

Tourism and Recreation

Mesabi Station

January 9th, 2017

5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

In Attendance: Sara Ferkul, Mary Finnegan, Jim Makowsky, Mary McReynolds, Beth Pierce, Allyse Freeman, Larry Killien, Jane Serrano and Desiree Yourczek. Tylor and Sue from Hometown Focus also attended to discuss the Hometown Focus community calendar.

Hometown Focus is currently working on purchasing a new system that will be compatible with websites as well as phone apps. They should be able to share the link to their community calendar on multiply websites, including chambers, tourism bureaus, businesses and hotel/motel websites. People would be able to submit events and they would all be screened by Hometown Focus staff. Once you are on the calendar they are hoping that you will be able to apply multiple filters to the calendar to make it easier to navigate. Hometown Focus will need more man power for the calendar as they move forward. They have also offered to design a mock of the new calendar.

There was discussion about the PR campaign. Jim Makowsky spoke with Jaimie Niska about the event and she was on board. Jaimie will be going through the RFP language and giving Jim her input. Jim will also be speaking with Sheryl Kochevar at IRRRB about a sponsorship.

Discussion about the Tourism Ambassador Program. This is a program that trains employees on the attractions in the area. After a certain amount of time and training the employee and the business can become accredited. There is an educational process to become an ambassador. The organization will come to the area and find the attractions in this area, they will make a workbook, specific for this area. There will be approximately 4 hours of class time and an online test. For the first year, the cost for this service is approximately \$35,000. The maintenance cost is approximately \$1,000 per year. The cost per trainee is approximately \$25 per person. This program builds pride throughout the area. This can also create some great partnerships with larger businesses. Mary mentioned possibly applying for a workforce grant for the cost associated with the training.

There was some discussion about group staying connected. Mary McReynolds suggested a LinkedIn page, the Livable Communities group has one as well. Desiree will be making an account for the group.

Group goal for the next meeting: to create and define a mission statement. Encouraged to begin generating conversation on our LinkedIn page about it.

Next Meeting:

February 13th, 2017

5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Tourism Bureau

Program Overview

Administered through the **Tourism Ambassador Institute**[®], the **Certified Tourism Ambassador™ (CTA) Program** is a certification program that serves to increase tourism by inspiring front-line hospitality employees and volunteers to work together to turn every visitor encounter into a positive, memorable experience.

The premise is simple: If front-line employees and volunteers (those who come into immediate contact with the visitor) provide quality service to visitors (convention attendees, visitors, business travelers, etc.), the visitor is more likely to have a positive experience. Visitors who have a positive experience are more likely to return at some point in the future. They will share their perceptions with their friends. Everyone benefits – the tourist, the hospitality industry, the local economy and, most importantly, the front-line ambassador.

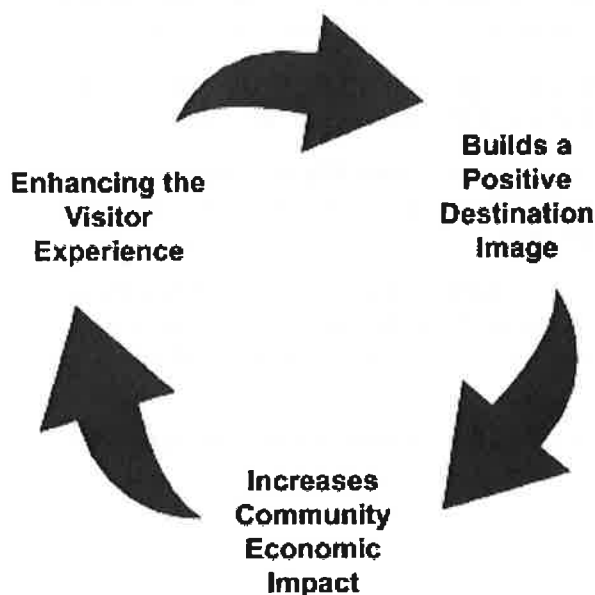
Upon completion of all program requirements, front line employees and volunteers are awarded the **Certified Tourism Ambassador™ (CTA)** designation and may use the initials **CTA** behind their names, i.e., John Smith, CTA. The designation is conferred by the **Tourism Ambassador Institute**[®] (TAI) in cooperation with a Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB), Destination Marketing Organization (DMO), or other tourism entity. These organizations agree to uphold certain standards of practice as a TAI Accredited Provider in order to ensure a high level of program quality over time. Those achieving the CTA designation would be expected to participate in continuous learning activities in order to be re-certified on an annual basis. This certification component strengthens the program in the eyes of the front-line workers and their employers and, as such, has lasting value over time to a city, region, and the nation as the program grows from city to city.

Benefits of the Ambassador Program

The beauty of the CTA designation is that it provides front-line employees and volunteers critical training that helps improve their attitudes and their performance. It gives them a chance to meet one another, learn from each others' experiences, and celebrate together. All of this strengthens the program over time as the program matures.

The benefits are numerous and build on each other, which creates a Benefits Cycle, as follows:

Ambassador's Program Benefits Cycle



This exciting, ground-breaking program has many features that translate into a wide variety of benefits that permeate, and elevate, the entire hospitality and business community.

Training vs. Certification

The concept of tourism ambassadors is not new to the industry. Several cities in the U.S. and Canada have implemented some form of an ambassadors program. These current and past programs range anywhere from downtown ambassador programs that answer visitor queries and monitor safety and cleanliness, to programs for cab drivers where their license to operate is contingent upon completing formal customer service training.

One of the critically important differences between the ***Certified Tourism Ambassador*** Program offered by the **Tourism Ambassador Institute** and these other training programs is that our program will lead to full certification as a ***Certified Tourism Ambassador™***. Certification, unlike training, provides lasting value to the industry and the visitors and tourists it serves.

Aligning to a Destination's Vision

Destinations continually strive to bring visitors and tourists to their area. The CTA Program is a natural fit to bring together a myriad of objectives. The ***Certified Tourism Ambassador™*** Program:

- Unites Front-Line Employees and Volunteers – Brings front-line ambassadors together to achieve a common, shared goal of enhancing the visitor experience.
- Increases Overall Convention & Tourism Business – An enhanced visitor experience leads to more frequent visits and better word-of-mouth about the region, which can lead to additional convention and tourism business.
- Increases the Economic Impact of Tourism – Not only will additional tourism result, but visitors are likely to spend more on each visit if they are directed by ambassadors to venues that match their interests (food, attractions, shopping, entertainment, etc.).
- Builds a Positive Brand and Overall Destination Image – If every experience is a good experience, the city will continue to shine in the eyes of the public making it easier to sell the city to decision makers, such as meeting planners, tour operators and boards of directors. In short, it strengthens brand awareness and top-of-mind perceptions about your area, while the ambassadors deliver your Brand Promise.
- Builds Upon Regional Collaboration – Gives your region a common, collaborative project that will help reinforce the importance of working together, instead of apart, to enhance regional tourism.
- Builds Public and Private Partnerships – Brings key corporations and hospitality organizations (museums, attractions, venues, etc.) together to support a program of critical importance to the future of tourism. It may also help local corporations recruit and retain top talent.
- Enhances the Current “Product,” While Building the Future – Telling visitors about the exciting things that are on the horizon will help drive future business and motivate the Ambassador corps. These shared learning experiences will help to ensure that visitors hear a consistent story about the attributes of your region.

In short, the program has many features that translate into a wide variety of benefits that help strengthen the entire hospitality and business community.

The Body of Knowledge

The Body of Knowledge has been developed through extensive research and field testing. Comprised of four modules, the Body of Knowledge covers the important elements of tourism, regional attributes/attractions and customer service. Learning objectives drive the learning experience and provide participants with a very clear idea about the most important learning outcomes in each Module. Sometimes, these objectives are written to: (a) describe facts the CTA candidates are expected to know; (b) describe principles or concepts that are important in the hospitality and tourism industries; and (c) describe an attitude or specific behavior (performance) that is expected of the ***Certified Tourism Ambassador***.

Program Customization

The CTA Program has been designed to be customized to meet the needs of each Accredited Provider, while staying true to the established curriculum or Body of Knowledge. The TAI works with the Accredited Provider through six important phases:

- Phase One – Research & Planning
- Phase Two – Customized Program Development
- Phase Three – Field Testing
- Phase Four – Train the Trainer
- Phase Five – Program Roll-Out
- Phase Six – Ongoing Program Management

A variety of customization options are available to fit the needs and budgets of organizations of any size. Contact the TAI for more information.

The CTA Designation

Benefits to Ambassadors

What's in it for the front-line employee or volunteer?

- Provides you with a meaningful credential that is visible to visitors, friends and family (John Doe, CTA)
- Increases your company's business, which may mean increases in compensation
- Builds skills you'll have for a lifetime
- Helps bolster your resume to show to prospective employers
- Supports your career development
- Helps you network with – and learn from – your peers across the region
- Helps you stay "in the know" with regular updates

Earning the CTA Designation

Certification requirements will be established on an annual basis by the Tourism Ambassador Institute® (TAI). A front-line employee or volunteer who aspires to become a CTA is required to complete these requirements in order to earn the designation and be authorized to use it. The Accredited Provider, on behalf of the TAI, will evaluate whether each candidate has satisfactorily:

- Completed the required reading and pre-class exercises

- Demonstrated active participation in all classroom exercises
- Completed all assignments
- Earned a passing score on the CTA examination
- Demonstrated a commitment to becoming certified as a CTA and to re-certifying annually

CTA Recertification Requirements

This program has been established with initial certification followed by re-certification annually thereafter. The annual certification renewal requirement ensures that CTAs are kept up-to-date on important new developments and that they participate in continuous learning in subjects comprising the CTA body of knowledge, especially regarding new developments in their city/region.

Recertification requirements will be established on an annual basis by the Tourism Ambassador Institute[®] (TAI). The Accredited Provider, on behalf of the TAI, will evaluate whether each CTA has satisfied the recertification requirements. To renew certification, CTAs must have earned a specified number of points during the preceding 12 month period. Points may be earned by:

- Participating in Planned Ambassador Events
- Attending relevant conferences, workshops, seminars, etc.
- Visiting Area Attractions and Venues (restaurants, museums, festivals, etc.)
- Learning about New Developments
- Staying Current With and Using Available Resources

Recertification also ensures that the program maintains momentum and evolves over time to meet the needs of CTAs and visitors.

CTA Identification and Recognition

Upon successful completion of the *Certified Tourism Ambassador™* Program requirements, successful candidates may begin using the CTA designation behind their names. They will also receive:

- A certificate, suitable for framing, showing their designation as a CTA
- A pin identifying them as a Certified Tourism Ambassador
- CTA "Rewards", such as discounts at participating restaurants, attractions, etc.

Expectations of CTAs

CTAs are expected to assume the responsibility of strengthening the status of the designation in the eyes of their employer and their city/region by:

- Continuing their education at every opportunity
- Enhancing their product knowledge – the city's restaurant, attractions, and everything else a visitor may want to do or inquire about.
- Taking advantage of discounts or free offerings from participating supporters to experience their "product" and in order to be able to recommend it first-hand to visitors.
- Celebrating their achievement with their co-workers
- Maintaining their credential on an annual basis by completing re-certification requirements
- Encouraging their colleagues to become CTAs

Individuals working in Rochester's hospitality industry are invited to be trained as **Certified Tourism Ambassadors** (CTAs). CTAs exemplify excellence in hospitality by delivering quality guest experiences and serving as knowledgeable ambassadors for our city. The CTA program is part of Rochester's one-of-a-kind hospitality initiative, Experience Accreditation.

Program Overview

Over 1,000 individuals have been trained as Certified Tourism Ambassadors since the CTA program was launched in Rochester in 2011. The program is a nationally recognized certification program for the tourism and hospitality industries. Tours and classes are offered to all individuals involved in the tourism/hospitality industry (Mayo Clinic employees, hotel staff, restaurants, volunteers, etc.). The program teaches best practices and ensures that CTAs understand their role in turning every visitor encounter into a positive experience and helping to position Rochester as a destination of choice.

There is a one-time, non-refundable, non-transferrable application fee of \$40 per person for the four-hour Mayo Clinic/City tour and classroom session. There is also an annual \$29 renewal fee. The program is designed for everyone including frontline staff, management, and executive staff, and provides national certification.

The City of Rochester and Mayo Clinic have supported the development of our destination specific program (Rochester DMC Ambassador Program) since its launch in March 2011.

CTA Benefits

Upon successful completion of the program, CTAs receive:

- A certificate and gold pin, showing your designation as a CTA
- Invitations to CTA program networking events
- CTA "rewards" through discounts and participating restaurants, attractions, etc.

How To Register

Visit www.CTANetwork.com for more information about the CTA Program or to view our upcoming training dates. As an Accredited Provider, the Rochester Convention & Visitors Bureau (RCVB) presents the official CTA designation on behalf of the Tourism Ambassador Institute.

For more information about the Certified Tourism Ambassador program, contact:

Keeley Hruska, Director of Visitor Experience, khruska@rochestercvb.org, 507-288-4331.