

JICANet Update

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Prior Updates can be found on our website at www.jekyllcitizens.org

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Record of the Jekyll Island State Park Authority (JISPA) Board Meeting of 19 December 2011, in the Morgan Center, as recorded for JICA

Chairman Bob Krueger brought the meeting to order at 9:30 AM. Board members present were Buddy DeLoach, Mike Hodges, Al Ike, and Sybil Lynn. Richard Royal and Mark Williams were on conference telephone. Also present was Park Authority Executive Director Jones Hooks. The audience numbered about 35 persons.

COMMITTEE SESSIONS; CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION

Dr. Kimberly Andrews, Research Coordinator at the Georgia Sea Turtle Center, gave a presentation on alligator research being performed in the Park. Key points of the show follow. It is particularly dangerous for pets and small children to approach the water's edge where large alligators are present. Alligator attacks, though, are rare; since 1948, there have been only 23 fatal alligator attacks upon humans -- 22 of those were in Florida and only one in Georgia. A University of Georgia graduate student working under Andrews will be seeking a Masters degree doing alligator research in the Park, including alligator population assessment, locations of alligators, size distribution of alligators, and growth rates of alligators. The current estimate of population size in the Park is 100. There are a couple of very large (9+ feet long) alligators in the Park, and these are the dominant reproductive individuals. Most of the Park's alligators are 3 feet long or smaller, and these have low survivorship. When the Park's alligators were approached by researchers, most submerged and moved away, but 37% slowly approached the researcher or showed no response, indicating that they had probably been fed by humans. Partly because some Park alligators have acclimated to human presence, the largest acclimated ones should be removed when discovered, but for the most part, the management efforts will be along natural lines, with emphasis on managing human/alligator interactions.

Al Ike had heard that alligator tail-swishing could be dangerous to nearby humans. Andrews felt that this was unlikely. She added that once an alligator's mouth is closed, it can be bound closed with little force, since the mouth-opening musculature is weak.

Director Hooks noted that the Park Authority has attempted to discourage feeding of wildlife, through notices in Beachscape, etc., without the degree of success desired. Andrews noted that Park employees have been a source of information about locations of alligators that could be fed, and these alligators have become habituated to receiving food from humans. Andrews is putting into place wildlife-awareness initiatives that should discourage this type of encouragement of wildlife feeding. Andrews described some work that she had done in South Carolina, wherein alligators that had lost their fear of humans were trapped, measured, and tagged – this process reinstilled the fear of

humans and worked as a form of behavioral modification. Buddy DeLoach interjected that the State of Georgia some years ago made it illegal to feed alligators. Andrews added that it is also illegal to harass alligators (throw rocks, etc.). DeLoach suggested that more signage announcing the illegality of feeding of alligators should be placed in the Park, but Andrews was uncertain of the wisdom of this, since it can lead to unintended encouragement of feeding.

Mike Hodges asked whether there are enough very large alligators in the Park to reproduce frequently enough to sustain the Park's population? Answer: Yes, probably, since there are substantial numbers of small alligators now, and the strongest of the medium-sized individuals could take the place of the largest ones as reproducers if the largest ones were lost.

Chairman Krueger inquired about the age of the largest (9+ feet) alligators? Answer: Thirty to fifty years, depending largely on prey availability.

Frank Mirasola noted that alligators can spend considerable time in salt water, before returning to fresh water. He felt that Park visitors should be aware that alligators can be encountered in salt water. Andrews noted that alligators often feed in salt water, where food is more readily available than in the Park's fresh water.

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Chairman Hodges reported that for the month of November, net operating cash flow was better than had been budgeted, but there was still a loss of \$171 thousand. For the fiscal year to date, the net income was \$844 thousand (25% less than in the previous fiscal year). Director Hooks noted that preliminary indications regarding revenues for December are worrying. Hodges added that hotel occupancy is up from 32% last November to 37% this November.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

Human Resources Director Cornell Harvey called upon Training and Benefits Coordinator Jenna Frost. Frost has been leading an Employee Wellness Committee and an Employee Recognition Committee. The Recognition Program will improve the feelings of value that Park employees feel about the work that they do. Morale, productivity and teamwork will be enhanced. Recognition of performance will be done by supervisors and by peers. For the Wellness Program, a survey was performed, and the three principal areas of employee interest were fitness, diet/nutrition, and weight management. Financial management was also included here, as was tobacco-use cessation (a surcharge of \$80 per month is paid for health insurance by tobacco users). Forums and seminars will be used to convey health-management information. Director Hooks remarked that Frost had implemented her healthy-food plan at the first all-staff meeting, and some attendees were surprised to find that the bacon, for example, had been replaced by granola bars and fruit.

MARKETING COMMITTEE

Chairman DeLoach announced that Communications Director Eric Garvey was recuperating from a total hip replacement. He called upon Sales Director Kevin Udell to give the marketing report. Udell observed that December is usually a slow month for sales of convention bookings, but instead of the typical 2 groups booked, this December brought 11 bookings to date (translates to about 5,000 room nights). Udell also has noticed that new bookings are going not only to Georgia groups, but substantially to southeastern USA groups. A special win may be coming from the Tennessee Valley Authority, a recalcitrant group that has now expressed interest, and will send representatives to visit the Park and its new convention center. Udell reported that convention bookings now number 70 for

2012, and 76 for 2013 (the target is 90 groups for 2013). Director Hooks interjected that the number of convention groups served in 2011 was 22.

Chairman Krueger sent word through Udell to Garvey, wishing him a speedy recovery.

Steve Newell noted that with 52 weeks in a year, and most conventions lasting at least a few days, if there are to be 90 conventions in 2013, will that create problems with convention space? Answer: Most groups will consist of about 500 persons, and the convention hall can be walled off into two 500-person spaces. The maximum number of large conventions that can be hosted per year is 120.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Mike Chatham of HHCP introduced Jennifer Nichols Kennedy, of TJNJ Partners, the interior designer for the new Convention Center. Kennedy displayed boards with descriptions of the furnishings and upholstery to be used in the Center. Durability was a major consideration in choosing the furnishings. Kennedy anticipated having all of the interior materials on site by the end of March, 2012. Director Hooks commended Kennedy for her excellent work, based in part on her experience at other large convention centers.

The contract with SMG, the proposed operator of the new Convention Center, is still being negotiated. Two points to be finalized are the timing of the hiring of the general manager (the Park Authority would like this to happen very early in 2012), and the options for termination of the contract should performance be unacceptable. The contract calls for quarterly meetings at which financial and other performance characteristics will be discussed. Director Hooks noted that it is possible that the Convention Center will operate at a loss of perhaps \$300,000 for the first two years (not including the outside income from hotel revenues, etc.), but the payback should come from the marketing assistance that SMG can provide. Legal Associate Chris O'Donnell thanked the State Attorney General's Office (especially Nancy Gallagher) for assistance in putting together the SMG contract. Hooks emphasized that the Park Authority fully expects the Center to operate in the black eventually. Mike Hodges emphasized that SMG is expected to be marketers and managers, and their incentive bonuses must be based on both types of performance.

Director Hooks began a discussion of the proposed new names for parts of the Beach Village by apologizing for a missing display slide. He is now without the expert executive assistance of Shanna Brain, who has left for another position. Hooks introduced Debra Ferguson, who is replacing Brain. The street passing through the retail center would be named Main Street. The street passing between the two hotels would be Convention Way. The convention center would be titled Jekyll Island Convention Center. Naming of the rooms in the Center would be based on position on the ocean side or the marsh side of the Center. The main ballroom of the Center would be Atlantic Hall (just as was the case in the former convention center). The principal meeting room would be the Ben G. Porter Oceanside Salon.

Dave Curtis of the group (Jekyll Oceanfront Hotel, LLC) responsible for the full-service hotel in the Beach Village provided an update. Curtis announced that the hotel will be a Westin hotel (a Starwood franchise; the franchise agreement has been signed). Curtis observed that Starwood Hotels will provide a worldwide reservation system for the new Westin. Buddy DeLoach asked about the opening date for the Jekyll Westin? Answer: Groundbreaking is expected to be in summer, 2012, with completion of construction 16 months later; the general contractor has been engaged.

Director Hooks addressed the question of the forthcoming security-camera system to be installed at the new Park-entrance center to be constructed on the causeway at the point of the current Welcome Center. Since the new Convention Center will be having a security-camera system installed also,

buying the systems from the same vendor is being discussed. Regarding construction of the new collection booth at the new Park-entrance center, three bids have been received, and the apparent low bid (\$1.665 million) is from Seaboard Construction of Brunswick. Currently, the estimated cost is being negotiated with the goal of lowering it. The Board accepted the choice of Seaboard.

Chris O'Donnell reported that there have been no critical comments from the public on the changes that have been proposed at first reading to the Park's ordinances. Therefore the modernization of the ordinances, and their placement on the internet (with searchability) was approved as the second reading.

Director Hooks reported that the federal EB5 Program has not yet approved foreign-source funding for the retail center in the forthcoming Beach Village, but the mid-priced hotel (the Hyatt Place) is on schedule for design submissions by the first of January, 2012.

Hooks commended the Park's golf-course maintenance folks for their recent good work – a Park visitor who has been golfing on Jekyll since 1970, has written to the Park administration complimenting the quality of the golf courses, especially Oleander Course, stating that the courses are in the best shape that he has ever seen.

The Jekyll-themed restaurant proposed by Global Concessions for the Atlanta Hartsfield-Jackson Airport has been tentatively approved (final approval is expected on 3 Jan 12), and it would be located in the International Terminal, the most sought-after site.

Hooks observed that Fins on the Beach (formerly Blackbeard's Restaurant) has been receiving improving inspection reports, leading to the most recent grade of 99 out of 100 (compare the last Blackbeard's grade of 80).

Mike Chatham of HHCP described the forthcoming change to the current collection-booth area. A traffic circle was originally planned for this spot, after the collection process is moved back onto the causeway. However, it has been decided that a simpler intersection will be satisfactory.

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Chairman Krueger expressed pleasure at the progress being made in the reconstruction of parts of the Park.

Dave Curtis objected to the naming of the street on which the Beach Village's full-service hotel will be located. Since some of the hotel's guests will not be conventioners, he felt that Convention Way was inappropriate. He suggested Ocean Way instead. Curtis also noted that his group (which operates the Jekyll Island Club) has never been happy with the pathway to the Historic District and the Club Hotel, and he would like to have some input into the design of the Riverview/Ben Fortson intersection.

Frank Mirasola added to the good things that have been said about the Park's coffetable book (The Nearest Faraway Place) – he noted that the price is right; it cost him twice as much to mail the book overseas as it did to purchase the book. Mirasola also expressed disappointment at the naming of the Convention Center central room. He felt that if a contemporary person was to be honored, that the honoree should have been someone like former Board Chairman Tom Lewis, who accomplished much during his tenure. He also suggested following the practice at the Club Hotel of naming rooms after historic figures.

Chairman Krueger adjourned the meeting at 11:48 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

Steven Y. Newell, Jekyll Island Citizens Association; produced after transcribing from a digital voice recorder

Previously Announced Events

4-H Tidelands Art Sale Exhibitors and Volunteers -

10th Annual 4-H Tidelands Nature Center Art Sale Sunday- February 19th- 10am-4:00pm- Held in Magnolia Hall - In the Historic District Convention Campus. Come and shop once again - collecting an array of items from your favorite local artists! Silent Auction included again for the second year. Anyone interested in adding to our exhibitor list- please be sure to contact us. Also- we are looking for a few good volunteers to help set up and run our Tidelands gift shop table- silent auction- and greeting station. Please contact Dawn at Tidelands [\(912\)- 635-5032](tel:912-635-5032) to exhibit or volunteer.

JI Blood Drive - Thursday, Jan 12

Please be a donor at our American Red Cross blood drive Thursday, January 12 from 1 to 6 pm at the Jekyll Island Presbyterian Church. If you are diabetic or are being treated for high blood pressure and it is under control with medications, please consider showing up at our drive. Previous deferrals in these areas have been changed. To save waiting in line, call Howard Sculthorpe for an appointment at 635-2866.

JI Club Hotel 125 Year Celebration - Thursday, Jan 12

The Jekyll Island Club Hotel kicks off a year of special events to celebrate the 125 years of the club's existence. It also marks the 25th anniversary of the club's renovation. The first event is a meet the local artist evening, 6-8pm. Light hors d'oeuvres and beverages will be served. Admission is free, but reservations are required (635-2600). See the club website (jekyllclub.com) for more information about this and other upcoming events to mark the anniversary.

JI Garden Club Bazaar - Saturday, Jan 14

Here is what you've been waiting for, the Annual Jekyll Island Garden Club Bazaar. The bazaar will be held at the Grand Oaks Hall in the Historic District Convention Campus. The hours are 9am - 2 pm. Come find that hard to locate item. There will be crafts, baked goods and lunch to boot.

Drop off dates for items are Thursday, Jan 12 and Friday, Jan 13 between 8a and 12noon at the Hall.

Music and Merlot - Saturday, Jan 14

Franklin Pond returns to Jekyll Island, January 14, 2012. General Admission: \$20 before January 14. \$25 January 14 and at the door. Tickets can be purchased on the JIA website, at the door, or by calling the Jekyll Island Visitor Information Center at [912-635-3636](tel:912-635-3636).

--- and that's the news from Jekyll Island where history lives, nature abounds and it's great to be back on the island!!! -- Jim Reed, JICANet Editor

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