocal and proactive is what’s going to make the difference for communities benefitting from all the tourism that happens in California. DiscoverIE is a way to help communities get the word out about events and other tourist attractions that bring visitors to the Inland Empire.

He went on to discuss how DiscoverIE is going to start engaging communities directly with ideas such as challenging consumers to create a song about the Inland Empire, promoting the region.

DiscoverIE already has a song, written by Juliet and E, that’s being used for marketing of the Inland Empire.

Tucker advised the audience how to join DiscoverIE and explained how it’s a benefit to all involved. DiscoverIE is able to promote a community and its events but that in turn helps visitors see all the events, programs and amenities available to them that are all within reach, he said.

The NEDC joined DiscoverIE several months ago. There are different levels of membership available and the NEDC joined at a level that allows the group to be featured on DiscoverIE’s website and calendar listing of events, along with being provided a seat on the marketing committee.

NEDC’s membership also gives the group networking opportunities and co-operative marketing opportunities.

Access to market research, a consumer leads database, media toolkit, exposure opportunities and member-only information systems are also part of membership. The NEDC can have a feature story in the e-newsletter, a logo in e-marketing and be listed with a link in e-marketing and in the council press releases.

The tourism summit also included guest speakers Brandon Feighner, vice president-PKF Consulting USA, LLC; Michael Krouse, president and chief executive officer of the Greater Ontario Convention and Visitors Bureau; and Caroline Beteta, president and CEO of Visit California.

Feighner focused on the hotel industry and that some areas of that industry are starting to recover. While the amount of money being spent isn’t very high yet, the number of people traveling and visiting is growing, Feighner said.

Krouse gave tips regarding creating a tourism marketing district for regions.

He was in agreement with needing to build relationships with nearby communities and packing what communities have to offer.

Beteta focused on the statewide portion of tourism and marketing. She gave plenty of insight into

tourism trends and what the “experience pillars” are, which support Visit California’s worldwide promotion of California as a tourism destination.

## **Tourist spending opens eyes at summit**

By JENNIFER DENEVAN, Needles Desert Star

NEEDLES — Caroline Beteta, president and chief executive officer for Visit California, gave the audience plenty to think about during the DiscoverIE Tourism Summit Sept. 18 in Highland. Visit California is the tourism marketing arm for the state of California. The group is geared toward bringing more tourism into the state and helping with revenue.

Beteta said visitors spend more than \$106 billion annually in California for travel-related purposes. This translates to more than 900,000 jobs in tourism and means \$6.6 billion in state and local taxes.

California is the number one travel destination in the U.S., Beteta said. This is impressive considering the state is in competition with Florida.

The next set of numbers is what had the audience gasping. She said that \$106 billion is hard to grasp so when broken down, this means the state averaged \$291 million spent every day. Breaking it down further means \$12.1 million was spent every hour on average in 2012, she said. This means travelers spent \$202,000 every minute. The forecast is for the state to bring in \$112 billion for the year in 2013.

Beteta spoke about domestic and international spending. A total of 78 percent of the 66.5 million person trips were domestic travelers and 22 percent were international. The 22 percent, however, represented 49 percent of the \$41 billion in spending, she continued. This means international travelers represent nearly half of the total money spent in California.

She said China and India represent the two markets that are traveling the most and continue to grow. Between 2003 and 2012, there was around a 900 percent growth rate in Chinese visitors, for example, growing from 71,000 visitors to California in 2003 to 708,000 in 2012.

There are five “experience pillars” that Visit California uses in marketing. Beteta said there is family fun; culinary; culture and entertainment; outdoor adventure and recreation; and luxury and indulgence. This aids them in developing a family campaign to help spotlight California as a top family travel destination.

Because tourism is the hot ticket, Beteta said everyone is in the fight for the tourism dollar. Worldwide, California ranked about 15th for spending. Las Vegas came in first.

It’s important to be proactive, she said. Multi-media, particularly social media, is key in getting information out to potential visitors as they’re considering where to take their vacations. With everyone battling for that money, communities have to be willing to take action and be proactive in developing

interest in coming to that community, she said.

Being proactive locally helps but getting involved in groups like DiscoverIE and Visit California contributes because the marketing can get further out and it gives tourists multiple places to go and see, she said.

## **City manager appreciative of efforts to attract tourist dollars**

By JENNIFER DENEVAN, Needles Desert Star

**NEEDLES — Rick Daniels, Needles city manager, didn't attend the DiscoverIE Tourism Summit in Highland last month, but he expressed excitement that representatives from Needles did attend.**

**He said he is grateful to those who made the trip. The distance from Needles to many places tends to isolate the city but being willing to take the time and effort to attend a summit that can be beneficial for the city is a worthwhile endeavor, he added.**

**Georgia Breault of the Needles Downtown Business Alliance, Jan Jernigan of the Needles Economic Development Corporation and Susan Alexis of the Needles Chamber of Commerce all attended the summit. All three previously reported feeling good about the summit and how the information shared can be beneficial for Needles.**

**Daniels said economic development rests on outside money. This means travelers spending money on hotels, restaurants, merchandise and other services in the city, he continued.**

**Tourism is often one of the most valuable forms of economic development, he said. Money spent on tourism spreads throughout the whole economy, he added.**

**Needles has several attractions at its disposal, Daniels said. There are Route 66 and the Colorado River. The addition of the dog park is expected to help bring in other tourists, he continued.**

**While it's important to be focused, Daniels said, the city can't be afraid to get people to pull off Interstate 40 or other major highways and stop in Needles.**

**He said it's correct to start with marketing California, then the Inland Empire, then the Tri-state area and finally Needles. All those things combined will help bring more tourism to the area and into the state overall, he added.**

**Economic development brings cultural diversity, Daniels said. It creates conversations and it makes the world smaller, he continued.**

He applauded the efforts by Jernigan, Breault and Alexis for taking time and spending the gas money to attend the summit. In the end it will pay dividends, he said.