

NPHA 2008 Annual Meeting: Constructive Outcomes Based on Commonality



NPS Deputy Director Dan Wenk, Director Mary Bomar and NPS Concession Program Chief Jo Pendry met with NPHA members

Washington, D.C. (March 19, 2008) The National Park Hospitality Association (NPHA) held its 2008 annual meeting in Washington from March 9th to 12th at The Madison Hotel and the U.S. Department of the Interior. Approximately 100 concessioners and allies participated in discussions on promoting park visitation, allowable concession activities to support park projects and programs, harnessing technology to serve park visitors, and a variety of other key concessioner issues. This year's annual meeting highlighted NPHA's work in partnership with the National Park Service (NPS), the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), the Travel

Industry Association of America (TIA), state and local tourism agencies, and other organizations interested in strengthening the national parks.

Sunday, March 9, 2008

USA Freedom Corps Deputy Director Alison Young was a featured guest at the NPHA opening reception. Ms. Young told the participants that she had greatly enjoyed teaming with NPHA to reconnect today's youth to the great outdoors at the 2008 Outdoor Recreation Village near Phoenix, Arizona. Ms. Young expressed her appreciation for the outstanding work NPHA members are doing to support the President's Call to Service and to strengthen a culture of service, citizenship and responsibility in America.

Monday, March 10, 2008 Annual Meeting

NPHA Chairman Joe Fassler called the annual meeting to order and encouraged the members to utilize the opportunities to network with peers and work to creatively address and resolve issues interfering with their operations. Rev. Richard Camp led the invocation and gave a brief explanation of the mission of A Christian Ministry in the National Parks, encouraging young people to work at concessioner operations.



NPHA Policy Advisor
Jim Santini

The 2008-2009 Board of Directors was elected by unanimous vote. All current members were reelected, and Lee Harlow, Volcano House/Ken Direction Corporation was newly elected. Other business included reports from Caroline Mica, NPHA Director of Communications, and Jim Santini, NPHA Policy Advisor. Ms. Mica encouraged members to actively participate in the association by joining a NPHA committee or task force and she solicited examples of concessioners' partnerships with the national parks to share with Members of Congress, prospective NPHA members and other interested parties. Mr. Santini

reviewed NPHA's efforts on the NPS Centennial legislation, the H-2B visa program and the status of CONPac, the concessioners' political action committee.



Forever Resorts President Rex Maughan shares the Outdoor Recreation Video

NPHA Board Member Rex Maughan, Forever Resorts, LLC, shared a video about the Outdoor Recreation Village, which drew an estimated 100,000 visitors. Mr. Maughan expressed his pleasure with the successful partnerships among federal agencies, non-profits and recreation businesses to win back the hearts and minds of American children for the great outdoors. He noted that the Outdoor Recreation Village served as a test platform for National Get Outdoors Day, June 14th, when diverse public and private organizations will work as partners to introduce all Americans, and especially youth, to a variety of healthy outdoor activities.

National Park Service Concessions Management Advisory Board (NPSCMAB) Chairman Clay James spoke on the NPSCMAB meeting agenda and thanked the NPHA members for including him in their session. NPHA welcomed Preferred Vendor Unilever Ice Cream representative Erle Hug, who expressed Unilever's commitment to partnering with NPHA to support retail operations in the parks and to join NPHA in generating funding for NPS Centennial programs and projects. National Geographic Books Special Sales Manager Greg Sutorius shared his organization's interest in partnering with NPHA, explaining the success of *Guide to America's Scenic Byways* and their intent to publish a *Guide to America's Top Waterway Destinations*.



Unilever Rep. Erle Hug shares ice cream samples with NPHA members

A special presentation by Mary Lhotsky, Senior Manager of the U.S. Mint Special Office of \$1 Coin Program, reviewed the Presidential \$1 Coin Act, which mandates that all entities doing business on federal property must accept and dispense \$1 coins. Ms.

Lhotsky's presentation introduced the group to **seigniorage**, the difference between the value of money and the cost to produce it. Seigniorage, along with a new semi-postal stamp, may find a role in funding the federal side of the Centennial Challenge Fund match.



L to R: Bruce Bommarito, TIA; Bruce Fears, ARAMARK; Aubrey King, Western States Tourism Policy Council

Moderator Bruce Fears, President of ARAMARK Harrison Lodging, opened the meeting's first panel, **Promoting Park Visitation and Delivering Seamless, Quality Experiences**, saying, "We must garner all the resources to try and figure out how to

reverse the decline in visitation to parks.” Bruce Bommarito, Executive Vice President & COO of the Travel Industry Association of America, attributed the park visitation decline to “macro” causes: a changing lifestyle without outdoor recreation and a rise in ethnic groups that are not accustomed to spending time in the parks. Adding to the trend were “micro” causes, according to the TIA executive, including the NPS assumption that visitation growth would continue without effort and the consequent low priority given to the NPS Tourism Program. National Alliance of Gateway Communities Chairman Bob Warren added that national parks have strong competition from other public lands that accept more diverse types of recreation activities and understand 21st-century American leisure trends better. Mr. Warren recommended combating the disconnect between nature and the American public, especially youth and minorities, through educational programming. Aubrey King, Washington Representative for the Western States Tourism Policy Council, championed a partnership-based marketing campaign as key to reversing the decline in park visitation – and thus aiding America’s quality of life. During follow-up questions, the panelists praised the NPS/Alaska Travel Industry Association promotion effort already certified as eligible for Centennial Challenge Fund support.

Recreation Exchange Luncheon Special Guest: Hon. Tevi Troy



Hon. Tevi Troy

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Deputy Secretary Tevi Troy addressed the growing health problems in the nation. According to Dr. Troy, there have been important successes in dealing with threats to the lives of Americans on many fronts. But now, he told the group, ***largely preventable chronic diseases cause seven in 10 deaths and consume three out of four dollars spent on healthcare.*** At the forefront of attacking chronic diseases and saving taxpayer dollars is the need for increased physical activity. He urged NPHA’s help in encouraging more physical activity by the Americans concessioners serve – an estimated 150 million annually.

Allowable Concessioner Activities Supporting Park Projects: Current Policies and Possible Alternatives was the second panel highlighting NPHA’s direction toward partnerships. The panel was moderated by Patton Boggs LLC partner Marti Whitmore,



NPCA President Tom Kiernan

a former top State of Colorado and U.S. Department of the Interior official, and included Tom Kiernan, President of the National Parks Conservation Association, John Reynolds, a retired top NPS executive, and Derrick Crandall, NPHA Counselor – who stood in for Gary Kiedaisch. The session yielded a remarkable dialogue. Mr. Kiernan noted that this was his first appearance at an NPHA meeting in 10 years. He also emphasized NPCA’s support for concessioners’ involvement with the Centennial Initiative. Mr. Kiernan offered support for a non-profit foundation for concessioners to participate in fundraising for regional and national-level projects. He noted the extraordinary opportunity the Centennial Challenge Fund created for diverse constituent partnerships and his desire

for further collaboration on other key parks issues. Mr. Reynolds urged concessioners to fulfill their contracts to the NPS to the best of their ability and offered the possibility of NPS co-sponsorships as an avenue for concessioner participation in the Centennial. Mr. Crandall emphasized the overriding importance of partnerships between the public and private sectors as a means to reach common goals.

The annual meeting's third panel was entitled **Harnessing Technology to Serve Park Visitors** and was moderated by Dave Woodside, Acadia Corporation President. The panel featured two presentations from technology-industry leaders: Shauna Maggs of Groundspeak, Inc. and Dennis Biela, Lightspeed Media LLC, affiliated with Apple. Mr. Biela unveiled his firm's Pocket Ranger, which provides visitors with downloadable information for the Santa Monica Mountains NRA and has the potential to expand rapidly for other recreation destinations. The "packet" would be available through a special section in Apple's iTunes store – which now sells eight million products daily – and would include up-to-date information on park features maps, and guidebook information in color and with multi-lingual audio capability. Ms. Maggs reviewed the evolution of geocaching and introduced the group to "waymarking," a scavenger hunt for unique and interesting locations. Groundspeak, Inc. offers a free user-generated website encouraging global play. The active discussions stimulated by the presentations made clear that NPHA members believe that technology is key to reconnecting our youth with the great outdoors.

Parks for Tomorrow Award



Photo from L to R: Rex Maughan, Forever Resorts; Hon. Jon Porter; Hon. Sam Farr; Joe Fassler, NPHA Chairman; Hon. Jim Santini, NPHA Policy Advisor; Derrick Crandall, NPHA Counselor

U.S. Representatives Sam Farr (D-CA) and Jon Porter (R-NV) were honored by NPHA as the initial recipients of the *Parks for Tomorrow Award*. "Congressmen Farr and Porter are true champions for national parks," said NPHA Chairman Joe Fassler.

Representatives Farr and Porter co-chair the Congressional Travel and Tourism Caucus and have led efforts of that coalition to work in a bipartisan manner to promote national parks and educate Members of Congress and their staff on the issues that are important to the concessioners. Both representatives have been vocal champions of the National Park Service Centennial Challenge Fund.

Congressman Porter urged concessioners to invite Members of Congress to see concessions operations, to encourage political activism by urging employees to vote, and, finally, to continue giving the American people unique, memorable experiences in the national parks.

Tuesday, March 11, 2008

Dialogue at the U.S. Department of the Interior

NPHA members had the opportunity to discuss important issues involving America's



NPS Director Mary Bomar listens to NPHA member concerns

Director Bomar and other key Interior officials. Director Bomar applauded concessioners' commitment to the parks and noted that concessioners were "attuned to what visitors want," adding, "The National Park Service needs your input." Director Bomar laid out the NPS goals: to be more responsive to the visitor's need; to prepare the parks for the Centennial celebration; and to reverse the recent trends of nature-deficiency. The NPS does not have the marketing resources of a corporate organization, Director Bomar said, but it does hope to increase funding and re-engage the

American people through the Centennial Initiative. NPHA Chairman Joe Fassler assured Director Bomar that the concessioners were committed to partnering with the Park Service on the Centennial but they were facing barriers in the interpretation of DO 21 regarding fundraising. Co-sponsorship and a non-profit foundation were offered as possible solutions to the obstacles posed by the management policies.



Secretary Kempthorne greets NPHA members

Secretary Kempthorne joined the dialogue and acknowledged the importance of concessioners to the well-being of the nation. "The role of concessioners is essential for the replenishment of our spirits in the beautiful settings our country offers," he said. Secretary Kempthorne expressed great enthusiasm about the FY08 budget, the largest in NPS history, and further excitement about the Centennial Challenge Fund. "We left \$175 million on the table," said Secretary Kempthorne and told the group that it is vital to get passage of the

Centennial Challenge Fund in 2008 – and complimented the NPHA members for wearing green "2016" buttons to the meeting and to their subsequent meetings on the Hill.

Additional speakers, who further discussed key concessioner issues, included: Jo Pendry, NPS Concessions Program Chief; Diane Chalfant, Assistant Associate Director of Visitor Experiences; Dean Reeder, National Tourism Director; and John Piltzecker, Partnerships and Philanthropic Stewardship Program Manager. All of the participants recognized the benefits of cooperating partnerships and identified the Centennial as the catalyst for the dialogue.

Capitol Hill Visits

NPHA members visited their Members of Congress and legislative staff requesting action on three key issues:

- The Centennial Challenge Legislation
- The H-2B Program
- The Travel Promotion Act of 2007

For full details, [\[Click Here\]](#)

Guest Speaker: Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks Lyle Laverty

Mr. Laverty addressed the NPHA members at the closing dinner of the annual meeting. He shared his positive outlook on reconnecting the American people to the public lands. Mr. Laverty is convinced that there is a way to re-engage our youth in nature. Just as Secretary Kempthorne expressed how important concessioners were to the parks, Mr. Laverty believes that the concessioners will do the “right, right” thing and set priorities to bring the American people back to their public lands.

Wednesday, March 12, 2008 Board of Directors Meeting



NPHA Board member Kevin Kelly, Delaware North Companies; and NPHA Chairman Joe Fassler

The NPHA Board of Directors met and re-elected the current officers for the 2008-2009 year. Board members unanimously approved the establishment of a 501(c)(3) foundation affiliated with the association and support the use of semi-postal stamps and U.S. Mint coin seigniorage as offsets for the Centennial Challenge Fund legislation. NPHA Counselor Derrick Crandall offered to proceed with establishment of the foundation, as well as to investigate other alternatives, including a more successful alliance with the National Park Foundation, and to report to the Board of Directors prior to final action.

The board discussed plans for the October 2008 Mid-Year Meeting. The following suggestions were made:

- Attract exhibitors: Unilever, National Geographic, USA Today, Buy America interests and more;
- Include educational content: Encourage companies to bring 8-10 employees to learn more about federal laws and regulations governing concessioner operations, as well as focus on “best practices” in key operational areas;
- Capitalize on location: Highlight the concessioner operations at Lake Mead and demonstrate the challenges concessioners face;
- Focus on the new Administration: Discuss key advisors, understand issues and create recommendations for the new Administration

Other suggested topics for the October 2008 meeting included: environmental management policies; pricing seminars; co-sponsorship discussions; and marketing seminars with CVBs and State Tourism Directors, e.g. Alaska promotions. A final suggestion was made to utilize the work product for the NPS Concessions Program training in February as a catalyst for discussion at the October meeting. The mid-year meeting planning committee will meet in the next 30 days to create an overview of the meeting.

Conclusion

NPHA members gave positive feedback on this year's annual meeting. Members agreed that the session at the Department of the Interior was particularly constructive. Furthermore, members were pleased with the strengthened partnerships with NPS, NPCA and other key organizations.

NPHA Board members attended the NPS Concessions Management Advisory Board meeting and brought the following issues for discussion: support for the Centennial Challenge Fund; FY09 budget; conflict management strategies; education of both concessioner staff and NPS staff; relationships with cooperative associations; and LSI clarification.

IMPORTANT DATES

2008 NPHA Mid-Year Meeting

October 12-15, 2008

Henderson, NV

NPS Concessions Management Advisory Board Meeting

October 15-16, 2008

Henderson, NV

2009 NPHA Annual Meeting

March 8-11, 2009

The Madison Hotel

Washington, D.C.

Please mark your calendars and plan to attend!