



Our Mission: To support our membership through cooperative economic development and community service.

**REPORT TO THE CITY
HOMER CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & VISITOR CENTER
October 28, 2013
Jim Lavrakas / Executive Director**

Mayor Wythe, City Council members, City Manager, and residents listening on the radio tonight. I'm Jim Lavrakas, executive director of the Homer Chamber of Commerce & Visitor Center, and I'm happy to come before you tonight to report on how the grant from the City was used last year in the marketing of Homer, and how successful those efforts were.

But please remember that my time as the executive director has been less than 2 months, so I am making my best estimations of the effectiveness of individual marketing efforts.

I'd first like to acknowledge the relationship the Chamber has with the City of Homer. For all intents and purposes, the Chamber has an agreement with the city to provide a service. For any grant money that comes from the City you contract us to market and promote the City of Homer as a place to do business, and a destination where people can enjoy the unique qualities that make Homer stand out from other places in Alaska.

No City funds go towards the operating costs of the Chamber -- no salaries, utilities, or other expenses are paid with those dollars. It all goes into marketing.

It's an immense job, the marketing of our town, and we're the obvious organization to take on that job that the City may not have the resources to do.

This past year we reached out to writers and travel professionals by working with our partners at the Alaska Tourism Industry Association and the Kenai Peninsula Tourism Marketing Council to leverage our advertising dollars with theirs to promote the peninsula as a destination for Alaskans and Outside visitors.

ATIA does the vetting of the professionals we actually host. That means, that we have only had to focus our energies on travel writers and professionals who the State's public relations firm actually feels have potential to reach a market that will help bring more travelers to our area. Of course, some of the publicity we get from these folks is spread out over several years. A writer who goes on a bear viewing adventure, for example, may write about it soon afterwards, AND may use the details and/or photos they collected in future stories about the Homer area.

Some of the professionals we hosted this year were:

With our partners at the Alaska Travel Industry Association we hosted 14 travel professionals from Trek America and Grand American Adventures for several days at the beginning of August. They got to see that our town is still a "lively place" on the shoulder season. They are taking back with them some new adventures, dining, and lodging options for their targeted audiences in England, Germany, the Netherlands, and the U.S. We should start to see the results of that in the next couple of year.

The Cooke & Haggerty party came to town in August contracted by McClatchy Newspapers to write on affordable family travel. Anne Cooke, a travel and adventure writer, is a regular contributor to the McClatchy-Tribune wire service, a other dozen major daily newspapers, and has been blogging for the Huffington Post since late 2010.

We hosted Elizabeth Hey from AAA's VIA Magazine, who will have a story focusing on fishing scheduled for their Jan 2014 issue, but who also did a great feature article in February of this year, on "Where the Bears Are".

In looking at last year's grant of \$41,000 from the City, as you can see in your packets *more than* \$21,000 out of the total budget of \$62,000 went towards local marketing and advertising, for both design, publication, and printing. That's a nice "Buy Local, Shop Local" shot in the arm.

The dues from our members paid the remaining \$21,000 in that \$62,000 marketing budget.

I think that advertising our events in our local newspapers is a wise thing, but after my years of experience in the newspaper business, I've come to understand that there is a limit to the effectiveness of print advertising these days. I believe that a more thoughtful approach to advertising is warranted on all fronts.

I'm looking at more targeted online ads, limiting the number of print ads in the various publications that come calling, and sticking with the tried and true: The Alaska Milepost, and Fish Alaska Magazine, the state visitors guide and Alaska Magazine, where we've had good editorial coverage in the past year.

My contacts at the various media outlets in Anchorage affords the Chamber the kind of publicity for Homer that you cannot buy. Here's an example of that when I engineered a daily photo update from this past Shorebird Festival. For a

couple of hundred dollars I hosted Anchorage Daily News staff photographer Bob Hallinen for a week and the resulting space in the Anchorage paper, *if* you could buy space on the Front page, was valued at well over \$10,000.

This is the kind of publicity that I am able to generate with very little expense.

So, here's what I pledge to you. I promise to scrutinize all marketing dollars going out of the Chamber's doors to make sure they are spent prudently. I promise to focus on the core programs that have been so successful, like our Jackpot Halibut Derby, and those community events like the 4th of July Parade, Winter Carnival, Cleanup Day, Getting to Know Homer, and community forums, that contribute to the quality of life here in our fair city.

One of the efforts I've already started is a rebranding program for our Chamber. A simple revision of our logo produced this image of a modern seaport town with lots to offer as a destination. Just follow your compass. I'll continue to update all the materials that come out of the Chamber to bring any marketing we do more current, consistent, and contemporary.

I plan on exploring the possibility of having a presence on 4th Avenue in Anchorage, where many travelers fresh off their planes and cruise ships seek out the best destinations in the Southcentral area. We want to make them come to Homer.

I look forward, as I know we all do, to the healthy return of salmon to the Nick Dudiak Lagoon. I watch and filmed with excitement the stocking of the 130,000 plus coho smolt into the The Fishing Hole this past May. Those fish should come charging back next Spring! I plan on creating a "They're Coming" campaign that will target Alaskans first and help bring back the glory days of our man-made fishing hole.

Friends of the Fishing Hole, a Chamber program that has gone by the wayside, will be making a comeback and make a late run of coho salmon a possibility again.

We are one of a few seaside towns in Alaska that does not have a webcam set up out at our harbor. When I lived in Ketchikan, before I went to work, I checked the webcam of the charter boat floats just to see the action. I'll be investigating getting our own webcam to create the same excitement for people who want to see the action at *our* Port.

And finally, I will work on a new approach to drawing new residents to our town with an updated relocation program, both on our website and in the materials we send out to folks enquiring about moving to Homer. With the Google eCity award this year we can plan a promotion to those online business entrepreneurs looking for a savvy place where they can start a business and raise a family in a healthy place, like Homer.

So, I finish by saying it's business as usual at the Chamber, and it's not. Where my predecessor was a cheerleader, I'm a project leader. My background is in producing a daily product driven by deadlines that could not be missed, and I know how to lead a team.

I ask you to trust us at the Chamber to do our very best as your contractor to market and promote all of Homer to all of our potential visitors and future residents.

Local Advertising	\$ 21,383.00
Hosting	\$ 6,155.00
Online	\$ 1,600.00
Other Print Ads	\$ 16,500.00
Radio	\$ 4,480.00
Trade Shows	\$ 8,844.00
TV	\$ 17,500.00
TOTAL	\$ 76,462.00

2013 MARKETING BUDGET

