

The Tuskegee News

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Local leaders meet to discuss tourism plan

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The Alabama Rural Action Commission of the Region 5 Tourism Committee met recently at the Tuskegee Human and Civil Rights Multicultural Center to continue discussions for a regional tourism plan.

“We are working to enhance our already existing tourism destinations,” said State Representative Peblin Warren (D-Tuskegee), one of the organizers for the committee. “We are looking for a collaborative effort in our region.”

Noah Hopkins, one of the committee co-chairs, presented the idea of having a comprehensive booklet to showcase all the counties in the region. Hopkins believes a comprehensive booklet will increase tourism for the entire region, even though he also supports a separate booklet for Macon County.

Fred Gray, known for his legal work as a Civil Rights attorney, acknowledged the work of Hopkins in helping with the opening of the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site in October and art exhibits at the Multicultural Center.

“I want to thank Mr. Hopkins personally,” said Gray. “The opening was a success and enjoyed by many.”

One of the sub-committees for Region 5 is marketing, which is looking at ways to forge a cohesive marketing plan for the region.

A regional booklet, featuring several of the businesses and attractions in the region with discounts included, was suggested.

Citizens were encouraged to be aware and informed about the Film Bill that has been introduced in the Alabama Legislature. The legislation would develop a film initiative package to attract filmmakers to Alabama.

Charlie Thompson, chairman of the Tuskegee Area Chamber of Commerce (TACC), pointed out a film about the Tuskegee Airmen is being shot outside Alabama and that an effort is necessary to prevent future movies on Alabama heroes from being filmed elsewhere.

Francis Smiley of the Alabama Tourism Department indicated that Region 5 needs to have a sub-committee to work on the film initiative package.

The marketing committee, chaired by T.C. Coley of the Multicultural Center, discussed several other marketing methods. One was to have a tour for all the areas in the region that have flea markets to highlight the markets to attract visitors. Coley also pointed out festivals in the region need to be pinpointed and made a high priority in promoting them.

Shirley Baxter of the National Park Service presented an update of historical sites at Tuskegee University, which



Francis Smiley, Noah Hopkins and Rep. Peblin Warren, pictured from left, organizers of the Region 5 Tourism Committee, preside over a recent meeting at the Tuskegee Human and Civil Rights Multicultural Center where

leaders discussed a regional tourism plan.

includes renovation of the Oaks and a new exhibit at the George Washington Carver Museum.

Tuskegee University has collaborated with NASA to continue the work of Dr. Carver with peanuts and sweet potatoes to include research for space exploration. An exhibit featuring the NASA research will be on display in the Carver Museum.

Another attraction discussed was VictoryLand. The operation's CEO Lewis Benefield hosted a lunch for the committee and talked about VictoryLand's expansion.

"We are delighted to have the group eat at the new buffet at VictoryLand," said Benefield. "The renovation and the construction at Victoryland are going well and are expected to be finished in fall of 2009."

The group had a concern about the lodging tax, which will be applied to the hotel at VictoryLand.

Warren charged the group to find ways to generate revenue to help build tourism in the region. Revenue can come from other Regional organizations and the Alabama Department of Tourism.

One final suggestion was to come up with a common thread to develop a regional name. f

Meetings are held monthly and rotate from city to city within the 10 counties making up Region 5.