

## FUNDING: Chamber receives room tax revenue for marketing

*Continued from page 1*

the City spend a portion of the room-tax revenue to fund tourism promotion or tourist-related facilities. The rest of the revenue goes into the City general fund to help fund a variety of City services and programs.

The Chamber is seeking a significant increase in the amount of TRT funding it receives. In the Chamber's annual report to the Council, Executive Director Judy Trego requested a \$250,000 increase from the TRT funds for increased marketing and promotions for Sisters Country, in order to address a number of action items outlined in the Sisters Country Vision.

The current three-year contract went into effect on July 1, 2017 and the City and Chamber may agree to extend the term of the agreement for up to three renewal terms of three years each. Due to the increase in tourism in the city, and the results of the Sisters Country Vision plan, the City would like to enter into in-depth negotiations with the Chamber to assess where things stand now and where the two entities go from here.

"The City is looking forward to what can be and not back on what has been," explained City Manager Cory Misley.

The first meeting took place last week, with Misley and City Councilor Michael Preedin representing the City and Trego and Nick Beasley, board chair, representing the Chamber. Misley indicated this was the beginning of negotiations that will occur over the next several months.

According to Misley, the City's fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30 and the Chamber's budget is based on a calendar year, so there is plenty of time to finalize a new agreement without impacting the Chamber's 2020 budget.

In the Sisters Country Vision plan focus area Prosperous Sisters, the

number-wone strategy identified is to make Sisters a four-season tourist and visitor destination. The plan would be to strategically develop Sisters Country's tourism and destination economy, increasing the number of shoulder season and winter events and attractions, such as performances, festivals, retreats, educational speaker series, trainings and sports tournaments.

The actions proposed to support that strategy include establishing a Sisters Event Committee and hiring a full-time event coordinator, creating a permanent multi-use events center, establishing four-season competitive tournaments, developing a Sisters Country Winter Festival, encouraging regional events partnerships, and building an ice rink and fly-fishing pond. The lead partners for that strategy are the City and the Chamber.

Misley indicated, "The City is going to take an active role in making Sisters a four-season tourist destination." He would like to see that goal expanded to include more than just new events and venues. Making the city safe and accessible is part of the visitor's experience, such as possibly contracting for sidewalk snow removal.

There has never been a strategic plan developed for tourism. Misley would like

to be able to have hard-evidence-based conversations about tourism. He said the City, Chamber, and citizens "are all in it together."

"We're at a bit of an intersection on this subject. Where do we go from here while practicing good stewardship of the City's dollars?" Misley said.

The Chamber's Trego offered, "As we move into the review portion of our contract, we look forward to continuing the 42-year partnership we have had with the City in our efforts to draw overnight visitors in shoulder and winter seasons."

In fiscal 2002-03, the City collected \$155,102 in transient room taxes and the Chamber received 28 percent of that amount or \$43,861. In 2012-13, the figures were \$330,912 TRT collected with \$109,201 or 33 percent to the Chamber.

In 2017-18, the new contract set a cap of \$250,000 from the TRT for the Chamber. That year the Chamber's \$250,000 amounted to 42 percent of the TRT, which was \$594,874. By 2018-19, the TRT proceeds came to \$648,398 and the \$250,000 was 39 percent of the total.

Those increases are reflective of the same trend throughout Central Oregon. County room tax revenues

rose from \$3,009,283 in 2002 to \$7,035,980 in 2018. All told, in 2018 Central Oregon had more than 4.5 million overnight visitors with direct spending of more than \$830 million for a total economic impact that exceeded \$1 billion.

The Chamber's requested increase would devote \$50,000 for recruiting an event coordinator, \$50,000 for Sisters winter and shoulder seasons activities promotion and collaboration, \$25,000 for increased Visitor Center hours, \$25,000 for a marketing social media program, \$50,000 for a campaign to promote Sisters as an artisanal center, and increased visibility in the Portland/Seattle/Northern California markets.

They are also requesting a five-year building lease.

According to state law, the City would be required to provide the Chamber with \$185,000, which is less than the \$250,000 the City has provided over each of the last three years.

Trego pointed out, "We leverage outside dollars from visitors to enhance our community with stabilized, year-round jobs, community development, and a growing menu of artistic and cultural events like the Sisters Rodeo, the Sisters Outdoor Quilt Show, the Sisters Folk Festival, and other activities for everyone living in Sisters."

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*Jean Metz*

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## SUDOKU SOLUTION

*for puzzle on page 20*

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9	6	3	8	2	4	1	5	7
7	4	5	1	9	3	2	8	6
5	8	7	4	6	2	9	3	1
6	3	2	9	1	5	8	7	4
4	1	9	3	8	7	6	2	5
1	7	6	2	4	8	5	9	3
2	9	4	5	3	1	7	6	8
3	5	8	6	7	9	4	1	2

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