

## **DESTINATION MASTER PLAN RFP SCOPE (Draft 8/07)**

St. Johns County, Florida is seeking a qualified firm (consultant) to conduct a review of existing county-wide tourism development assets and programs and develop a comprehensive Destination Master Plan.

### **BACKGROUND SUMMARY**

- St. Johns County has a unique opportunity approaching with the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ponce de Leon's landing in Florida and the subsequent "discovery of America." While there is no consensus among historians on where in Florida Ponce de Leon first stepped foot in 1513, it is widely perceived to have been in the St. Augustine area. Two years after this national celebration in 2013, the City of St. Augustine celebrates its 450<sup>th</sup> birthday as the oldest, continuously occupied European settlement in North America. A great deal of national – and even international – attention will be focused on St. Augustine and St. Johns County over a four to five year period. Some of that attention has already surfaced as Jamestown and Virginia celebrate their 400<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- Key tourism generators include the area's historic significance including unique architecture spanning four centuries which gives the area a distinct European flavor; 42 miles of Atlantic beaches and intracoastal waterway with significant stretches undeveloped; the World Golf Hall of Fame and headquarters of the PGA TOUR in Ponte Vedra Beach, plus 18 golf courses with varying degrees of public access – all of which provide a background for numerous restaurants, family attractions, resorts, bed & breakfast inns and other lodging options.
- St. Johns County is perceived by potential and actual visitors as being a strong arts community with many artists and authors choosing to live here, inspired by its eclectic natural and built beauty. St. Augustine has been included in the top 100 arts communities several times in the past decade and the number and quality of art galleries would be the envy of larger communities.
- The area host several festivals and events throughout the year, however, most of the events have little impact in attracting overnight visitors. The largest event – THE PLAYERS Championship has a significant impact as a tourism demand generator and stimulates incremental economic activity through attendance during the event proper and generates golf rounds on the TPC golf courses and at several others within the county. Other events

which serve to attract overnight guests are the First Coast Nature and Birding Festival, Triple Crown Sports Series, the Gamble Rogers Folk Festival and the annual Kingfish Tournament.

- The area hosted more than 3.8 million visitors in calendar year 2006. Direct spending by the visitors exceeded \$672 million. Approximately 60% of the visitors spent at least one night in St. Johns County's paid lodging. There are approximately 14,000 residents employed within the tourism industry. According to a 2002 University of Florida study, the industry supported 23,000 jobs within St. Johns County.
- County wide, hotel business mix by dollar volume is approximately 60% leisure and 40% meetings and incentives. Almost half of the leisure business comes from within Florida. International (UK and Germany) visitors constitute about 10% of the total.

### **Destination Master Plan (DMP) Scope**

The DMP should establish short-term goals in preparation of the attention we expect to receive surrounding the Ponce de Leon and city birthday celebrations.

- Review existing assets, procedures and programs for tourism development with regards to ROI and establishing benchmarks;
- Maximize bed tax revenues to enhance tourism development and tourism management through the visitor experience of area natural resources, recreation opportunities, heritage and cultural resources.
- What should we do to leverage the events to establish a strong international brand as a heritage and cultural destination;
- What should we do to assure a quality and authentic visitor experience;
- Provide facility / resource standards to brand St. Johns County and manage delivery of a consistent quality visitor experience;
- Prioritize a list of recommendations for infrastructure, capital projects, and tourism demand generators – both public and private sector - deemed necessary to maximize these opportunities. Identify and prioritize a list of possible funding options for projects including the Local Option Tourist Development Tax (LOTDT);
- Develop a strategic based plan for best use of LOTDT currently used for funding festivals and events (Category II) in order to utilize cultural events as a tourism demand generator, a quality economic development hook, and to enhance resident's quality of life with special emphasis on attracting overnight visitors during non-peak tourism periods.

The DMP should also address long range goals to provide for a strong tourism industry with positive economic and social benefits for St. Johns County, to include, but not limited to:

- How should we protect, preserve and celebrate the key assets of St. Johns County's tourism economy, including the natural, built, heritage, and cultural treasures of the of the area; pursuing tourism in a way that supports improvements in quality of life, respectful of carrying capacities at key visitor access points, delivering an authentic visitor experience and maintaining a high visitor yield;
- Recommend a monitoring procedure of key indicators base on the Tourism Area Lifecycle Model or other germane economic models;
- Define opportunities for private sector to provide business response through investment in areas surrounding public sector facilities that are managed for tourism, recreation and cultural activities;
- Update county recreational opportunities related to visitor demand, usage, capacities and standards of service by adopting additional data, analysis, goals, objectives and policies into the County Comprehensive plan and Interlocal Governmental Agreements