



November 2016

This has been an exceptional year for the tourism industry in Tuolumne County. Records were broken as travel spending in Tuolumne County exceeded the state average by nearly double which means the tourism industry in Tuolumne County is thriving! Thank you to the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors and to the Sonora City Council for continuing to reinvest a portion of the Transient Occupancy Tax dollars back into tourism marketing. A huge thank you also goes out to our TCVB Partners and Board of Directors who have stood by us as we have updated many programs internally and externally and who constantly support our many efforts as we strategically go about promoting Tuolumne County. We are once again pleased to present this Annual Report and in particular, this synopsis of the past year.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Mayo".

Lisa Mayo  
Executive Director  
Tuolumne County Visitors Bureau



**Tuolumne County Visitors Bureau  
2015-2016 Annual Report Detailed Information**

**Community Outreach/Local Marketing**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Tuolumne County Tourism Summit**

Back by popular demand, this event was held during National Travel and Tourism Week in May 2016. Speakers included Mo McElroy of Visit California and local trails advocate Tyler Summerset with the Tuolumne County Transportation Council. Charlie Gu of China Luxury Advisors spoke to attendees about the increasing inbound China market and shared best practices for marketing to and assisting Chinese visitors. This year we also had local social media expert, Tiffany Phillips-Nunes outline the basics of social media marketing. Faith Lopez, social media influencer from Sacramento, took us on a “tour” of Instagram and how to best use this fast-growing social media platform. We reached capacity for the event (50 attendees) and received positive feedback.

**Tuolumne County Transportation Council**

Signage on the back of transit bus; work with Tyler Summersett (Sr. Transportation Planner) on a number of projects to promote local transportation, YARTS and trail options.

**Community Sponsorships**

The Tuolumne County Visitors Bureau supports many events that take place throughout the County whether through promoting on our website, ads, social media or in the Vacation Planner. The following are events that we additionally supported through monetary sponsorships:

- 2016 Columbia Father’s Day Fly In
- All Hallows Fantasy Faire
- City of Sonora – Sponsor a Bench Program
- Groveland Areas Partners -Groveland Gears and Grooves Mini Triathlon
- Groveland Trailheads
- Highway 120 Adventure Brochure
- ITSA Film Festival
- Railtown 1897 State Historic Park
- Sonora Celtic Faire
- Tuolumne County Chamber of Commerce Bronze Sponsor
- Tuolumne County Sheriff’s Posse and the Mother Lode Round-Up
- Twain Harte Summer Concert Series

**Additional Community Support**

- The TCVB donates countless auction items and gift baskets to support various fundraisers throughout the County. We also donate to some organizations beyond Tuolumne County as appropriate.
- This past winter the TCVB bought coffee/hot chocolate for a day for anyone who volunteered with cleaning up Highway 108 trash that had been left behind from sledding outings.

- At the end of the Tuolumne County Television Commercial the TCVB promoted the Sonora Celtic Faire at no charge to event promoters.
- TCVB Executive Director serves on the following community boards/committees:
  - Sonora Regional Medical Center Advisory Board
  - Trail Me About it Committee/Sonora Area Foundation
  - Tuolumne County Chamber of Commerce
  - Tuolumne County Historic Society Board
  - Vision Sonora Tourism, Marketing and Outreach Sub-Committee
- Additional boards/committees served on:
  - Cal Poly Recreation, Parks & Tourism Administration Advisory Board
  - CalTravel Ambassador
  - Gold Country Visitors Association (President)
  - High Sierra Visitors Council (Secretary)
  - Visit California Rural Marketing Committee

### **Advertising**

Multi-platform Advertising – includes print and online (Most print advertising includes an on-line component)

- VIA Magazine: 2.6 million distribution per issue
- Sunset Magazine: 675,000 Northern and Southern CA combined distribution per issue
- Visit California Visitors Guide: 500,000 distribution – Advertised with Gold Country and Yosemite
- San Francisco Travel Planner: 225,000 distribution
- Yosemite Journal: 100,000 distribution
- Adventure Sports Journal: 42,000 distribution per issue
- Adventure Outdoors Magazine: 190,000 distribution per issue
- San Francisco Chronicle: 1) Special Tuolumne County insert, 2) Special ½ page ad for Super Bowl 50 – promoting to people wanting to get out of the city during Super Bowl.
- Bay Area Newspaper Group insert: 2.7 million circulation. Content for series of nearby destination travel articles including Railtown, National Hotel's "Gold Dust" campaign, Columbia State Park, Sonora's food and libations scene, Highway 108/Pinecrest camping. Article samples:
 

*"Four Ways to play in Sonora, from bourbon tastings to sarsaparilla floats – The Gold Rush Town of Sonora is known for its historic attractions, but its modern day pleasures are considerable. Have we mentioned the bourbon bar?"*

*"Forgot to book a campsite? Get away from the crowds at Stanislaus National Forest – Eager to get away from the crowds of Pinecrest? Here are three options that range from getting away from it all...to getting away from some of it. Hello, Stanislaus National Forest in Tuolumne."*

### **Promotions**

#### **LocalGetaways.com**

Newspaper and Online Spotlight on Tuolumne County

Editorial: *11 Groovy Reasons to Visit Yosemite & The Gold Country This Summer*

Included in 18 Northern California newspapers (3.2 million impressions)

Published Custom Editorial on the LocalGetaways.com Homepage

Dedicated e-newsletter with a spotlight on Tuolumne County

Social Media and SEO Campaign

### **Every Kid in a Park Campaign**

This year the National Park Foundation kicked off its Every Kid in a Park campaign that's aim is to engage and create the next generation of park visitors, supporters and advocates. The immediate goal was to provide an opportunity for every fourth grade student across the country to experience their federal public lands and waters in person throughout the 2016-2017 school year. The TCVB decided to ride the coattails of this promotion and create a Tuolumne County Passport to Treasures also aimed at fourth graders and their families but with a focus on all parks and family-friendly activities in Tuolumne County. The Passport Program did generate some overnight stays as that was one of the offers on the Passport.

### **The California State Fair at Cal Expo, Sacramento**

Tuolumne County received a Gold ribbon for the "Tuolumne County Delivers 3 Vacations in 1 Destination" themed exhibit. Local artist, Judy Grossman painted in the exhibit for opening weekend to produce art that became a part of the exhibit. Tuolumne County volunteers answered fairgoers' questions. Black Oak Casino Resort sponsored the exhibit and Sierra Pacific Foundation sponsored volunteer t-shirts designed by Judy Grossman. According to State Fair officials 673,237 people attended the State Fair this year.

### **Media and Tour Operator Hosting & Outreach**

- Hosted Bay Area Travel Writers - approximately 35 travel journalists, photographers and bloggers attended.
- Hosted Toronto, Canada Media Fam Tour; 5 journalists and photographers
- Hosted a French Tour Operator Fam Tour
- Hosted two Chinese Tour Operator Fam Tours
- Regularly host an average of 1-2 individual journalists per month

### **Social Media**

Facebook continues to be the social media outlet that provides the most engagement with users.

Facebook – Over 19,500 followers

Instagram – 1000+ followers

Twitter – 730 Twitter followers

Also have a presence on YouTube with television commercial, new Brand USA video and National Geographic Video

### **Travel Shows**

- *LA and Bay Area Travel and Adventure Shows* and *Sunset Celebration Weekend* provide opportunities to invite consumers to Tuolumne County. Partnerships with regional visitor bureaus and with Tuolumne County partners are a component of these shows. In 2016 the TCVB welcomed Danielle Gerhart of California State Parks as a partner in our booth.
- *International Pow Wow (IPW)* – The travel industry's premiere international marketplace in the U.S.; Strong international media component that has resulted in international press and familiarization tours (50+ meetings in 2015, new appointment tool provided 33 pre-booked appointments). Promotion of TC to journalists if they will be in San Francisco Bay Area.
- *World Travel Market*, the largest English-speaking trade show to connect with tour operators and journalists to promote the "most direct route to Yosemite from the San Francisco Bay Area." Promoted FIT (frequent independent travelers) lodging properties and invited UK tour operators and journalists who plan to visit San Francisco to see the area. (Visit California used Yosemite as pavilion backdrop. Tuolumne County was the only product offered at WTM 2015 that included Yosemite.)

- *National Tour Association* gives destinations and attractions the opportunity to meet one on one with tour operators at pre-set appointments. This is a good time for informing them of new happenings and opportunities for their clients.

### **Strategic Partnerships**

- National Geographic Digital Nomad partnership; emphasis on Highway 49 Gold Country towns Sonora, Jamestown and Columbia; 108/Pinecrest, Stanislaus National Forest, and Highway 120, Hetch Hetchy Reservoir (Five digital stories and one produced video, Road Trip: Beyond Yosemite, social media, web coverage 2 million +, newsletter subscribers to 1.4 million households)
- San Francisco Travel Association: Formed major partnership including Visitor Information Center exposure, partner newsletter inclusions, social media, microsites for China, UK, US providing content and strategy (in 2016-17 work)

### **2016 Tuolumne County Vacation Planner**

The Vacation Planner remains a key guide for those planning on visiting Tuolumne County and for in-market visitors. For 2016 the Tuolumne Grove of Giant Sequoias was featured on the cover. With the popular Mariposa Grove being closed until late 2017, we wanted visitors to know they still had an option to see the Giant Sequoias in Tuolumne County's portion of Yosemite National Park. Highlights from the 2016 Planner include:

- Printed 100,000 Planners – 50,000 were sent directly from the printer to a circulation company in the Bay Area to distribute in high traffic areas like Peet's Coffee Houses, BART Stations, Whole Foods and more.
- Continued increase in Reader Response Leads (resulting from more advertising) led to more Vacation Planner requests
- Increase in Visitor Center traffic has increased Vacation Planner Distribution

### **Public Relations**

*Overview:* The TCVB strategically focused on tourism public relations including public affairs, editorial partnership content and key partnership creation and facilitation, taking advantage of our publicist's level of experience and key industry contacts. The overall public relations message continued to focus on the geographic availability of Yosemite National Park, the county's most recognizable attribute, while promoting the countless activities available in the entire County that other gateway communities do not have.

*PR Highlights:*

- Elevated messaging surrounding the National Park Service Centennial, Yosemite National Park and Tuolumne County's less crowded portion of the park (result example: *Away in Style* digital magazine in Asia/Australia recommending ways to visit YNP)
- Increased awareness of Tuolumne County by Visit California (VCA) through various trade shows; hosted first PR rep from VCA in county during winter, (result example: First dedicated outdoor media fam of Canadian writers experiencing the county from Pinecrest to Groveland/Highway 120 entrance to YNP)
- Hosting of VCA-provided travel writers and bloggers (result example: *Travels with Bender* blogger):

*"This Time Machine to 1852 Only Costs \$7 – We stumbled upon a 4-day event that transports visitors to a genuine California Gold Rush town set in 1842. While we didn't walk away with a gold nugget, we still felt like we struck gold with this impromptu discovery in Columbia State Historic Park in Tuolumne."*

- Major PR effort in YARTS inclusion in messaging, resulting in 100% increase in ridership since the transportation option's inception (result example: Epoch Times, largest Chinese newspaper outside of country with 21 regional versions including Epoch Taste/Food: A Foodie's Guide to America's National Parks)
- Continual PR messaging to promote affordable lodging and dining options (outside of Yosemite) and securing overnight stays in Groveland and rest of county). Example of PR message: *"In Groveland, a gateway city to Yosemite National Park, historic inns and dining options abound. Chef-owner Aaron Haas of Fork & Love offers inventive pairings, such as Vietnamese pho with German ingredients. Across the street, the Groveland Hotel has won many awards for its wine list. Next door is the Iron Door Saloon, the oldest drinking establishment in California; if you stop by, try Indigeny Reserve on tap, a locally made hard apple cider that's hard to find outside the area. Dori's Tea Cottage offers a restful stop for lunch or tea. A regional bus service, YARTS, shuttles visitors from Groveland into Yosemite for \$15, park entrance fee included.*
- Additional media events attended: Visit California's Media Marketplace, San Francisco (September) promoting geographic closest route to Yosemite, history, three vacations/one destination, holidays in Sonora, Jamestown, Columbia, Twain Harte, etc., winter sports
- Continued promoting family travel and history angle (result: curated content on Trivago booking website): *"5 Places Your Kids Will Get a Taste of California History"*
- Worked with the National Hotel on PR for an international story, "Gold Dust is Legal Tender in Jamestown California Hotel" (eGlobalNews, Australia): *"In a small town in Northern California, hotel guests have an opportunity to participate in a history-rich Mother Lode tradition that no place else can claim. They can pay for their stay in gold dust at the National Hotel in Jamestown. In the early days of the Gold Rush, newly panned gold dust was widely accepted by taverns and boarding houses with a pinch buying a shot of whisky at most saloons. Now, the owner of the Historic National Hotel is bringing back the idea. Stephen Willey will accept gold dust as legal tender to make purchases for rooms, meals and drinks.*
- Enjoyed media coverage such as Bloomberg's Tesla's Answer to Range Anxiety article featuring the Groveland Hotel installing a Tesla charging station: *"Yosemite-bound travelers often stop for lunch in Groveland, a gateway town 26 miles from the park's north entrance. The 17-room Groveland Hotel – built in 1849, during the height of the Gold Rush – has a Tesla charging station that's free for hotel guests and a nominal \$5 charge for anyone passing through."*
- Took Tuolumne County's "new Yosemite resort news" to trade shows in the UK, IPW Orlando, IPW New Orleans, Visit California Outlook Forum, Cal Travel Summit, and distributed internationally on TravMedia news distribution, providing additional media awareness of Rush Creek Lodge, Groveland and Tuolumne County.
- Continued focus on promoting outfitters and guides within the County, including activities whenever possible with media visits (hiking to Hetch Hetchy, fly fishing, stargazing, chartered tours for fams)
- Continued focus on promotion of fairs, festivals and the American west lifestyle, then and now

### *Public Relations by the Numbers:*

- **25** new or revised story ideas pitched to an estimated 300 journalists from UK, Canada, US, Australia, New Zealand, Asia, Europe, India
- **50** Regional, national and international tracked story placements
- **5** significant new opportunities with Visit California
- **3.4 million** engaged Nat Geo fans and followers saw Digital Nomad series
- **46,000** Twitter followers reading Robert Reid's coverage of Tuolumne County
- **2.9 million** readers received Bay Area New Group's coverage of Tuolumne County
- **1,000** tourism industry professional tasted Indigeny Reserve cider in San Francisco
- **500,000** people liked Tuolumne County Yosemite post on one SF Travel Facebook post
- **3,855** People who liked Tuolumne County Yosemite post on one SF Travel Instagram post
- **14** Visit California office representatives received new information about Tuolumne County's "front door" to Yosemite, Gold Country and the High Sierra at the Annual VCA Marketing Outlook Forum
- **200+**Media pitches were provided to travel journalists about Tuolumne County
- **Unknown** Number of media taught to pronounce Tuolumne

### **The TCVB Team**

In February of 2016 Jennifer Lopez was hired as our new Marketing Coordinator. Jen previously worked as the Marketing Coordinator for Delaware North at Yosemite. Her graphic design and organizational skills make her a tremendous asset to our team! Jen has already executed some major marketing projects like our new TCVB website and the multi-platform Brand USA Campaign. With the addition of Jen, we now have three full-time staff and seven part-time staff to operate two full-time and one part-time Visitor Center. We also have two independent part-time contractors: Publicist and Bookkeeper.

### **Visitor Information Centers**

In addition to Sonora and Chinese Camp, Groveland has been added to the list of Visitor Information Centers (VICs). Please see the Supporting Stats for additional VIC numbers.

**TC VIC, Chinese Camp** continues to grow in numbers and is the epicenter for helping visitors with lodging bookings, itineraries and road conditions. In 2015, we opened the CC VIC three days per week during the winter to try and determine traffic patterns. Prior to this, it had been closed all winter. Being opened proved to be very valuable to the visitors and our partners and for 2016 we will continue to operate it daily through winter unless traffic decreases significantly.

**TC VIC, Groveland** has Yosemite Ranger there daily from Memorial Day through Columbus Day. Visitor Bureau has staff there Friday-Sunday. We have found that many of the visitors in Groveland were directed to go there from the VIC in Chinese Camp as Yosemite Park Passes are sold by the Rangers.

**TC VIC, Sonora** is home to the TCVB offices. The Visitor Center location sees only a fraction of the visitors in Chinese Camp due to location.

### **Industry Partners/Associations**

In addition to a number of local organizations, the TCVB is actively involved in a number of industry associations. The following organizations provide one or all of the following benefits - Marketing, Advocacy, Education and Grant Funding for Partnership Programs:

- Visit California
- California Travel Association
- San Francisco Travel
- Gold Country Visitors Association
- High Sierra Visitors Council
- U.S. Travel Association – Brand USA

- Destination Marketing Association of the West
- Destination Marketing Association International
- National Tour Association
- Outdoor Writers Association of California
- Bay Area Travel Writers Association
- Yosemite Gateway Partners
- Association of Film Commissioners International
- California Film Commission

### **Filming**

Several film inquiries; one permit issued:

- CNN India, June 2016 “Popular Film Locations in California” documentary

### **Current Marketing Activity and Looking Ahead**

- New TCVB Logo!
- Multi-Platform Marketing
  - Brand USA/Visit California Co-Op – Outdoors Pillar (one of only 4 CA destinations to be featured)
  - KGO (Print, Radio, Online, Social Media, Email Marketing)
    - *Print:* The TCVB was the presenting sponsor in KGO’s “On the Go” Guide that is produced in partnership with Cumulus Media’s sister publication Modern Luxury, 10,000 guides are printed and distributed August 1-October 1 including at SF Fleet Week, Half Moon Bay Pumpkin Festival, San Francisco Veteran’s Parade, Mountain View Art & Wine Event and Cal Football Games.
    - *Radio:* 100 :30 commercials, 100 :15 commercials (including John Hamilton’s “On the Go” Saturday morning show
    - *Online:* KGO Guide accessible 24/7 with hyperlinks to our website, 3 ads included in VIP opt-in email newsletters.
    - *Social Media:* Tuolumne County on KGO’s Facebook, Twitter and Instagram platforms
    - *Email Marketing:* To KGO Subscribers
  - Trade Shows
    - New for 2017: Sportsmen’s Expo at Cal Expo, Sacramento; San Diego Travel and Adventure Show; TravMedia New York Media Showcase
  - Television
    - Updated Television Commercial – on Xfinity, AT&T Uverse, Dish and DirectTV networks in the Sacramento and Central Valley Region; New for 2016-2017- will air in Tri-Valley (Livermore, Pleasanton). November – December 2016, February – April 2017
    - Franco Finn’s “on the go” Television Show – KOFY-TV, filming November 2016
    - California Dream Eater – Visit California Dream 365TV Original Series; filmed at the Iron Door Saloon, October 2016
  - Newspaper
    - Bay Area Newspaper Group Insert, published August 2016 to push late summer fun
- Website
  - New website launched October 2016 and includes lodging booking capabilities
- Familiarization Tours



- Visit China Tour Fam Trip, November 2016 (Currently translating various press releases into Mandarin). Tuolumne County in Chinese is translated: 途乐迷 Journey, Happy, Enchanted.
- Community
  - Developing matching funds marketing programs for Tuolumne County non-profits.

**2015 Tuolumne County Tourism Stats\***

The preliminary 2015 Travel Impact Report by Dean Runyan Associates is produced annually for Visit California. In 2015 Tuolumne County saw an increase in visitor spending of 6.5% over the previous year. California’s state average was 3.4%. This is a great indicator of increased visitation to Tuolumne County.

Total Direct Travel Spending:	\$221.7 million
Tourism Industry Employment:	1,680 jobs
<i>Government Revenue Generated by Tourism</i>	
Local Sales Tax Receipts:	\$6.9 million
State Sales Tax Receipts:	\$9.8 million

*\*These statistics do not include spending or job generation by either Black Oak Casino Resort or by Chicken Ranch Casino as they fall under Government.*

*Thank you!*

