



Notes from the Cowboy Trail

2010 was a pretty good year for the Cowboy Trail, and we now look forward to 2011. Most of the changes that we undertook have now come to fruition. This newsletter is to bring you up to date on the happenings of the last 12 months, and to invite you (and anyone that you think falls within our service mandate) to the AGM on 11 February. The location will be confirmed by the end of the month, but mark the day on your calendar!

Our business plan for 2010 outlined a number of ways in which we wanted to promote the communities and businesses along the Cowboy Trail. Most were accomplished, and we were able to grab some unexpected opportunities that weren't identified at the start of the year. Three such occasions were a free booth at the Calgary Outdoor and Adventure show (which we shared with the Alberta Outfitters Association); and episode dedicated to the Cowboy Trail on the French language show "*Viens Voir Ici*", which has a viewership of roughly 250,000 franco-Canadians; and participation in CBC radio 2's "songquest" competition, in which the Cowboy Trail was voted as Alberta's #1 highway and for which Curb Lund wrote and recorded "*the West Just Fades Away*". The fact that opportunities like these fell into our laps is proof that the Cowboy Trail has wide recognition and role to play in promoting your western and heritage themed products and services.

Our website has now been redesigned and is much more interactive and interesting. Please visit www.thecowboytrail.com to check it out. Suggestions for improvement are still welcome. There is also a facebook group that I invite you to join. A good presence on the internet is vital to most businesses, and Kris Neilson did an excellent job modernizing our site.

We will strive to get the 2011 brochure out before the end of April as that is when most VICs are stocking their shelves and demand peaks. The rates for advertising in the guide brochure are lower than last year for the ½ and full page ads, reflecting more accurately the costs of production.

The decision in 2010 to de-linking membership and brochure advertising did not result in a significant increase membership. We will continue on that basis though as there is no compelling reason to change back, and it is possible that the new website format will attract more basic members in the future.

Financially the association is in better shape than it has been in years, and we have paid down more than \$3000 of the long-term debt. By "staying the course" we should be able to be debt free in 5 years, while at the same time continuing to provide our members with excellent promotion value.



Large Cowboy Trail signs are available for purchase by members at the reduced rate of \$60, and we are in the process of developing more items bearing the famous logo in response to popular demand.

Cowboy Trail communities are encouraged to develop and promote by-way tour maps on our website, enticing people from the big urban centers to visit us and find the many local gems and hidden attractions of the foothills. The 2011 CTTA business plan will be posted on the website under "membership information" by month's end. You will find that it resembles last years with some refinement. It will be discussed at the AGM and be amended in accordance with the wishes of those members present.

It is volunteers who make the Association tick, and I'd like to recognize and offer a special thanks to Manuelle Prunier for the many volunteer hours she worked last spring contacting members and potential members as our secretary. Unfortunately for us, she has taken full-time employment with the Canadian Badlands and will be unable to work so hard on our behalf this year. That means you'll probably be hearing from me instead (I can hear the collective groan already).

Please pass this invitation on to anyone in the industry that you think should be members. I'd like to hear from you directly if you have any questions or ideas. By using volunteers instead of paid staff we can keep the association cost-efficient and ensure the stakeholders' priorities are being addressed. The downside of volunteers is that they can't spend time chasing members at the expense of running their own businesses, so please help out. This means:

1. getting your membership and ad material in quickly
2. contributing whatever promotional ideas or experience you can
3. promoting the association within your business community and distributing guide brochures
4. assisting with shows and other opportunities that arise.

I look forward to hearing from you and hope to meet you at the AGM.

Yours truly,

Neil MacLaine.

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