

Marketing collective promotes aboriginal tourism aggressively

by Marie-Lauren Gregoire

SIX NATIONS – A new marketing association on Six Nations is promoting aboriginal tourism with gusto and reaching new markets for businesses, organizations and attractions. The Six Nations New Credit Marketing Collective is an organization that represents 55 native owned or operated organizations involved in the tourism industry. The collective is doing what has never been done before by any group on Six Nations.

"The reason we're marketing ourselves is that bottom line, we need tourists," said Kim Porter, chair of the Six Nations New Credit Marketing Collective. "To get ourselves out there, to let the world know about the best kept secret, that's what came out of the study."

The marketing collective evolved three years ago after a recommendation from a tourism marketing survey. The collective is implementing many of the recommendations of the survey.

"The Six Nations New Credit Marketing Collective was born out of the Six Nations Tourism ad hoc working group which came together in 1997 and 1998 to undertake the Net Gain study," said Kim Hill, community development manager, Community Futures.

The Net Gain study produced a few recommendations one of which was to establish an independent marketing organization to promote tourism.

"The study was presented to the ad hoc committee in 1998 with recommendations to establish a separate entity to encompass the stakeholders in tourism," said Hill. "It was commissioned by the ad hoc working group and the funding was leveraged by Chiefswood and Six Nations Tourism."

Since those recommendations the Six Nations New Credit Marketing Collective evolved and has brought increased awareness to Six Nations business and tourism community.

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working on a website in the fall and an advertising campaign in the spring.

The collective collaborated with Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership to produce a brochure for the Six Nations and New Credit tourism industry. The Tourism Guide was released last June to rave reviews from members, partner agencies and tourists.

The 44 page glossy booklet showcases aboriginal tourist attractions on Six Nations, New Credit and Brantford. Tourism dependent businesses are also featured in the first comprehensive marketing tool produced on Six Nations.

"We spoke to some government agencies and they said it was an international marketing product so in my mind we did it," said Porter.

The collective had previously produced a brochure but Porter and other members of the collective felt that it was inadequate to capture all that Six Nations has to offer.

"The book went to 89 tourist centres and doubled the numbers at the border," said Porter.

Member businesses of the collective are reaping the benefits of belonging to a collective directly from the tourism guide.

"A lot of people, collectors or not, have come by with that booklet," said Ron Curley, proprietor, Stone'n'Bone Gallery. "The people are actually coming by and they're using it."

Porter said the number of tourists have increased since the publication of the book and Chiefswood, where Porter is marketing officer, have experienced a little boom in tourism.

"Now that the guide is out there it tells you about the community at large, that's one thing that was missing was information about the community at large," said Curley.

Prior to the collective there was little promotional material available for the local tourism businesses.

"It was not current, it didn't reflect what was available from a business perspective," said Connie Jamieson, owner of First Nations Travel. "I think a lot of businesses, be it a craft shop or restaurant, were not promoted."

Jamieson was involved in the marketing study in 1997 and shared her thoughts from a tourism perspective. Jamieson is also chair of Aboriginal Tourism Team Canada and vice chair of the Collective.

"I didn't see a current pamphlet on local businesses, events and sites until the Collective," Jamieson. "From a business perspective, I think there could have been more done as far as promoting businesses."

The collective was established to deliver marketing benefits to the local business and tourism industry. Many of those benefits are seen in advertising.

"The benefits are that the businesses get more bang for their business dollar, they get more value for their advertising dollars and it promoted the community at large," said Hill. "More general awareness in the other communities of Six Nations as a temporary community."

The collective markets tourism on Six Nations to partner agencies in Brantford and Caledonia and surrounding communities. The collective in turn belongs to various tourism bodies such as Grand River Country and Southern Grand River

Valley. The collective also creates partnerships with Tourism Brantford and the Ministry of Tourism.

"We had worked with Odrotekha, Six Nations Tourism," said Valerie Wilson, manager, Brantford Tourism. "Just recently we've found that the Six Nations New Credit Marketing Collective was more aggressive in trying to market the area even better than before."

Porter said the collective maintains and creates partnerships with tourism bodies within and outside Six Nations.

"We partner in many different things, we partner in the promotional material that we do," said Wilson. Tourism Brantford partnered with Six Nations in the production of "Longhouses and Grandhouses" in recent years. "We had the heritage museums and attractions within all of Brantford, Brant County and Six Nations."

The collective also benefits the members through marketing research and consultation. The Ministry of Tourism provides resource material and funding through consultants and the collective takes full advantage of the assistance.

"I think basically when people attend workshops or seminars they learn about advertising or packaging or other attractions," said Jim Shuttleworth, consultant, Ministry of Tourism and Recreation. "When they get together as a group, they pass this information on to everyone in the group."

Shuttleworth and Wilson worked with Six Nations Tourism in the past but have found the collective more aggressive in its efforts to promote and market tourism on Six Nations.

"They would call on us periodically about the OTMP, Ontario Tourism Marketing Plan or the CTC, Canadian Tourism Committee. We provide them with information as a group," said Shuttleworth. "We react to phone calls from people who need us to attend meetings. We really haven't heard a lot from Karen Smith [director of Six Nations Tourism]."

As the relatively "new kid on the block," the marketing collective is making itself known and it represents various businesses and sites on Six Nations and New Credit so it is making them know at the same time.

"Tourism is to enhance the community and work with outlying tourism businesses to encourage people to visit Six Nations and not only nationally but on an international basis," said Nina Burnham, Six Nations Councillor and chair of Tourism Committee.

Burnham believes there is a problem between the marketing collective and the board of Six Nations Tourism. Six Nations Tourism is not a member of the collective.

"There's some misunderstanding there and it just seems like I really don't know what the problem is they just don't get along," said Burnham. "We're looking at that and possibly in the fall we'll be making changes," she added.

Many organizations have experienced a benefit as a member of the collective. The immediate benefits come from advertising collectively.

"We all join together and it doesn't cost everyone an arm and a leg and by going in together we can afford to buy a whole

page," said Porter.

The philosophy of the marketing collective is to market collectively to "get more bang for your buck." The businesses and organizations on Six Nations and New Credit are motivated to promote themselves efficiently.

"The thing that works about it is it owned by the people who operate it," said Hill. "It's not owned by the council, it's an association of businesses that want to promote tourism."

The association of businesses operate collectively out of their own pockets. The collective received funding from the OTMP for the brochure and future marketing tools.

"We've directed them and given them some information as far as marketing," said Shuttleworth. "They've done everything on their own and paid for everything on their own."

The members of the consortium's core group are volunteers dedicated to enhancing tourism on Six Nations. The collective has no office or staff, currently Kim Hill is the resource co-ordinator. The collective has accomplished a lot with very little but the group of interested tourism businesses.

"It has definitely benefitted us, I can see the numbers increasing," said Skip Pannel, director, Kanata Iroquois Village. "We're new and we're trying to get the message out, this is one way we're getting the message out. I'm very pleased with what we've done to date, I see it growing, we're going to grow as a group not as individuals."

Pannel also belongs to other organizations to represent the collective and Kanata. Pannel belong to Heritage Villages and Paddling Ontario and knows the benefit of belonging to a collective organization.

"I know they did an excellent job with the brochure," said Glenda Porter, president, Agricultural Society. The Agricultural Society is a member of the collective and has seen some benefits from belonging to the collective.

"I think we have [received some benefits], I think there's been a lot of interest, especially since the book," said Porter. "I believe it has helped us a bit."

So far, the marketing collective has done good things for the members through its advertising. This year the collective has advertised in tourist guides in Brantford and the Southern Grand River Valley.

"It's beneficial because we're out there and people know about us," said Jamieson. "It's helpful because people know there is a travel agency in a First Nations community. It's beneficial because people call about sites and events."

The various partnerships that the collective is involved in help promote not just Six Nations's businesses and tourist attractions but the package of attractions, shops, restaurants and hotels.

"We're a strong supporter, as Tourism Brantford, it makes a lot of sense for us to participate in whatever Six Nations is doing in regards to tourism," said Wilson. "We're a strong supporter of the Six Nations New Credit Marketing Collective."

Wilson has been involved with tourism partners at Six Nations for ten years and has been involved in tourism initiatives at Six Nations.

"In order to provide the best example of what to do and see here we try to promote the outlying areas, not just Brantford," said Wilson. Tourism Brantford was involved with the promotion of the brochure that the marketing collective produced a few years ago.

"We find in that kind of market we've always had a very good return," said Wilson. "There is always some kind of economic return that comes from working together."

Businesses, sites and attractions in the tourism industry market a product and offer a package to visitors. The marketing collective offers the opportunity to market a package through networking with Six Nations sites and businesses and surrounding tourism partners.

The aboriginal tourism industry is growing rapidly and the marketing collective is working to ensure that Six Nations and New Credit keep up with the burgeoning industry.

"Aboriginal tourism is at the forefront," said Porter. "People want to experience the aboriginal product."

The members of the collective are working to ensure tourists can experience the aboriginal product on Six Nations and New Credit. However some councillors sitting on the band council tend to think otherwise. In a recent Six Nations band council meeting the discussion on the direction Chiefswood's board of directors and Six Nations Tourism board of directors were taking and how compatible are they to each other. At that council meeting, it was suggested by some councillors to disband both boards and amalgamate the two to better serve the community. It was agreed by council to table further discussions until this fall after the tourism season is over.

Councillor Nina Burnham said "the two boards were going in different directions and one board would better serve Six Nations, the surrounding area and the territory." Councillor Alton VanEvery also commented on the two boards direction, saying some of tourism ideas were like "a runaway train." Not realistic enough, and agreed that one board would better serve the community.