



To: Town of Ridgway
From: Ridgway Area Chamber of Commerce
Subject: Q1 Interim Lodging Tax Report
Date: Sunday, May 5, 2019

Dear Ridgway Town Council,

The RACC Board of Directors is happy to share our first quarter report with the Town of Ridgway. We are excited by the progress that continues to be made at the organization.

Included with this report is the Chamber's Lodging Tax P&L statement. As a reminder, RACC's QuickBooks structures are organized around the Town-approved marketing plan and managed by Middleton Accounting. These actuals are a direct pull from QuickBooks and reflect a continued diversification of investments designed to advance our local business community.

It has been a busy and exciting three months since our last report to the Town. Currently, we are overseeing two Colorado Tourism Office grants: \$10,000 marketing grant (partnership with OTO) and \$15,000 Visitor Center and Heritage Park redesign grant. We launched the youth apprenticeship program that will support both our youth and business community in the short and long-term. We are prepping for the May 13th Career Fair Experience Day. Also in May, we will be launching our first Visitor News quarterly newsletter targeting potential visitors from out of the area. In addition, the Chamber is revamping the weekly e-blast to ensure it best benefits businesses and communities. Meanwhile, the Town and Chamber continue to partner on content for the Creative Corridor large matching grant of \$25,000.

We continue to see progress being made as a result of the organizational infrastructure investments made over the last two years, especially through RidgwayColorado.com and the exceptional group of contractors now engaged with the organization. Along those lines, I am happy to share that this is the first quarterly report that has been developed and will be presented by our Marketing Director, Hilary Lewkowitz. Hilary has been doing an exceptional job of advancing our overall programming, in partnership with the rest of the Chamber team, and I'm excited for this to be one of the final steps in transitioning to a staff-led, board-advised organization.

We look forward to hearing any questions or comments you have regarding this interim report and continuing to partner with the Town of Ridgway to advance the interest of local businesses and the community as a whole.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Colin Lacy".

Colin Lacy

President, Ridgway Area Chamber of Commerce

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Staffing

As shared in the 2019 Marketing Budget Request, we are transitioning the Chamber to an organization that is staff-led and board-advised. Increased staff capacity will enable the organization to successfully achieve its marketing plan and bring increased value to the local business community.

Program Coordinator, Pamela Cannalte continues to maintain a lead staffing role for the organization focused in particular on the operational/program management of our different tracks of work. In particular, management support to the Visitor Center, membership relations, and the implementation of select special projects throughout the year, including this year's golf tournament and Visitors Guide support. Pamela has been a terrific leader and contributor to the organization's mission and the community more broadly.

Marketing Director, Hilary Lewkowitz, has taken on an increase of roles in order to ensure that the Chamber can move towards a staff-led and board-advised model. Hilary is managing all staff, which includes: organizing and leading monthly staff meetings, working with the board to identify marketing goals, guiding the direction for all marketing-related projects, approving invoices and liaising with town staff. In addition to these management roles, Hilary is overseeing and/or implementing all marketing-related projects plus managing our two current Colorado Tourism Office grants.

As of April 30th, we are no longer contracting Ashley King-Grambley as our Communications and Social Media Consultant. For several years, Ashley has managed the weekly community news e-blast and Facebook social media posts. The Chamber decided that we are finally in a position for our immediate staff to manage these important communications. We are very grateful for Ashley's many contributions and consistent quality of work over the years. It is the result of Ashley's efforts that developed the Facebook presence that the Chamber has today. Hilary Lewkowitz will be taking over the weekly e-blast and Tanya Ishikawa, who works closely with us on many other communications projects including the Visitors Guide, will be managing the Chamber's Facebook account. Part of the transition process will include a number of changes to the e-blast, which are listed in the "Website" section of this report.

Jeannie Robertson has taken over the Visitor Center Coordinator volunteer position. Pamela Cannalte is working directly with Jeannie to ensure the Visitor Center volunteer staff and general operations are being managed appropriately. The Visitor Center opening day is Saturday, May 3rd.

Our exceptional group of local consulting partners and staff, all based in Ridgway, includes:

- *Marketing Director* – Hilary Lewkowitz
- *Program Coordinator* -- Pamela Cannalte
- *Online Content and Storytelling Consultant* – Tanya Ishikawa
- *Visitors Center and Volunteer Coordinator* – Jeannie Robertson
- *Accounting* – Middleton Accounting (Jane Pulliam)
- *Website and Technology Partner* -- Peak Media (Josh Gowans)
- *Media and Design Partner* – Sprout Design Studio (Nicole Green)
- *Youth Ambassador* – Emma Wallin

Board of Directors

On January 10th, the Board of Directors held their annual retreat to discuss budget, staffing structure, 2019 goals and more. During this time, the board held elections and the following changes are noted below. Colin Lacy was re-elected as President for another year-long term with the caveat that this will be his final year in that leadership role. During the April monthly board meeting, Barb Latham informed the board that she will be stepping down from her role as Treasurer due to a career change that moves her away from Ridgway. The Board is actively working to find a replacement for Barb.

- *President* – Colin Lacy (US2020)
- *Vice President* – Tim Patterson (RIGS)
- *Secretary* – Erin Stadelman (Ouray County Fairgrounds and Rodeo Association)
- *Treasurer* – Barb Latham (Citizens State Bank) *until June 2019
- *At Large*
 - Jason Bojar (Balance Natural Medicine)
 - Daniel Richards (Colorado Boy)
 - Amanda Swain (Ridgway Adventure Sports)

Colorado Tourism Office Grant: \$10,000 Off Peak Season Marketing (partnership with OTO)

In the fall of 2018 the RACC received a Small Marketing Match Grant for \$10,000 from the CTO, which is based on a 25% match (\$2,500). Grant implementation began in January and is being led by Marketing Director, Hilary Lewkowitz. RACC and OTO are collaborating on the grant in an effort to increase countywide off-peak season visitation and visitor-driven economic opportunities. Both organizations recognize that summer tourism visitation is close to maximum capacity. In contrast, businesses struggle to keep a consistent cash flow during the off-peak seasons of October through April.

Grant implementation since January includes:

- Sponsored article on Colorado.com, CTO's website for marketing Colorado out-of-state and internationally. The article, "5 Reasons to Escape to These Quiet Mountain Towns", focuses on off-peak season tourism assets in Ridgway and Ouray.
 - <https://www.colorado.com/articles/5-reasons-escape-these-quiet-mountain-towns>
- Advertisements on Colorado.com that showcase Ridgway as a year-round destination and are based on the five marketing themes. Advertisements will run until they receive 100K impressions. Clicking on the advertisement (and links in the article mentioned above) takes readers to RidgwayColorado.com/plan-your-trip to enter their contact information to receive a digital copy of the Visitor's Guide.
- Instagram Takeover on Visit Colorado's (144K followers) account from April 19-25. Over a 7-day period, 22 images were shared on their account that covered the five marketing themes and focused on late spring tourism assets.

Below is a press release that details the grant and opportunity:

Ridgway and Ouray Receive State Grant to Promote Off-Peak Season Tourism

The Ridgway Area Chamber of Commerce (RACC) and the Ouray Tourism Office (OTO) are pleased to announce their recent award of a \$10,000 marketing grant from the Colorado Tourism Office to promote countywide, off-peak season visitation and tourism-driven economic opportunities. Ridgway and Ouray recognize that summer tourism visitation is at or near maximum capacity. In contrast, local businesses struggle to keep a consistent cash flow during the shoulder seasons of October through April. The marketing grant will be used to target off-peak season months in an effort to increase tourism-driven economic opportunities for local businesses. This is the first tourism-related, countywide collaboration that will lay the foundation for future marketing strategies around off-peak season travel periods, and Ridgway Chamber's first state Tourism Office grant award as the lead applicant.

The two biggest challenges for Ridgway and surrounding area business owners are seasonal swings (off-peak season income) and hiring/retaining employees, according to a 2017 study conducted by Durango-based RPI Consulting. Over the years, Ridgway and Ouray have seen businesses close because of decreased cash flow during the slower months. It has also been challenging to hire and retain employees without being able to promise year-round employment. The purpose of this new initiative is to increase visitors during the off-peak seasons, which will directly impact the success of our local economy by bringing more financial (and workforce) stability to local businesses.

This grant will greatly enhance both Ridgway and Ouray's current marketing programs. To date, Ouray and Ridgway have not worked together towards a collaborative countywide marketing strategy. In addition, neither Ridgway nor Ouray has specifically targeted off-peak season tourism in marketing campaigns. This grant will be the start of a long-term marketing strategy to unite Ouray County stakeholders towards a common goal of tourism development beyond the busy summer season. The marketing initiatives will be based on a series of itineraries highlighting countywide tourism assets that are accessible during the months of October through March. Target markets will be high-value outdoor enthusiasts and creatives that are looking to experience uncrowded and authentic Colorado mountain towns.

"We see this grant as only the beginning of a new and ongoing strategy to focus marketing efforts specifically on the off-peak season, and to do so in collaboration with Ouray. Our board believes this is where we can move the needle for our business community and their employees", commented Colin Lacy, RACC Board President.

"This grant represents an opportunity for Ouray and Ridgway to showcase our shared assets and unique experiences in the seasons where we would like to see more economic stability. Both the Ouray Tourism Office and Ridgway Area Chamber of Commerce share a vision of a sustainable, community-first and experience-based destination marketing program, and this forms the basis of a new collaborative strategy between the organizations. This grant, and the shoulder seasons, are our best opportunity to start moving forward on a sustainable path into the future. We applaud RACC for taking the lead on this grant and look forward to working with their excellent team in the upcoming year.", said Kat Papenbrock, Executive Director, Ouray Tourism Office.

Outside of just this CTO grant, RACC intends to guide its broader marketing strategy to focus in particular on this shoulder/low season period. This is a period that is critical for our businesses success and an area where we believe we can begin to move the needle in terms of impact. This grant would support the development of a marketing plan, which will include a series of itineraries based on existing

initiatives: Creative Corridor, Hot Springs Loop, Colorado Spirits Trail, and San Juan Skyway. Itineraries will detail off-peak season tourism assets related to existing initiatives, and incorporate activities, restaurants and lodging throughout the county. This is just be the beginning of a broader strategy to target the shoulder and low seasons.

Colorado Tourism Office Grant: \$15,000 Visitor Center & Heritage Park Strategic Plan for Redesign

In partnership with the Town of Ridgway, we are pleased to receive a \$15,000 grant (with a \$3,650 match) to create a strategic plan to redesign the Visitor Center and surrounding Heritage Park. This area is considered the gateway to the region, and is the first point of contact for visitors entering Ridgway from the directions of Montrose or Ouray. As the Railroad Museum started its transition to the new location, we have seen the numbers of visitors at the center dropped from ~6,000 in 2017 to ~4,500 in 2018. Grant funding is being used to hire a consulting firm to help redesign the space to meet off-peak season needs, drive visitors to explore tourism assets, adapt to the digital world of travel and better represent Ridgway's community character. This project is an exciting and significant opportunity for both the business community and community at large.

Grant implementation since February:

- DHM Design was chosen through a public RFP process as the lead consulting firm for the redesign process.
- March 28th - The first community input meeting was held in order to gather ideas on vision for the redesigned space.
- April 1-28 - DHM Design created a 1st draft of the strategic plan with input from Town, Chamber and community meeting.
- April 29 - The second community input meeting was held to assess the 1st draft of the strategic plan. Feedback from this meeting is being used to create a second draft of the strategic plan.



This project is a great example of Town-Chamber collaboration and we look forward to working together on the remainder of this grant and starting the implementation process.

Below is a Press Release that details the grant:

Ridgway secures \$15,000 state tourism grant for Visitor Center redesign

The Ridgway Area Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with the Town of Ridgway, secured a \$15,000 Colorado Tourism Office grant to redesign the Ridgway Visitor Center and Heritage Park. This grant, announced in January, was the second awarded to the Ridgway Chamber in the last six months, bringing local tourism grant funding to a total of \$30,000.

The Visitor Center, located in the 1.25-acre park at the southeast corner of Highways 62 and 550, is owned by the town and managed by the chamber. Together with the Visitor Center, the indoor and

outdoor displays of the Ridgway Railroad Museum have shared the property and building for more than a decade. The train cars, photos and artifacts in the museum were the main draw for visitors. In early 2018, the museum's outdoor displays moved to a new location on Railroad Street, next to the historic Railroad Depot building, and the plan is for the indoor displays to move there by 2020. Without the train cars, the Visitor Center building is now alone in a 73-year-old building on an empty lot.

"The numbers of visitors at the center dropped from 6,000 in 2017 to 4,500 in 2018, with future projections of a continued decrease in visitor numbers," said Chamber Board President Colin Lacy. "The town government and chamber started discussions last year about a potential redesign of the center and property that would effectively motivate visitors to explore Ridgway tourism assets." The property next to the Ouray County Fairgrounds is considered the gateway to the region, as it is at the base of the San Juan Mountains, and is the first point of contact for visitors entering Ridgway from the directions of Montrose or Ouray, Lacy added.

The CTO grant will fund the development of a strategic plan for redesigning the Visitor Center and park to meet off-peak season needs, drive visitors to explore tourism assets, adapt to the digital world of travel and better represent Ridgway's community character. The planning process will include stakeholder engagement to gather community input. The chamber and the town will seek additional outside funding for implementation of the resulting plan.

Meanwhile, the chamber is collaborating with the Ouray Tourism Office on an off-peak season promotion plan, funded by a \$10,000 CTO grant. The goal is to enhance both Ridgway's and Ouray's current marketing programs to increase tourism from October to April to support local businesses and economic growth.

The chamber and the town government are also partnering on a \$25,000 regional CTO grant to promote Ridgway as a Creative District along with four other communities along the Colorado Creative Corridor. The corridor, developed in 2018, offers travelers multi-day itineraries and encourages them to explore Certified Creative Districts throughout rural Colorado.

Colorado Creative Corridor

In 2018, Ridgway joined four other Colorado communities in the establishment of the "Colorado Creative Corridor." This project is continuing in 2019, with another \$25,000 grant from the Colorado Tourism Office. RACC will provide \$2,500 in match funding for this effort, and the Town of Ridgway will also provide \$2,500. The partners are: Tourism Council of Carbondale; Carbondale Creative District; Salida Creative District; Chaffee County Visitors Bureau; Crested Butte Creative District; Gunnison-Crested Butte Tourism Association; Delta County Tourism Council; North Fork Creative Coalition; Ridgway Creative District; and the Ridgway Chamber.

2019 grant funding will continue on the success of this past year, which saw the following results: print brochure (with Ridgway itinerary) distributed throughout the state, earned media with estimated 142.9 million reach, plus Creative Corridor Colorado.com brand channel and social media platforms.

Hilary is serving in a lead strategy role from the Chamber's end on how we can begin to capitalize on this significant investment and opportunity. This includes working with Town Staff to ensure marketing content best reflects Ridgway assets.

We are excited for this project to continue to bring value to the business and creative economy for years to come, and look forward to this continuing to be an important example of the positive impact of Chamber/Town collaboration.

Online Media Assets: Website, Digital Newsletters & Social Media

RidgwayColorado.com remains the #1 Google search result for keyword "Ridgway Colorado" as well as other high value keywords. Site optimization is an ongoing effort, we are working with Peak Media to continue to improve site features, functions and ease of use. We will continue to invest in additional content and our staff/contractors to monitor the site and keep membership content fresh and up to date. We are actively leveraging the "Five Themes" branding (detailed below) within the website, online itineraries and quarterly visitor newsletter (launching in May).

In an effort to better capture email leads, we updated <https://ridgwaycolorado.com/plan-your-trip> so the Visitor Guide is gated content. This webpage is the landing page for any digital advertisements outside of RidgwayColorado.com (e.g., Colorado.com advertisements land on this page). All email leads will automatically be added to our CRM system and sent the weekly e-blast and/or quarterly visitor news (based on user preferences).

Last fall we completed the development of a CRM (customer relationship management) for the website. With leadership from Peak Media, we are now using this system and continually working on improvements.

The weekly community e-blast is re-launching this week with a new design and platform. Until a month ago, email contacts were stored under an email platform that was not connected with our CRM system. Because of this, we were losing valuable data and list growth. Peak Media and Hilary Lewkowitz worked together to transition all contacts into our CRM system and redesign the e-blast in a manner that will better serve businesses and the greater community. In addition, we will be launching our first-ever quarterly visitor newsletter. This newsletter will go out to our Go-Colorado leads plus website sign-ups. The purpose of this newsletter is to send promotional emails to targeted email leads. This new newsletter will focus on the five marketing themes and promoting Ridgway as a year-round destination.

The RACC Instagram account is now being presented as a visitor-facing platform. So, we will use this social platform to promote Ridgway tourism assets and local businesses to potential visitors. This strategy is in-line with communities throughout Colorado. Since February we started partnering with local photographers and using only high quality images. As of May 3rd, our Instagram account has doubled to 917 followers in just three months. Facebook will continue to be a platform that we promote and communicate to our local community.

Visitors Guide

Development and distribution of the 2019 guide is now complete with leadership from our communications partner and Visitors Guide editor, Tanya Ishikawa. We made additional improvements on the content, including the creation of a more county-wide narrative on select themes. For the first time, in 2019, the guide has a single cover with both “Ridgway and Ouray”, which will significantly improve the user friendliness of the guide and is another step in the right direction of Ridgway/Ouray collaboration.

100,000 copies were distributed this year as a result of the collaboration with Ouray. We are very pleased with this significantly improved narrative and the alignment of the guide with the five marketing themes of Culinary Experiences, History & Heritage, Arts & Entertainment, Outdoor Adventure and Health & Wellness. The 2019 guide includes an introduction from our 2019 Youth Ambassador Emma Wallin, who completed an interview and application process just this week.

We will begin planning the 2020 guide within the next 1-2 months. The intent is to continue to work with contractor, Tanya Ishikawa, and to partner again with Ouray on guide content.

Golf Tournament

Planning for the Chamber Open will begin in the next month, and will be led by Pamela Cannalte with support by the Board and Marketing Director. This year’s fundraiser and community event will build on the success of 2018. We are using 2018 tournament proceeds to fund the Youth Apprenticeship Program (see below section).

Five Themes

The Chamber is actively using the five themes as the foundation of all marketing initiatives. As we have shared in previous reports, these themes are designed to capture the unique attractions of the Ridgway area and our goal has been to develop these themes and in line with marketing best practices, use them consistently across our media, including website, visitors guide, print ads, social media and visitor center. These are now being adopted across all of our platform in conjunction with the themes:



Arts & Entertainment



Culinary Experiences



Health & Wellness



Outdoor Adventure



History & Heritage

Print Media

The Chamber coordinated co-op ads with local businesses in the 2019 San Juan Skyways publication. The San Juan Skyway is distributed throughout Colorado and is considered to be a marketing asset for local businesses as well as the Chamber.

Visitor Center

In the staffing section of this report we highlight Jeannie Robertson, our new Visitor Center Coordinator. With the support of Pamela Cannalte, we are thrilled to have Jeannie coordinating the volunteers and Visitor Center operations.

As mentioned above, we are excited to be moving towards a strategic plan to redesign the Visitor Center and Heritage Park. In partnership with Town, we look forward to seeing the results of the new plan and moving towards staged implementation.

Itineraries



Itinerary development is a project that we continue to work on and the itineraries are now included on the RidgwayColorado.com website as well as the Colorado Tourism Office's Colorado.com website in their Field Guide/Creative Corridor section of the website. These itineraries are important assets for the Visitors Center as well. The Chamber is committed to giving exposure to all five categories of business mentioned above and ultimately develop itineraries to include a wide range of activities, themes and times of the year. We will continue to send fresh itinerary content to Colorado.com, which will incite interest in Ridgway as a whole and provide inclusion of a cross-section of local businesses.

Itinerary development is an important way to collaborate with local partners and create strong, action-oriented content for both visitors and locals, which ultimately leads to more customers for local businesses and nonprofits.

Our itineraries are gaining traction with Colorado Tourism Office. Just a week ago, they shared a 3-day itinerary on Visit Colorado and received engagement (pictured above).

Youth Apprenticeship Program & Career Experience Fair

We are excited to launch the Youth Apprenticeship Program. This new program builds on a series of initiatives to better connect local youth to our business community and provides high quality work experience opportunities. The Youth Apprenticeship program offers paid summer apprenticeships with completion bonuses for Ridgway students in their junior or senior year. Students will have a specific job with a local member business and will receive ongoing training and professional development above and beyond a traditional summer job. Funding for this initiative is entirely made possible by the generous support of our annual golf tournament sponsors and players. Participating businesses for the 2019 program are: RIGS Fly Shop, Beautifully Served, Cowgirl Creations, Mountain Girl Gallery and Lucky Find Consignments.

In partnership with Ridgway Secondary School, we are co-hosting a Career Experience Fair on May 13th. This one-hour event enables local businesses and nonprofits to connect with middle and high school students, and introduce students to part-time work and volunteer opportunities in our community.

The Chamber is very pleased with the progress that continues to be made in 2019 and we sincerely thank the Council and all of the Town staff for their support and partnership.

