



2014 Special Events Strategy

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Introduction

This document proposes a general strategy with which to approach the 2014 special events season along with specific suggestions for events programming; however, the reader is asked to keep in mind that as a working (and living) document, and because of the OBT's belief that, if something can be done better, good is not enough, it should be expected that strategies may be affected as new information is acquired, options are considered, and if deemed viable, embraced.

Special events are primarily intended to increase retail sales within the City of Montrose and tourism activities within the immediate region which will necessarily impact local hospitality and other businesses while also providing entertainment and pastime opportunities for the general community. Funding for these efforts is provided through designated line items from the Retail Sales Enhancement (RSE) and Tourism Promotion (TP) Funds.

The administration and management of the RSE and TP funds is the responsibility of the Office of Business and Tourism (OBT), a division of the City Manager's Office. Established in February 2013, the OBT is the newest city governmental department. The undertaking of the RSE and TP programs is additionally guided by the RSE and TP Advisory Committees comprised of representative members from the community that provide feedback as to the efficacy of programs, voice the comments of their constituents and offer input on new programs.

As part of an overall change in programmatic direction which included revisiting and rethinking the RSE and TP programs, the OBT sponsored a community-wide forum at the Montrose Pavilion Event Center on March 11, 2013 that attracted City of Montrose and Montrose County citizens ready to discuss questions such as the features of the existing retail sales enhancement and tourism programs they believed were most effective, which areas of the programs required increased emphasis or improvement, and what specific elements should be added to the existing programs.

The gathering provided OBT staff with fresh ideas to add to the bucket of approaches already being considered; however, with regards to special events programming the message was loud and clear: the historical approaches had not been very effective. Moreover, there was a call for increased accountability from the program administering entity as well as the organizations that were receiving assistance along with a desire to



measure, to the extent possible, the efficacy of the variety of special events as well as to continue conversation relating to the introduction of community signature events.

This plan, while not exhaustive, outlines the present evolution and includes input garnered from the above-mentioned forum and many hours of one-on-one conversations with individuals and enthusiast groups, as well as the direct experience attained by OBT staff from having administered or coordinated the 2013 special events activities and programs. It also specifically addresses and offers solutions to the concerns voiced by concerned residents as described in the previous paragraph.

In order to remove subjectivity and to develop a fair understanding of how the special events program had been administered, the OBT deliberately selected not to make significant changes to special events programming assistance other than establishing a special events committee composed of various community stakeholders who assisted with the granting or rejection of special event funding applications.

As the data analytics program (currently underway) determines our audience (families, children, young singles, retirees, RV'ers, campers, outdoor adventurers, beer and wine drinkers, history and culture lovers, etc.), we will better understand their needs. As a result, we will create special events and other activities to attract them; however, we should always be mindful of not neglecting the needs of our residents and those visiting Montrose regularly, as events must also our local audience.

The data analytics report is expected by late spring. In anticipation of these results and driven by the belief that investing prudently and strategically into a comprehensive special event program can generate positive economic development returns community-wide, the 2014 budget line item for special events has been increased to \$80,000 (\$40,000 each from the RSE and TP funds). The 2013 allocation was \$55,000 (\$35,000 RSE and \$20,000 TP).

Proposed Changes for 2014

In 2014, the OBT will benefit from the addition of a full time staff member who will be responsible for special event and press release coordination. Additionally, the office will prepare and apply to all special events a performance-based review system which should well inform 2015 activities and resource dedication. Slated for a late January-



early February installation, a significant aspect of efficacy measurement will be obtained through the use of the Tourism Tracker software, a MUNIREvs date-driven economic impact module that measures baseline activity as well as peak period impacts as caused by specific events.

Tourism Tracker has the ability to provide frequent aggregated lodger, restaurant and shopping data that can assist with resource management (e.g. ordering inventory, planning staffing levels, etc.). More than a forecasting tool for business that can, for example, allow hotels to adjust rates according to general seasonal activity while accounting for peaks in special event activity, this program will help determine the overall efficacy and impact of special events. For example, the Telluride destination has used the data collected through this module to analyze the impact for the extended operating hours on the gondola to Mountain Village. The community was also able to determine that the retail and restaurant activity from the Wine Festival, in some areas of the community, meets or exceeds performance at the same businesses for the much larger Bluegrass festival.

Another significant change for 2014 is to support special events that can potentially develop the tourism capacity of existing businesses, attractions and historical and economic strengths. For example, the Food Farm Forum assists agritourism efforts while strengthening relationships with restaurants and the Farmer's Market whereas a proposed Western Days event can place the focus on evolving and cultivating heritage tourism efforts with the help of close participation by our three museums.

From a functional standpoint, the practice in the past has been to, for the most part, award a check to event coordinators and let them do with that assistance as they may and ask for a post-event analysis report within 90 days of the event. In 2013, the OBT along with the special events committee reviewed more than forty applications, and while the full amount of the line item budget was expended, the OBT received only five post-event reports. Moreover, the funding requests (as verified by event coordinators themselves) were arbitrary. Often, the applications requested clearly inflated monetary assistance figures because event coordinators knew they would generally receive less than was being asked. In the majority of cases, the OBT was not viewed as a partner in the event and mostly considered a sponsor.

The Office of Business and Tourism is suggesting a very different approach for 2014. If we are to be true to our dual mission of increasing hotel stays and retail sales, then we



must be more stringent and more serious about how funds are utilized. Therefore, the OBT proposes to be viewed by the majority of special event coordinators asking for assistance as a partner and not simply a sponsor.

Generally speaking, applications should be reviewed more critically, special event coordinators ought to be held to higher standards and expected economic impacts should be demonstrated. For example, applications ought to sufficiently denote that:

- The event has been well planned
- Proper attention has been given to the details
- The objectives have been clearly identified
- The requested assistance is supported by accurate and factual need and reasoning, etc.
- Event organizers have/are making genuine efforts to acquire sponsors
- Acceptable consideration has been given for acquiring analytical data that helps to inform factual evaluation of the event

In addition, assuming an event meets the OBT's special event assistance criteria, applicants should look to partner with other event coordinators and submit their requests at least six months in advance so that OBT staff can formulate a partnered strategy as to how its resources can best be used. For example, if "X" event will take place in July, OBT staff should be approached with a complete special event plan (akin to a business plan) by January, or even earlier. Such forethought and forward action will allow OBT staff to coordinate and maximize resources such as arranging for marketing/advertising and co-branding activities, developing brochures, enrolling hotels, restaurants and retailers (as appropriate), etc.

A collaborative effort with the Pavilion for a June performance by the Colorado Symphony and the Montrose Soccer Club for a September soccer event demonstrate that the OBT is already using this proposed framework to ensure that these events are significant and successful in their RSE/TP impact. At a minimum, these events promise the potential for significant hotel stays, restaurant visitations, and shopping activity.

Where possible, the OBT will look to enhance existing events. For example, in 2013, significant changes were made to the annual tree lighting, Santa's Cabin, and Parade of Lights events that resulted in much congratulatory feedback from the community. Implementing outdoor heaters for fall/wintertime events, re-routing the procession



following the tree lighting, and relocating and redesigning the Santa's Cabin event to include a winter wonderland look and feel that included a fire pit (allowing children to roast marshmallows) are some examples of these improvements. In 2014, the OBT is planning to host contests during the holiday season in conjunction with these events to further assist retail sales by initiating a "\$\$\$'s" Spent in the City" program.

Here are the key points, in summary:

- A focus on accountability that:
 - Increases emphasis on event organizers and their ability to coordinate a successful event (including the OBT itself)
 - Increases preparedness by event organizers that increases confidence in the success of an event – for example, by changing the two annual deadlines for submitting event requests to once per year
 - Increases factual demonstration of both direct and indirect impacts to retail sales and tourism
 - Makes the tough choices to discontinue assistance to events that either have been going on for a long time and/or those that are not directly compatible with the OBT mission (e.g. eligible events should demonstrate hotel pickup history)
 - Requires budgets and post-event reports
- Increase partnership related efforts so:
 - Coordinators include the OBT at the conversational and planning table
 - The use of promotional items and co-branding efforts can be maximized
 - The OBT is not the primary and potentially sole funding source (excludes OBT sponsored events)

This past year, the OBT also learned a thing or two about sponsoring any large scale event that may also be referred to a signature event. While there is no specific mention of a singular signature event in this document, the OBT believes that any resource sufficient, well-planned and professionally executed event produced over time that gains mass appeal can become a signature event. Besides, consistency and predictability also have a lot to do with it. The office is not negating the idea of a signature event, per se, and remains open to suggestions and ideas as to what that event may be. But, it has learned that the best events:

- Start small, grow big



- Determine clear objectives
- Prepare a clear and detailed plan
- Utilize an RFP process
- Hire professionals are provide support by a dedicated internal staffer

Community feel good events (versus true RSE/TP events) should also be given due consideration, so perhaps a small percentage of the special event funds can be set aside for this purpose. Additionally, OBT staff will, at a minimum if asked, assist all gala and non-profit fundraising events in kind only (such as arranging for discounted hotel rooms, special offers, promotional item giveaways, etc.)

Working 2014 Special Events Schedule

(As of January 8, 2014)

The following events and activities are ones that the OBT will either participate in, or is exploring the possibility of doing so. The list is not all-inclusive and events may be added to, or removed from this schedule:

- January 11 - Food Farm Forum
- January 16-19 - International Sportsmen's Exhibition
- February 8 - Michael Martin Murphy at the Pavilion
- March - OBT block party
- April 21-26 - Earth Week / Only Earth Day (April 22)
- May - OBT block party
- June (Fri 6-Sat 7) - Black Canyon Classic Car Club - Colorful Colorado Car Truck & Rod Show (could be hosted at Roger Bourget's Chopper Shoppe)
- June - OBT block party
- June 19/22 - Colorado Symphony
- June 18 - 22 - 94th VFW State Convention
- July 4 - Parade, OBT block party, (other events TBD)
- August - pre and post Sturgis Motorcycle Rally guided rides (Aug 4-10)
- August - OBT block party (to coincide with motorcycle guided rides?)
- August 29-September 1 - Black Canyon Soccer Tournament
- September - OBT block party
- September 20 - Police Officers Ball
- October (Fri 3-Sat 4) - Fresh Fest



- October (Fri 24-Sun 26) - 2nd Annual Hospitality Summit
- November 28 - Tree Lighting, Santa's Cabin starts
- November 29 - OBT block party (separate or to coincide with 11/28 activities?)
- December 6 - Parade of Lights

Other (new) special events and ideas under consideration include:

- Up to 8 OBT block parties
- Visitor Center open house events to complement Main in Motion (depending on what form it takes in 2014) and the Friday night stroll
- Entering the world of Cyclocross (CX) by participating in a series comprising of races in the Grand Valley, Roaring Fork Valley and Montrose to be known as the Western Cup Cyclocross Series
- Starting a Men in Heels Race
- Consideration towards starting a Western Days event
- Assisting in the introduction of the Safety Town to Montrose
- Initiating the Pickin' in the Park music series in Montrose (a free-to-the-public summer series in town parks with food and other booths currently featuring weekly live music in Ouray, Ridgway and Paonia that attract hundreds of people)
- Exploring certain existing events as to if/how they can be enlarged (e.g. concerts and shows sponsored by the Montrose Arts Council, the Garlic Festival, etc.)

Finally, the advent of the Competitive Youth Sports Program in early 2014 with its own designated coordinator and budget will also be a key focal effort for the OBT special events efforts and is expected to generate significant tourism and retail sales related activity due to a concerted effort to attract sports competitions and tournaments over several day periods to Montrose. Looking farther, the OBT has begun considering possible opportunities arising in the next 18-24 months with regards to the new waterpark and Ute museum expansion. With the addition of a full-time staffer dedicated to special events and the changes in philosophy and approach as indicated in this plan, along with the exciting foundational implementations from 2013, the OBT intends to pave the way for a noticeably different special events season than in years past that is characterized by a measurable increase in hotel occupancy and retail sales.

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