



# Wye Valley & Forest of Dean Tourism Association

0845 053 1173 ~ info@wyedeantourism.co.uk



## CHAIRMEN'S REPORT 2009

2009 Has been a very busy year. The appointment of John Bosley as our Admin Assistant, with his IT skills, has considerably enhanced the smooth day-to-day running of the Association. Our membership now hovers around the 275 mark and our operating annual budget is around £35,000. We have come a long way.

### Eligible Businesses

- a) We have now introduced 2 new categories for businesses – Wedding Venues, which are listed with Conferences, and Group Accommodation.
- b) We have also decided that we will now allow accommodation that has chosen not to be graded into membership. They will appear on the new website as UNGRADED. This particularly will allow more group accommodation and bunkhouse venues to appear. Ungraded properties will not appear on any council websites nor in printed matter.

### Publications

- a) We have produced the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Eating Out Guide with a print run of 50,000.
- b) With a grant of £5,000 from Monmouthshire County Council, we have produced an Older People's Directory of places to stay, attractions etc. This had an initial print run of 10,000 and has been so well received that we have been able to fund a reprint of a further 10,000.
- c) In planning – a guide with 12 walks designed for the Less Able – this will be produced in 2010, funded in part by Capital Region Tourism (CRT), the Regional Tourism Partnership for SE Wales, and Forest of Dean Tourism.
- d) The Accommodation guide will not be reprinted as we now have equivalent entries in the FODDC guide.

### Internet & Website

We now feel that the marketing emphasis has shifted from printed material to the web and have spent the TA's funds accordingly.

- a) We were able, with another grant from CRT, to participate in 3 days' Social Media training courses. This has resulted in the setting up of a Blog on our site and some basic knowledge of Twitter and Facebook which we hope to develop in the future as an innovative marketing tool.
- b) In order to drive more traffic to our site, we have invested £2,000 in a google adwords campaign, based around our accommodation, in an effort to attract more visitors into our area. This campaign has been very successful (in terms of additional hits to our site) and we intend to repeat it for 2010.
- c) We have introduced the selling of limited 'banner ads' onto the website as a fund-raising exercise which will make our site virtually self-financing. These banner ads have achieved very good hit rates and all slots are fully sold for 2010.
- d) We commissioned an additional video for the website based around the Heritage of the area. This will soon be ready for loading on the site.

e) In the autumn, we commissioned Vitalis to give our website a completely new look and to incorporate many new features. This represents a major part of our marketing campaign. It now features much greater geographic recognition i.e. it is possible to find all the facilities close to the business you are looking at; there is an improved Members' section, Events section and probably the most significant addition is the ability to show customer reviews for every business.

### **Funding**

We are very fortunate this year in having secured various different pots of funding, all emanating from CRT, which is one of the major benefits of our cross-border activities.

- a) Social Media courses, as above
- b) Purchase of 3 pop-up stands representing 3 categories: Accommodation, Attractions/Activities/ and Food (Eating Out), for use at shows and exhibitions
- c) "Joint working with Clusters" used to fund the "On Your Doorstop" meetings
- d) "Secretariat Services & Database Management" used to pay part of our admin costs
- e) "Membership recruitment and retention initiatives" - ditto -
- f) "Skills Development for Businesses – linked with Older Peoples Strategy" being used to part fund the new Walks for Less Able booklet

### **Cross-Border Working**

As a body of private commercial businesses, we do not need to recognise country or county borders. Clearly this is more of an issue for public bodies but we are delighted to say that we have been able to maintain and indeed strengthen our links both to Gloucestershire and to Monmouthshire and SE Wales.

We are still aiming to make closer links with Herefordshire but do have an Association membership of its DMP. So our representative was consulted in the recent commissioned review process of the workings of the Visit Herefordshire DMP, the outcome of which is awaited.

At our last AGM, members voted in favour of the TA joining Cotswold & Forest of Dean Tourism (DMO) and we were able to negotiate an annual 'corporate membership' fee of £7,000 which gives every member a listing in the FODDC Visitor Guide with its nationwide distribution as well as all the other benefits of DMO membership. In effect, this free membership is saving businesses a £100 additional cost of DMO membership, and is therefore attracting even more businesses to join us. Through our members' high turnout in the recent Board elections, we have achieved two additional seats on the DMO Board, which has given our area a much enhanced representation.

### **Advertising**

- a) We have arrangements for free TA advertisements in the FODDC Visitor Guide, the MCC Visitor Guide and also the Herefordshire Visitor Guide. This effectively gets our Association details distributed nationwide. In exchange we give each county a free slot in our Do Something Different booklet.
- b) We are also trialing an entry in the Coach Drivers' Handbook with a whole page ad paid for by 6 Attractions with a large editorial on our area. This will appear early in 2010.

## **Exhibitions**

We have had stands, manned by members and primarily by Ros & Alistair Robertson, at the Outdoor Show at the NEC, at the Abergavenny Food Festival, the Monmouth Show, and the Forest Food Showcase.

## **General Matters**

- a) With potentially the most significant impact on our businesses, is the closing of all the **Forest TICs**. After strong objections, this was put off until September 2009. Your committee took the line of not trying to fight the inevitable but to work strenuously to find other ways of disseminating information to visitors and locals alike. Following questions to Cabinet, we have secured racking for leaflets in the main part of FODDC reception and are actively encouraging all our members to display our booklets in their businesses. There will also be signage from the town centre. We are in discussions with Forest Connections at Beechenhurst and are hopeful they can take over many of the TIC duties.
- b) We have purchased **200 leaflet holders** which have been distributed to members.
- c) Glide Media offer a service of **free delivery of all their leaflets** to all members, throughout the year.
- d) **Ryder Cup** - See Attached Report
  
- e) We have bestowed **Honourary Membership** on Brian Deakin (our Treasurer), and Karen Davies (our Vice Chairman) both of whom have now ceased trading but continue to work tirelessly on behalf of the Association.

## **ADDENDUM TO CHAIRMEN'S REPORT 2009 - RYDER CUP**

Ryder Cup 2010 is to be held at Celtic Manor Resort on the week beginning 27th September with the tournament taking place 1st - 3rd October 2010.

Over the past two years, and on behalf of WVFDTA, we have been to Open Meetings as well as having specific discussions with Rob Holt Chief Executive of Ryder Cup Ltd.

Our meetings and discussions have focused on how and in what form this prestigious sporting event could benefit businesses within our area, and in particular accommodation providers. This was reported to members in a previous Weekly Digest.

It has been said by tourism professionals that it will be the legacy of this high profile event being held in Gwent that will benefit the area, with potential visitors becoming more aware of South East Wales as a golfing destination.

For Information.

It has been clearly stated that access to the event will ONLY be by Park & Ride. It has also been stated that the Usk Showground will ONLY be a Park & Ride facility for people WORKING at the event. Llanwern Park & Ride will be the designated site for people coming to the event from our cross border area.

In conclusion.

We do not feel that super-enhanced rates for accommodation that have been discussed in the Press are actually achievable and are trying to disassociate the Association from adverse publicity as we feel it will impact badly on the reputation of our area.