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Diversity Draws Visitors

by Chris Luna

Dallas is ranked as a leading convention destination, offering great accessibility, a wonderful climate, excellent meeting facilities and more than 63,000 hotel-motel rooms. And to keep that leadership position as America's demographics change, our convention sales and marketing approaches are changing as well.

Almost 20 years ago, the Dallas Convention & Visitors Bureau (DCVB) pioneered a marketing concept to attract multicultural conventions and meetings to Dallas. We developed a team approach, using one of our city's greatest strengths - our diversity.

Dallas' ethnic chambers of commerce brought to the table their relationships with minority organizations. The bureau added its industry experience and knowledge of hotels and venues. Together, that powerful team has been committed to make Dallas the No. 1 destination for multicultural conventions and meetings.

The bureau's multicultural marketing committee is a cohesive group of professionals, representing the bureau, the Dallas Black Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Dallas Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Dallas Asian Chamber of Commerce, airlines, hotels, and others in the hospitality industry.

But valuing diversity isn't relegated to this one committee. The bureau's directors, staff, vendors and constituents all reflect such diversity. Are we where we want to be? Not yet. But we are making important progress.

In the past few years, Dallas has hosted such groups as the National Conference of Black Mayors, the Hispanic National Bar Association, the Organization of Chinese Americans, and the National Minority AIDS Council. From 1997 through 2001, Dallas booked more than 132,000 hotel room nights tied directly to such efforts. With a convention delegate spending an average of \$ 1,18.47 during his or her typical four day stay, the economic impact is substantial.

Still, we can't rest on our successes. More and more cities are becoming aggressive in courting this growing market. To continue and expand upon our successes, we need to promote the diversity in our city and create an awareness of the need for diversity in the hospitality industry. Specifically we must:

- Determine and implement a more effective way to solicit and secure local support for national events. Many national organizations require the involvement of a local chapter. While more than 100 multicultural organizations have chapters in our area, we need better ways to inform them of opportunities and to enlist their support.
- Create and distribute new or modified advertising materials to better explain the breadth of multicultural Dallas
- Increase the number of minorities in the hospitality industry. We should support educational opportunities such as the Dallas Independent School District's Travel & Tourism Academy and Richland Community College's travel, exposition and meeting management program.
- Solicit and receive financial support from the business community to help sell Dallas as the place for minority conventions and association meetings.

Dallas is the No. 1 leisure, business and convention destination in Texas. In 2000, 14.9 million visitors spent more than \$ 10.6 billion here. And each year, more than 3.8 million people attend 3,600 conventions in Dallas.

We are proud of our success in making Dallas a leader in hosting multicultural conventions and meetings. But more work needs to be done to take our multicultural marketing efforts to the next level.

Chris Luna, managing director of The Luna Group, serves on the Dallas Convention & Visitors Bureau's board of directors and chairs its multicultural marketing committee