Nevada tries to make tourism website more engaging

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

The Nevada Tourism Commission was feeling a little better about TravelNevada.com 2.0 after its brand consultant told members they'll be tweaking the state's tourism website after a lukewarm response to its mid-April debut.

Representatives of Burson-Marsteller, the New York-based consultant the state is paying $3.2 million over two years, told commissioners Wednesday they are working on fixes to the website that should be completed by the end of July.

"I must say it's a dramatic improvement," said Commissioner Christopher Baum, who heads the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority, after getting a preview of the changes.

"It's a dramatic improvement in terms of navigation, in terms of visuals, in terms of intuitive ability to find things that are of interest to travelers," Baum said. "In a perfect world, it would have been the first version we launched, but I'm delighted that we're getting to a version now that we can all be happy with. It's dramatically better on virtually every level."

Tourism leaders statewide complained that a portion of editorial content that had previously been accessible on the website was gone or difficult to find. Burston-Marsteller's contracted website designer said one of the fixes planned is to restore some of the previously available content.

"We went too far in trip planning than rich narratives and other editorial content," said Louis Hernandez in his presentation to the commission.

Some critics have complained that information about events was outdated and that the site's functionality declined. Others were concerned about whether an out-of-state vendor was best qualified to develop the website. The website revisions also came at a time when the state unveiled its new brand, "A World Within. A State Apart," which also was panned.

Tourism Commission Director Claudia Vecchio defended the brand, saying there would always be detractors and that it just needed more time for the public to appreciate it.

While commissioners were satisfied that improvements were under way, they were delighted by early reports of site metrics showing that visits to the page and increases in the number of requests for more information were on the rise, thanks primarily to the state's strong social media presence.

Michelle Stevenson told the commission that Facebook posts about the state more than tripled in the last year and the dwell time on Nevada's page was well above industry averages. The state agency focused on social media, spending minimally on more expensive television and traditional media advertisements.

Pilot to be partly filmed in Tahoe

Lake Tahoe is one of the locations where a pilot TV show will be filmed.

Actress-producer Hallie Jordan of "Small Red Star Productions" and collaborating partners Jon and Danielle Artigo of "Artigo Indie Films" have started pre-production on "To the Bridge."

When two women (Jordan and Artigo) are scorned by the same man at the same time, they plot their revenge. With a whirlwind of unexpected twists, they find themselves uncovering a new career path as artists in the realm of cheater justice.

This is the first collaboration of the two production companies.

Besides Tahoe, they will be filming on location in Las Vegas, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

The pilot is set to be released for distribution prior to the holidays.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



Patrick Wright

• The California Tahoe Conservancy board on June 20 gave Executive Director Patrick Wright his evaluation. Board Chairman Larry Sevison would only tell *LTN* that a three-member committee has been set up to create goals for Wright. No raise was given.

• Volunteers are needed for the U.S. Junior Amateur golf tourney July 22-27 at Martis Camp in Truckee. Go online to sign up.

• May was the fifth consecutive month Reno-Tahoe International Airport reported an increase in passenger traffic.

• Squaw Valley is offering free outdoor yoga classes on Wednesdays from 6-7pm on First Street in the village from June 26-Sept. 11, except July 17.

• Here are the El Dorado-Tahoe and Sierra weekly roadwork schedules from Caltrans.

Then and now: ‘Color TV’ used to be something to advertise





Fleming Music Company was here in the 1960s selling everything from grand pianos to 45-rpm records, and boasting “Color TV!”

Following numerous other occupants, this is now Auntie Q’s in South Lake Tahoe on Highway 50.

The 1969 photo was supplied by Bob Rockwell, while the current photo is mine.

— Bill Kingman

McCloud River not an ordinary paddle



The Reed sisters – Jann, from left, Pam and Tami – paddle on the McCloud. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

McCLOUD – The Hearst Castle of the north is a little more difficult to get to than the one in San Simeon that is now part of the State Park system. But it's worth the paddle.

Going up the McCloud River the Wyntoon spread that is owned by the Hearst Corporation is not open to tours. Rumor has it Patty Hearst calls this castle in the North State home.



Tom and Pam approaching Wyntoon.

It was Phoebe Apperson Hearst who first purchased the land along the river. Her only son, media mogul William Randolph Hearst, took over the deed when she died. Now the corporation has title to the property, which is 67,000 acres in dense forest, with some of the structures right along the river.

The water is how the public can get a glimpse – via kayak or canoe. The roads leading into the compound are private.

Julia Morgan designed this estate, just like she did San Simeon.



Tami and Tom in clear waters.

Wyntoon got its name from the local Wintu Indian tribe that used to call this part of Northern California home.

This is the area where Hearst was going to re-create a 13th century monastery. Those stones instead ended up in Vina at the Abbey of New Clairvaux.

Last weekend eight of us set off to see what my sister, Pam,

and her boyfriend, Tom, have been talking about – water that changes colors, at times so clear it makes Lake Tahoe look cloudy, and a house that is beyond ordinary.

It takes us less than two hours to get to the estate. Sue and are in our canoe, while my three sisters and their significant others are in individual kayaks.



Much of this section of the McCloud is emerald in color.

The water is like glass. Pine trees come down to the water's edge. At times the embankment is extremely steep. There is little opportunity to beach, but that doesn't bother us.

The few motorboats that are out are full of people fishing for rainbow and brown trout. They are courteous as they pass, slowing so their wake is gentle.

As we paddle upstream the water begins to change. From the dock it started off as an emerald green. It becomes more teal. Then it's sparkling clear to a depth of at least 10 feet in some spots.

Normally it's the shore during a canoe voyage that captures my attention. This time it's the water. It's mesmerizing.

Soon we reach our destination – Wyntoon. Signs say don't trespass. Instead we take pictures of the rock and wood structures that in some ways do resemble a castle.

My brother-in-law, Mike, paddles up a bit farther to the

rapids where instead of getting anywhere he gets a workout.

We head back, taking our time, chatting among ourselves and wishing the headwind would go away.

A bald eagle swoops down and successfully plucks lunch from the lake. We aren’t the only ones enjoying the McCloud.

Plein air artist to be at S. Tahoe studio

Plein air artist Jude Bischoff will be at the Pacific Crest Gallery in the Heavenly Village June 29-30 from 3-6pm.

Bischoff’s Modern Animal series is of bold original oil paintings.

The term plein air painting describes the large movement of 20th century California artists who worked out of doors (en plein air), directly from nature in California. It is considered to be a regional variation on American Impressionism.

For more information, contact the South Lake Tahoe gallery at (530) 541.2325.

Letter: Businesses give back

to help less fortunate



Julie Lowe works with the children of Kenya. Photo/Provided

To the community,

On behalf of the Zawadisha Fund, we would like to give a heartfelt thank you to all the local community members who shopped or purchased services at the following businesses during May's She Is Beautiful Lake Tahoe:

BioSpirit Day Spa, Bliss Skincare Studio Elevate Wellness Center, Gaia-Licious Global Gifts, Mountain Yoga and Zen Birth Services.

These businesses gave a portion of their sales to the Zawadisha Fund, whose mission is to empower, entrust and expand opportunities for women. Zawadisha is Swahili for "to give a gift" and we believe the best approach to development is a "hand up", not a "hand out." The Zawadisha Fund provides small business loans to female entrepreneurs in Kenya.

Our model allows us to build strong relationships with our members who have informed our innovative program which now includes (in addition to loans): financial literacy workshops, a matching savings program, self-defense education, and preventative health measures such as locally-sourced ceramic water filters and mosquito nets.

“Living in a small town makes it easy to stay isolated from the global environment. This annual program brings our attention to the fact that our small donations create a ripple effect in the lives of people thousands of miles away,” said Melinda Choy of Elevate Wellness Center.

The proceeds from She Is Beautiful Lake Tahoe will fund loans for approximately 20 women. Our members will now be able pay their school fees, start to build savings to escape a cycle of poverty, and be leaders in their households and communities.

If you would like to learn more about our work and how to get involved, please email jen@zawadisha.org or visit our website.

Thank you again to all of our generous businesses for making social change in our world.

Sincerely,

Julie Lowe, founding board member the Zawadisha Fund

Bike group honors those who help the sport

The 2012 Lake Tahoe Bicycle Achievement and Service Awards are given out by the Lake Tahoe Bicycle Coalition each year to an individual, business, organization and agency who have demonstrated their advancement of bicycling in the Lake Tahoe area.

This year’s achievement award recipients are:

Tom Wendell, Individual Category. Wendell is well known in the South Tahoe bicycle community as a committed and longstanding bicycle advocate. In the 1980s, he helped co-found and became president of one of the first bicycle organizations – the Tahoe Regional Advocates for Cycling (TRAC). Under his leadership, TRAC first championed the idea of the city of South Lake Tahoe becoming designated as a Bicycle-Friendly Community by the national bike advocacy organization, League of American Bicyclists.

Design Workshop, Business Category. Design Workshop is a leading community design and planning company that has and continues to be a key contributor to many of the regional community plans and bike path designs. They often help graphically and strategy layout visions of future projects to help stakeholders and public visualize the future of their community.

Barton Health, Organization Category. Barton Health's family of doctors, nurses and supportive staff, including, Barton Center for Orthopedics, have taken a leadership role in providing bicycle education for the public.

Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park, Agency Category. Over the past several years, the Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park has been collaborating with Tahoe Rim Trail Association, and the recently revitalized Tahoe Area Mountain Bike Association for the building of new and maintenance of old single track trails throughout the Spooner Lake Park – the site of one of America's Top Ten Mountain Bike Trails – the Flume Trail.

2012 Lake Tahoe Bicycle Service Award Recipient: Rudy Pakes, South Tahoe resident.

Supermoon to dance across the sky Sunday

By Scott Neuman, NPR

The largest full moon of the year will grace the night sky Sunday as our nearest neighbor in space makes its closest approach.

The moon will reach its closest perigee of 2013, dominating the sky. For about a half-hour of the event, the moon will also turn full – a confluence of events that produces a so-called supermoon. The full moon on Sunday will appear to be 14 percent to 30 percent brighter than it does when it's at the other end of its orbit, known as apogee.

At closest approach, the moon will be 221,300 miles from Earth. A few days later, on July 6, it will be at its most distant apogee of the year at 252,583 miles.



Sunday will be a supermoon.
Photo/Huffington Post

Moonrise occurs at about 8:50pm on the East Coast and at about 8:29pm on the West Coast.

As Hoax Slayer, a Snopes-like website dedicated to “debunking email hoaxes and exposing Internet scams,” notes: “Some of the circulating messages tend to exaggerate how big the moon will actually appear. And, of course, it will not appear bright purple or blue as suggested by some circulating graphics. Nevertheless, June 23 should present a great opportunity to view and photograph the moon in all its splendor.”

LiveScience also writes about the myth of the supermoon, which it says has been blamed for everything “from the sinking of the Titanic to Japan’s earthquake and tsunami of 2011.”

“But Earth science experts say linking geological events to the full moon is foolish. The gravitational changes created by a few tens of thousands of miles of difference in distance between the moon and Earth aren’t enough to alter tectonic forces in any meaningful way. …

“Nor have studies turned up evidence that the moon affects human health and behavior. A 1985 review of research published in the journal Psychological Bulletin found no convincing evidence that full moons spur mental hospital admission uptakes, psychiatric disturbances, homicides or other crimes. A 2010 study similarly found a lack of excess criminal lunacy on full-moon days.”

Improv group has 5 summer shows

The Tahoe Improv Players will be putting on four shows at the Valhalla Estate on the Tahoe Tallac Site plus a show at the Brewery Arts Center in Carson City.

Also on stage during the Aug. 6 show will be Laura “Whose Line Is It Anyway” Hall and Rick “Curb Your Enthusiasm” Hall.

Show dates:

July 9 Boathouse Theater

July 20 Brewery Arts Center

July 23 Valhalla Grand Hall

Aug. 6 Boathouse Theater

Aug. 20 Boathouse Theater.

All shows start at 7:30pm.