

Feb. 2, 2007 ~ Cultural Economy Summit III

Breakout Session: Tourism and Cultural Economy

Chuck Morse, Assistant Secretary La. Office of CRT

Veronique LeMelle, Director Div. of the Arts

This session is a visionary session between arts/culture and tourism.

1st Question

How many people are here representing tourism? About 50%, And how many people are here with culture/arts? Chuck Morse said "Both groups should raise hands both times because tourism in Louisiana cannot exist without culture/arts"

The state is faced with the challenge of addressing the gap between the arts/culture and tourism. We must strengthen relationship between local tourism and statewide tourism.

Chuck Morse

Tourism and culture are like a family. All are part of a cultural/tourism industry. "Culture sells it and tourism gels it." Both bring people together.

A lot of times tourism tries to take culture for granted. This mentality has to stop. Both are equally important to selling the 'experience' of Louisiana.

There are such things as cultural tourists that visit Louisiana. Tourism will recover because of culture. Louisiana needs to work together and recover with culture.

Chuck's Vision: Looking at our unique history in Louisiana and common threads that link it to the rest of the world is what is going to highlight the experience of visiting this state. Louisiana history is unique and the heritage is what is going to 'sell it.'

LA needs to take advantage of assets that are within the state and make them marketable. Tourism needs culture to sell LA and we can't take culture for granted.

LA citizens need to be entrepreneurs as well and bring talents to the marketplace.

-Can't develop anything with out exploring history. People here are the 'story.'

-This 'story' can't forget the originals and natives to Louisiana.

-This relationship between history of the people and the office CRT needs to be an open dialogue and needs voices of the people to better position them in the community.

Veronique LeMelle

4 points that are most important arts/culture

1) Preservation

2) Promotion of aspects

3) Creation of new work

4) Celebration of new traditions

How we get these outcomes is very important!

- Need to allocate responsibilities to each region
- Need to set time frames and realistic expectations

We are planting the seed for future events in New Orleans and also anniversary of Katrina. We are trying to use Katrina not to look back but to move forward and making the relationship between tourism/culture better than it was before.

The best example of Tourism and Arts and Culture working together was for the Louisiana Purchase Anniversary. The relationship lasted for about a year but it did not sustain! Le Melle's overarching idea is to integrate tourism/culture and put them on the same page throughout the years to come.

Audience Ideas and Questions

-Citizens also need a return on the investments they put into the state. Infrastructure for arts and culture are non-existent for citizens to enjoy. How can tourism grow if there aren't appropriate venues? Why aren't there more theaters in this metro-city?

LeMelle and Morse response: These issues are important but we can't just focus there. We have to look at major revenue makers in the city and see if we can generate our own revenue to rebuild infrastructures. It's a comprehensive approach to a larger picture. The session we are in focuses on LA arts and culture combined with office of CRT. Arts and tourism need to be planning and visioning on same table looking at the bigger picture.

-What are small towns to do that have a thirst for arts, when they want funding and all the funds go to New Orleans? Towns like Slidell that have gotten a huge influx since the storm are left falling through the cracks.

-Morse response: Festivals in these towns drive funds for arts. The more celebrated these festivals become, the more attention will come to the arts. All funding can't come to New Orleans. People are looking for funding across the state. Several districts around the state have been very vocal about dispersing funding for arts organizations. All towns in LA need strong local infrastructures to make arts experience important and worthwhile to citizens. Those things drive funding.

- Another point is that many smaller towns don't know where to go or who to talk to in order to receive money.

-Organizations around the state have programs in place to unite all the cultural and tourists groups in the area. How can we make that information available to everyone. Can there be a way to package activities here like "Travelocity?" Is Louisiana capable of selling a cultural experience to a national audience like New York and Los Angeles with huge arts and cultural travel activities.

LeMelle and Morse and Robert Vitrano response: YES!! There has to be a central communication station where people can package and advertise events. Carole Bebelles elaborated that there is an engine that drives tourism, which is culture. We need to close the gap between tourism and culture so both can be addressed fairly. The question is "How do we bridge that gap between the two industries?" If we can answer that then we can better package and sell the experience to tourists.

-This leads to another discussion about the people and the authenticity of 'selling something.' Tourist and citizens alike can know that they are receiving an authentic product. The people need to be included in this planning process just as well as a planning committee or a board. The people are what tourists keep coming back for. One man mentioned Robbie Vitrano said: "We live in New Orleans for the same reasons other people want to visit."

(Great point). We need to make sure that the package is inclusive of all people. He also said rebuilding the authenticity of the city and making sure the real talents of the city are included will then lead to rebuilding things, quality of life, and infrastructure. The city needs better internal communication system.

Marc Mouton of Arts Council N.O. talked about the New Orleans Fun Guide which is a website that is trying to be that "one stop shop" for events, tourist attractions, and arts in the city. The only problem is getting people to constantly contribute to this initiative and make the process streamlined and inclusive to all groups. He mentioned non-profits can advertise for free. The calendar was to be a universal page that shows all events to people that visit the site.

Another person elaborated on the gay and lesbian culture that really contributes to tourism and arts community. "DECAFEST" is a cultural festival given near Katrina anniversary that is a multi-disciplinary arts festival that is stemmed from Decadence. The gay community here is strong and wanting to rebuild the culture here as well.

Morse asks the audience again, "How do we find out about all these activities throughout the state? They are all great but how can the state office keep track?"

-One suggestion was build partnerships and better utilize programs that exist already. There are tons of databases that inform people of events but it has to be centralized and maintained.

-Another lady mentioned that Louisiana Folklife Association is supposed to find out about arts and culture in the state but it doesn't. (From that point several people elaborated on different folk life and preservation activities that are going on in their towns. This leads back to the idea that communication need to be better and that there has to be a centralized place where people can relay information)

-Last comment was that Louisiana need to be marketed on a national level with maybe a Sirius Radio show, A segment on Food Network (Emerils isn't even filmed here), and more specials in magazines and Travel Channel.