

Gallup Council approves chamber agreement

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
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Agreement keeps chamber in tourism, marketing picture

The Gallup City Council unanimously approved a \$185,000 professional services agreement June 14 with the Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce – furthering a lodgers tax relationship with Chamber CEO Bill Lee that goes back several years.

The vote on the professional services matter took place at the regular city meeting. City Tourism and Marketing Manager Catherine Sebold and City Manager Maryann Ustick introduced the item to council members.

The agreement allows the chamber to oversee, manage, and design the content, production, sales, and distribution of the 2017 Gallup Visitor's Guide, which can be found at area hotels, motels, and some restaurants.

The guide's been a useful tool for visitors to Gallup and McKinley County, and the agreement provides funding to the chamber for advertising and promotional services that attract visitors and increase tourism for Gallup.

"This is a promotional and marketing agreement for the most part," Lee said. "We [the chamber] are honored to work with the city on this once again."

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Sebold told council members that the agreement allows the chamber of commerce to continue to maintain and staff a Visitor's Information Center. The chamber is located at 106 W. Historic Highway 66 and close to the heart of downtown Gallup.

The chamber of commerce will continue to provide tourists, travel agents, and tour operators with information on what Gallup and the surrounding areas have to offer in order to attract tourism, Sebold and Lee said.

Sebold noted that the advertising and promotion allocation of the approved funding represents a \$55,000 decrease from last year, "as the city of Gallup will take over the lease on the billboards from the chamber," she said.

The agreement has been in existence between the city and chamber for about five years. Lee gave the following breakdown of the \$185,000:

- \$35,000 for the Visitor's Guide
- \$50,000 toward the Visitor's center
- \$100,000 for promotion and advertising

The agreement expires June 30, 2017, according to City Attorney George Kozeliski.

Both Lee and Sebold said they would share information to make sure the marketing and tourism effort moves ahead. Lee noted he and Sebold will concentrate on digital and social media for marketing and promotions.

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“We plan to take some new approaches and at the same time utilize some old methods,” Lee said.

Mayor Jackie McKinney said Lee has done a good job marketing and promoting Gallup in the past. Lee was previously chamber director for six years until he left for the McKinley County Manager job about 19 months ago.

“There were some things that worked well in the past. But we will use some new strategies, too. One of the goals, still, is to get people driving Interstate 40 to stop in our city,” Sebold added.

Sebold’s job was created about a year ago. She was hired for the job in April from a similar job in Prescott, Ariz. There, she was that city’s communications and public affairs manager.

Lee said he and Sebold are in the process of getting the city connected with an offshoot of New Mexico True TV, which connects the city with the Dish TV Network. That network broadcasts throughout New Mexico and is able to reach national cable subscribers. Lee said the city’s website assists in informing people about Gallup. He didn’t rule out YouTube feeds as a marketing tool, too.

“We’re close to finalizing that,” Lee said of the TV initiative. “That will obviously bring a lot of exposure to Gallup and all of the county.”

Gallup City Councilor Linda Garcia called the tourism and marketing happenings positive. Garcia’s council District 1 includes a good portion of downtown.

“I think the agreement is a good idea and Bill Lee has certainly proven that he knows what direction to take things,” Garcia said. “This helps the entire city.”

Lee, a Gallup native, former McKinley County Manager and president of the annual Red Rock

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Balloon Rally, one of Gallup's top annual tourism draws, was recently elected to the McKinley County Board of Commissioners seat for District 3. That job starts in January.

Information on how much of an annual salary Sebold earns wasn't immediately available from City Hall. Lee said there were 2,768 people who came through the doors of the visitor's center last year. He said from January 2016 through the end of June there have been 926.

"I think the numbers speak for themselves," Lee said. "I think the city gets a fair share of people from all around the world that come here."

***By Bernie Dotson
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