



Commissioners Approve Privatization of Experience Kissimmee

Minich Confirmed as Organization's 1st President/CEO

KISSIMMEE, FL, August 19, 2014-- Osceola County commissioners adopted a contract Monday to privatize tourism promotion, empowering a newly formed not-for-profit organization to market the area to travelers from around the world.

Hailed by many tourism leaders, the action cemented a decision commissioners made in March to establish a public/private partnership responsible for promoting its number one industry. The formalized contract also ushers in a new era for Experience Kissimmee, the destination marketing organization formed in 1978 as the Kissimmee-St. Cloud Convention & Visitors Bureau. With Monday's vote, Experience Kissimmee will cease operating as a department of Osceola County government when the new fiscal year begins on October 1.

A Board of Directors chaired by Mark McHugh, current President/CEO of Gatorland, will be responsible to the county commissioners for charting the future of Experience Kissimmee and the area's tourism growth and development.

"This vote reaffirms our commitment to Osceola County tourism and to the thousands of citizens whose livelihoods bank on the success of tourism," said Osceola County Commission Chairman Fred Hawkins, Jr. "Through the combined efforts of county staff and tourism industry leaders, we have invested countless hours working on a contract that sets the foundation for an exciting future for tourism."

"What we've done is given Experience Kissimmee the freedom to be more entrepreneurial and to capitalize on sales and marketing opportunities without having to process requests through our governmental channels," Hawkins added.

Experience Kissimmee reports approximately seven million visitors stay overnight in Osceola County accommodations each year. In addition to accounting for more than 40,000 jobs in Osceola County, direct visitor spending pumps \$2 billion into the local economy.

Monday's vote also confirmed the selection of D.T. Minich as first ever President and CEO of Experience Kissimmee, inheriting a nearly 40-person staff and an annual operating budget of approximately \$11 million.

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“I think D.T. is a dynamic leader with great ideas,” said County Commissioner Michael Harford, whose district includes the tourism corridor. “I’m looking forward to watching him build the Osceola brand and create consensus with all our industry partners on how to market a destination that is on the front porch of the world’s theme parks.”

Minich, 50, who held the top post at St. Petersburg/Clearwater Area Convention & Visitors Bureau for the past seven years, also formally began his new duties on Monday.

“We are extremely excited to welcome D.T. to his new position with our organization,” said Experience Kissimmee Board of Directors Chairman Mark McHugh. “He brings the background, experience, and visionary leadership we know will propel our destination marketing efforts and the Experience Kissimmee staff to higher levels of success.”

In accepting the President/CEO post, Minich said he was anxious to get started, but will take time to get to know his new staff as well as local industry leaders. “Osceola County is an exciting destination with such a rich history, a diversity of vacation experiences, and the world’s finest theme parks right next door,” says Minich. “As I look at our current marketing opportunities and new products expected to be introduced in the near future, I am thrilled at the fun challenge of sharing our good news with visitors from around the world.”

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CONTACT:

Experience Kissimmee, Communications
Media@ExperienceKissimmee.com
407-742-8212

Osceola County Public Information Office
Mark Pino
407-742-0100
pio@osceola.org