

TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL MEETING
January 12, 2026

MEMBERS PRESENT

Commr. Kirby Smith, Chairman
Ms. Cindy Staley
Ms. Gigi Lemon (arrived at 2:10 p.m.)
Mr. David Perry
Mr. Christian Slupe
Councilmember Alison Strange
Commr. Alan Reisman
Mr. Robert Hendrick

MEMBERS NOT PRESENT

Mr. David Filippini

OTHERS PRESENT

Mr. Ryan Ritchie, Director for the Office of Tourism
Ms. Rachel Bartolowits, Assistant County Attorney
Mr. Josh Pearson, Deputy Clerk, Board Support

CALL TO ORDER

Commr. Smith called the meeting of the Lake County Tourist Development Council (TDC) to order at 2:00 p.m. on January 12, 2026 in County Commission Chambers, Administration Building, Tavares, Florida.

Mr. Ryan Ritchie, Director for the Office of Tourism, gave the Invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

MINUTES

On a motion by Mr. Hendrick, seconded by Commr. Reisman and carried unanimously by a vote of 7-0, the TDC approved the minutes for the TDC meeting of October 6, 2025 (Regular Meeting).

CITIZEN QUESTION AND COMMENT PERIOD

No one wished to address the TDC at this time.

UPDATES

Mr. Ritchie welcomed their new Tourism Marketing Manager, Ms. Lisa Chipungu, who started in December 2025. He mentioned that she had worked for Visit Orlando and Experience Kissimmee, and brought a wealth of knowledge and great destination marketing experience to their office. He said that he was excited to have her join the team. He then showed the affidavit of publication for the current meeting per Florida Statutes.

WEBSITE PRESENTATION AND UPDATE

Mr. Levar Cooper, Director for the Office of Communications, showed the updates to the Discover Lake website, noting that at the last TDC meeting it was requested that there be a lodging feature added to the website. He indicated that they added a landing page for lodging that would feature different stories and would change according to the seasons; furthermore, they planned to continue building this out in the coming months and as time went on, they would look at analytics and prioritize which stories were working the best. He pointed out that there were links to the Cities' pages and the top-rated Tripadvisor listings, as well as the "plan a trip" option which was at the bottom of the page and would include the various lodging in the county to make it easy for users to find.

Commr. Smith asked if they had been working with their lodging partners to help create this content.

Mr. Cooper answered that they had worked with them to get photos and videos of their accommodations; additionally, he said that Ms. Cindy Staley put them in contact with some of the other stakeholders as well. He stated that they would update this content as new things came online, noting that Mission Resort + Club was doing some updates to their properties and that they had been speaking with stakeholders in the citrus industry as well.

Ms. Staley questioned if visitors would be able to book a room when they clicked on a specific hotel.

Mr. Cooper replied that the link would open a new page for Tripadvisor and that they could find more information about the hotel, see the reviews, and check availability.

Councilmember Alison Strange asked if Lake County was making any money off those bookings.

Mr. Cooper responded that they would receive Tourist Development Taxes (TDT); however, they did not receive any funding from Tripadvisor.

Councilmember Strange suggested looking into getting an Application Programming Interface (API) link, whether it was through a partner who could provide one, or registering Lake County as a travel agency, as the new trend was to use an API link to act like Expedia and make a small amount of money off that link. She mentioned that the City of Clermont had an API link for their featured partners on their website and split the fee with their partners, noting that this could be additional revenue for the county.

Ms. Gigi Lemon arrived at 2:10 p.m.

Mr. Cooper stated that they were looking at integrating the API since Discover Lake was an API partner with Tripadvisor. He commented that they were not aware of a revenue side to it; however, they could see what options were available before they continued building this out.

Commr. Smith said that they needed to meet with the County Attorney on this.

Mr. Ritchie mentioned that he was not familiar with the County being able to generate additional revenue from something like this, but that he could look into it.

REPORTS

MADDEN MEDIA

Ms. Olivia Wells, Destination Strategy Director for Madden Media, stated that they would be giving a presentation on everything that happened during this past fiscal year, and she introduced Ms. Nicole Klein, Senior Media Strategist for Madden Media.

Ms. Klein highlighted some industry travel trends going into 2026 and noted that Expedia's 2026 report and forecast showed some great opportunities that Lake County could capitalize on which included hotel hopping, commenting that the majority of travelers indicated that they wanted to stay at multiple hotels within a single destination trip so they could experience different neighborhoods in one trip and maximize cost savings. She relayed that they were leaning into this trend with their theme park influencer campaign which encouraged hotel hopping between the City of Orlando and Lake County due to the proximity and juxtaposition of experiences between the destinations; additionally, they were using their seasonal remarketing campaign with the seasonal pages on the website which included multi-city experiences within the county to encourage visitors to go to different events, restaurants, and accommodations within the county. She stated that another trend was farm charm and agritourism, that they planned on focusing on the u-pick farms and Lakeridge Winery, and that the last trend was the year of sports tourism; therefore, they planned on focusing on the fishing partnership event promotions and their partnership with Star Athletics to lean into the blend of sports and leisure.

Ms. Wells said that nationally, hotel demand was fairly flat and was skewing down year over year at about 0.3 percent whereas short-term rentals had increased year over year at about 4.3 percent. She mentioned that they were also seeing these trends at a State level, and although occupancy had declined year over year this past quarter, the average daily rate (ADR) was up; furthermore, short-term rentals were stable with a slight increase which showed that consumer intent to travel remained strong. She indicated that they were seeing a decrease in the percentage of visitors that came into Lake County year over year; however, visitors were still spending money in the area, adding that they would keep an eye on that and make sure they were pushing heads in beds accommodations alongside retail, restaurants and attractions. She also relayed that there was a 30 percent increase in visitor spend for retail which showed that there was interest in the shops and downtowns. She stated that the decrease in accommodations likely meant that visitors were making more day trips.

Ms. Klein discussed their media performance, and mentioned that at the last meeting they were asked to provide a month over month comparison of website sessions for 2024 and 2025. She pointed out that there had been a lift across all months, year over year, which was primarily driven through the paid channels of paid search and social ads, but also through organic search which indicated an increased awareness of Lake County. She related that overall, the media campaigns delivered about 2.4 million impressions and 113,000 clicks to the website; additionally, it was green across the board for the lift in website sessions, and user engagement improved by 86

percent, noting that while they were driving increased traffic to the website and had increased users overall, the user intent remained high. She commented that the users were coming from the in-state key markets of the Cities of Orlando, Tampa, Miami, and Jacksonville, and the out-of-state markets of New York City, New York; Atlanta, Georgia; and Chicago, Illinois. She displayed a chart of their performance tactics, and stated that Lake County was performing consistently above the Madden Media benchmarks for clickthrough rate, which were higher than industry benchmarks. She mentioned that paid social ads continued to be a great top performer with the key being the video creatives as they were very engaging and delivered a clickthrough rate of over 200 percent of the Madden benchmark. She related that Google Performance Max (Pmax) was a newer tactic that they launched and was already performing above the benchmark, adding that this had advanced artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities across search, display, and videos and was driving the most efficient traffic. She indicated that they launched a campaign to highlight Lake County's partnership with University of Central Florida (UCF) Athletics, and that through this digital component they were able to serve ads to users on their mobile device while they were in the stadium for football games, as well as re-serve them ads after they left the stadium by creating a geofence around the stadium and capturing the device pool. She said that this campaign delivered nearly one million impressions which would have been enough to fill the stadium 21 times and that because of this success, they were continuing with this for UCF men's and women's basketball. She relayed that in December 2025 they launched a holiday campaign on Facebook and Instagram that focused on events, shopping and downtowns, and that the blog produced by Lake County ranked in the top five for website sessions, the clickthrough rate performed 60 percent above the Madden Media benchmark, and the top key markets for engaged users included the Cities of Orlando, Tampa, Miami, and West Palm Beach. She stated that they continued their seasonal remarketing strategy for the fall and winter, noting that the seasonal landing pages continued to be optimized by the Office of Communications to include relevant trip planning content for those seasons. She explained that after users visited the Lake County website they re-served them ads with the seasonal message across Meta and Google with a "book now" call to action to encourage trip bookings. She said that overall, paid media delivered 95 percent of sessions to these seasonal pages, which showed the importance of paid media and reengaging people. She commented that they created an ad for the Visit Florida Vacation Guide which was both in print and electronic, noting that it reached users actively interested in traveling to the State of Florida. She remarked that the ad featured a first-person point of view to immerse readers in the Lake County experience and to differentiate from the beach focused markets, adding that they continued to utilize the "Tune Out to Tune In" message.

Ms. Wells discussed their public relations (PR) efforts, and stated that they had eight secured stories which had the potential reach of over 80 million impressions. She mentioned that these included articles in *Southern Living*, which mentioned the City of Tavares as the seaplane capital of America, *StyleBlueprint* which focused on hidden gems in Lake County, and *Forbes* which focused on the holidays in the small towns of Lake County. She remarked that they would be hosting Mr. Tim Cotroneo, a writer for *Travel Dreams Magazine* and *Golf Vacations Magazine*, for a press trip on January 14 through 17, 2026, noting that he would be staying at Mission Resort + Club and would be golfing, having a sunset cruise on the Rusty Anchor in the City of Mount Dora, and experiencing a seaplane tour. She indicated that they would be attending the 2026 International Media Marketplace conference and would have dedicated one-on-one meetings with

top tier journalists to represent Lake County, and she showed the one-sheet page that their design team put together for the conference that told the story of Lake County.

Ms. Klein commented that as the year continued, they were excited to elevate through the paid media campaigns and were continuing with branded partnerships with *Outside Magazine* and long form video storytelling through broadcast, focusing on fishing and camping. She indicated that they would be amplifying their influencer custom content series by hosting one influencer in market each month with the primary focus being capturing theme park travelers and bringing them to Lake County, noting that they hosted three influencers in market the previous year. She related that they would be partnering with a City of Tampa based influencer, Sarah Outdoor Adventure, from a seasonal approach, and that she would be staying at Mission Resort + Club on January 13 through 14, 2026; additionally, they would be promoting the messaging of blueways and byways, fishing, and theme parks to state parks for their Meta and Google campaign refreshes which would allow them to reach users with different interests and be specific with their targeting to show the array of experiences within Lake County.

Ms. Wells recalled that they recently approved a partnership between Madden Media, Star Athletics and Lake County, and would be filming a three-part episode series showcasing the partnership that Discover Lake County had with Star Athletics; furthermore, this series would have the athletes get off the track and into Lake County showing that they were not only Olympians, but were in Lake County enjoying the amenities that were available to hopefully convince others to visit as well. She commented that they were still working through the details and the storylines, were identifying the areas and attractions they wanted to showcase, and had interviewed the four athletes who would be in the series. She also said that they would be filming in March 2026, and that they were excited to continue to capitalize on this partnership.

Ms. Staley asked if they had the statistics for which area had a decline in occupancy.

Ms. Wells replied that she did not have the data at the moment; however, this data was from Zartico, and their data team could look to see if they could dive deeper into the information to identify the year over year difference.

Councilmember Strange opined that bicycling and trails would be important for the South Lake region in the next few years, and said that she would love to see this be explored; additionally, the American Bicycle Association was coming back to the City of Clermont on January 27 through 29, 2026, and she suggested that Madden Media tap into some of the things they were doing. She also mentioned focusing on several events that were upcoming in the City of Clermont, including Pig on the Pond, the Great Clermont Triathlon, and THE Spring Games, who would be happy to host the Olympians.

Ms. Wells stated that she would meet with Mr. Ritchie after the meeting to show him the partners they had with booking engines directly on their websites so that they could capitalize on that further.

GREATER ORLANDO SPORTS COMMISSION

Ms. Lindsey McBride, Associate Vice President of Events, Operations and Business Development for the Greater Orlando Sports Commission (GO Sports), mentioned that they worked with A.B. Newton and Company, which was based out of the City of Winter Garden, to update some of their graphics, icons, and social media for digital presentations; additionally, they had some step and repeats created as well. She indicated that for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-2025, 27 events were held which brought in an economic impact of over \$12 million, almost 13,000 visitors, and 15,263 room nights. She stated that they recently hosted the Florida Bass Nation Junior and High School Qualifier at Venetian Gardens in October 2025, as well as the Rocking Horse Fall Horse Trials and the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA) Golf State Championships in November 2025, noting that they were looking to extend their contract with FHSAA for another three years. She relayed that she would have the final numbers for these events when they were closed out. She showed several news article titles about Mr. Charlie Woods, Mr. Tiger Woods' son, competing at the High School State Golf Championships at Mission Resort + Club in which he participated along with Ms. Annika Sörenstam's son and Mr. Henrik Stenson's son, and commented that much national attention was brought to Mission Resort + Club because of the professional spotlight that their parents had. She stated that they were planning to host the Rocking Horse Winter 1 Trials at Rocking Horse Stables in January 2026, and the Major League Fishing Tackle Warehouse at Venetian Gardens and the Florida Anvil Ultra Triathlon at Lake Louisa State Park in February 2026. She remarked that they had been working with Discover Lake County and Madden Media to promote the Major League Fishing event digitally and on the radio, and that they planned to see if Mr. Tim Frederick, a professional angler, would promote the event on the radio as well. She said that for their business development travel, Mr. Jason Siegel, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for GO Sports, was currently overseas meeting with national media rights holders, that Mr. Brent Nelson, Executive Vice President, Business Development and Sports Tourism for GO Sports, was leaving on the following Wednesday for the Large Market Meetings, and that Mr. Ritchie was going to attend the Sports Events and Tourism Association (ETA) Chief Executive (CE) Summit at the end of January 2026. She mentioned that staff attended the Leaders Week in London, England and met with international governing bodies and events rightsholders to discuss bringing events to Lake County, and that they had been in contact with Supertri about hosting an event in the City of Clermont since they were known for biking, running, and swimming. She relayed that staff also attended the Volleyball Women's World Championship in Huntington Beach, California and spoke with United States of America (USA) Volleyball, the Florida Region of USA Volleyball, and the Fédération Internationale de Volleyball (FIVB) about bringing events to Hickory Point Beach Volleyball Complex. She commented that after attending the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Symposium in August 2025, some bids came from those meetings, and they planned to submit bids for the Division II (DII) Men's Golf Championship and DII Women's Golf Championship in 2028; furthermore, after conversations with Horizon League, they were looking to extend their contract for an additional three years through 2029. She discussed their business development prospects and mentioned the following: the Professional Disc Golf Association was coming in May 2026; they had received a few requests for proposal (RFP) from US Rowing that were of interest to Lake County; they were working with Ms. Gigi Lemon and Mr. Ritchie to bring an event with NXTPRO Sports to The Big House; and she was meeting with Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (B.A.S.S.) at the end of the month to discuss

bringing back their High School and College events, the Elite Series Team Championship, and the Open Series to Venetian Gardens.

Councilmember Strange remarked that the City of Clermont could host NCAA level cross country, rowing, softball, triathlon and track and field programs, and that she would love to see some bids come through where the City or Lake County could bid on them. She then asked if there were any pending bids for any of these.

Ms. McBride explained that the NCAA did two to four-year cycles and that the two-year cycle was upcoming for this summer, adding that they were expecting to receive RFPs this summer and would evaluate them and work with the City of Clermont to see where those events could fit.

Councilmember Strange commented that they would welcome events for any of the sports she mentioned.

OFFICE OF TOURISM

Mr. Ritchie stated that in the previous month they changed their office's name from the Office of Visit Lake to the Office of Tourism since it was the industry standard and many tourism offices across the State of Florida operated under an official government name while using a distinct brand, noting that internally they were the Office of Tourism while their brand was still Discover Lake County.

Market Analytics

Mr. Ritchie mentioned that the cumulative TDT year to date (YTD) collections were \$374,665 through October 2025, which was up one percent year over year. He said that there was a bit of a lag in collections; however, he would receive the numbers for the last two months of 2025 once the final reports were done. He showed a graph of the TDT collections since FY 2019 and pointed out that FY 2025 was a record year at just under \$6 million. He recalled that the County entered into an agreement with Vrbo and Airbnb to start collecting on the short-term rental properties in FY 2021; therefore, there was a significant increase in FY 2022 since it was the first year for the full collections, and the demand for travel had also increased after the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). He stated that 43 percent of the collections through December 2025 were from the hotel/motel category and that 57 percent were from the online platforms, and that although the collections had increased, hotel occupancy decreased almost 16 percent and the ADR decreased about six percent. He explained that in FY 2024 they were coming off some hurricanes and storms which affected the year over year data; however, these dips were happening regionally, statewide and across the nation. He commented that the short-term rentals were stabilizing them tremendously as their ADR was up roughly 18 percent from around \$170 to \$200, adding that they were forecasting the ADR to be well above \$250 over the next few months.

Administration and Budget

Mr. Ritchie showed the promotional activities budget for FY 2026 at just under \$3.5 million, and stated that they had spent roughly \$50,000 YTD and had encumbered about \$922,000 with about \$2.2 million remaining. He relayed that this included contracted events, TDC event sponsorships, co-op marketing opportunities, advertising and publications, and promotional items.

Tourism Updates

Mr. Ritchie remarked that for FY 2026 quarter one event sponsorships, they sponsored 64 events which brought in around 23,000 room nights and about 410,000 visitors, noting that they sponsored many of the holiday festivals, such as the Mount Dora Craft Festival, which was the reason why the numbers were so high. He showed pictures of various staff activities, and indicated that at the end of July 2025 they partnered with the USA Track and Field Outdoor Championships in Eugene, Oregon which was covered on USA Track and Field Television (TV) and on NBC during primetime, with about 11 minutes of total exposure time for Discover Lake's signage and commercials; furthermore, the top asset for future net value was the commercials on TV. He said that they were the official sponsor for the 100-meter men's final, in which Star Athletics athlete Mr. Kenny Bednarek won, as well as the 3,000-meter men's steeplechase; additionally, there was signage on display when interviewing athletes after the races, and the Discover Lake County name was on the finish line tape. He also commented that there were discussions about having additional events for this upcoming year. He stated that the UCF Athletics partnership had been great so far and was working out fairly well for them as seen from Madden Media's report, and explained that this partnership gave them the right to have signage in the stadium and arena during the football and basketball games. He added that commercials were aired on the radio during the basketball and baseball games, as well as the Knights Talk Live broadcasts and any events streaming on ESPN+. He said that they had digital integration and rotating banner ads on UCFKnights.com and the UCF Athletics mobile app, and that this was included in the visiting team guide which was distributed to all teams traveling into the area for their family and their fans who were supporting them. He relayed that they were also the official partner of the UCF Rowing Team, who were Big 12 Champions in the prior year. He mentioned that Mr. Josh Hester, Sports Tourism Manager, attended the National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA) Convention in December 2025 in which about 2,500 coaches attended, and had hosted the Caffeinated Conversations happy hour. He said that this was their second year partnering with the NFCA and that they also partnered with other destinations regionally in the sport of softball and in conjunction with THE Spring Games to market their destination as a softball destination, commenting that there had been conversations about bringing larger events to Lake County. He indicated that they also attended the American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA) Convention for the third year, which was hosted in conjunction with the NCAA Division I Women's Volleyball Final Four, and sponsored the sand volleyball complex that was built in the middle of the convention. He remarked that through this partnership and with meetings with event organizers, the Hickory Point Beach Volleyball Complex became well known and they had seen tremendous success with bringing these events to Lake County. He listed the top 10 quarter one event sponsorships based on projected economic impact, and stated that most of these events were some of the larger seasonal events that happened in Lake County. He relayed that for co-op marketing, they had five new campaigns with three new partnerships, which were Renninger's Twin Markets, Dash Sports, and Cat Boat Escapes, with print, out of home, and digital marketing tactics. He showed the quarter two upcoming events and pointed out that WineFest XXXI would be held in February 2026 at Lakeridge Winery, and he also showed a list of the TDC meeting dates for 2026.

NEW BUSINESS

2026 THE SPRING GAMES

Mr. Ritchie indicated that this event would be held in February and March 2026 in the Cities of Clermont and Leesburg, and that roughly 150 teams would be participating. He said that this event would bring in about 8,000 room nights and \$13 million in economic impact, commenting that this was the largest sports tourism event that was hosted in Lake County and that he was excited about this partnership and the exposure they received from this. He mentioned that the request was for \$150,000.

2026 IWWF WORLD WAKEBOARD CHAMPIONSHIPS

Mr. Ritchie remarked that the International Waterski and Wakeboard Federation (IWWF) World Wakeboard Championships would be held in October and November 2026 at Lake David Park in the City of Groveland. He said that there would be participants from 30 different countries and that this would bring in just under 2,800 room nights and \$2.3 million in economic impact; additionally, they were requesting \$150,000.

2026-2028 FHSAA GOLF STATE FINALS

Mr. Ritchie stated that this event was for the State's top high school golfers and would be held in November for the next three years at Mission Resort + Club. He relayed that this would bring in roughly 1,500 room nights and \$870,000 in economic impact, adding that the request was for \$49,000 for 2026, \$52,000 for 2027, and \$55,000 for 2028 for a total of \$156,000.

2028 NCAA DII MEN'S AND WOMEN'S GOLF NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

Mr. Ritchie explained that he was bringing this event to the TDC as a recommendation for approval for GO Sports to bid on this event as it had not been awarded yet, noting that if awarded, they would probably get either the men's or the women's event and that it would be awarded either at the end of this year or the beginning of the following year. He said that the request for the men's event was \$32,500, and that the women's event was \$27,500 for a total of \$60,000.

Commr. Smith asked if the requested amounts for the 2028 NCAA DII Golf National Championships were guaranteed, and Mr. Ritchie denied this. Commissioner Smith then questioned if the funding would come back to them if they were not awarded this event.

Mr. Ritchie clarified that this funding would not be provided unless they were awarded this event.

On a motion by Commr. Reisman, seconded by Ms. Staley and carried by a vote of 7-0, the TDC approved to support the 2026 THE Spring Games with fiscal impact not to exceed \$150,000.

Councilmember Strange recused herself from voting.

On a motion by Councilmember Strange, seconded by Commr. Reisman and carried unanimously by a vote of 8-0, the TDC approved to support the 2026 IWWF World Wakeboard Championships with fiscal impact not to exceed \$150,000.

On a motion by Mr. Hendrick, seconded by Councilmember Strange and carried by a vote of 7-0, the TDC approved to support the 2026-2028 FHSAA Golf State Championships with fiscal impact not to exceed \$156,000.

Ms. Staley recused herself from voting.

On a motion by Commr. Reisman, seconded by Councilmember Strange and carried unanimously by a vote of 8-0, the TDC approved to support the 2028 NCAA DII Men's and Women's Golf National Championships with fiscal impact not to exceed \$60,000.

Commr. Smith opined that if this funding was not encumbered, it should go back into reserves.

AROUND THE HORN

Ms. Lemon stated that many good things were happening at The Big House, specifying that they kicked off 2026 with a large volleyball event over the weekend and had many volleyball and basketball events scheduled through August 2026.

Councilmember Strange mentioned that Rutgers University was in the City of Clermont and were staying there for the week for their winter training, noting that this was their fourth year to do this. She relayed that the City had a four-pronged approach to handling tourism and economic development and that the first prong was to work with Mr. Ritchie and his team to bring in large events to Lake County, commenting that they were currently in discussions with many different organizations from other states. She remarked that their second prong was to work with local users who were regulars in the cities and who were not familiar with the Office of Tourism to show them how this office could support them through grant programs and encourage them to move some of their larger events from other jurisdictions to Lake County. She indicated that their third prong was to maintain successful programming such as THE Spring Games, the Great Clermont Triathlon, and Pig on the Pond, which were large tourism drivers. She commented that they also made some major changes to their economic development department by bringing in two individuals who were nationally recognized in economic development and urbanism; additionally, they hired the American Bicycle Association to work on their parks and recreation plans with a specific focus on the trail systems and how they could connect them throughout the community and to neighboring communities. She stated that DPZ CoDesign, which was a major urban design firm out of the City of Miami, was working with the American Bicycle Association to ensure that commercial was located in the right place and that there were enough short-term rentals, opining that they needed more short-term rentals in the North Lake area to help with the week-long events; additionally, they hired a firm called True North to do a marketing assessment and public communications assessment for them. She elaborated that once those were completed, they would work with the Office of Tourism to determine how to promote what the City of Clermont was doing.

Mr. Robert Hendrick indicated that Sand Court Experts had hosted a couple college tournaments recently and that two more were scheduled at Hickory Point in the current year; furthermore, he was looking to have Pro Tour do a stop at Hickory Point for a tournament as well. He mentioned that they were currently building courts in many high schools around the State since beach

volleyball was increasing in popularity among the youth, including in the Counties of Duval, Charlotte, Brevard, Palm Beach, Polk and Volusia. He relayed that he always tried to visit Hickory Point when there were tournaments to see how staff and the facility was doing, and noted that he was there recently and watched a showcase tournament hosted by p1440 that was for high school girls to play for college recruitment. He also said that he spoke with the tournament director, who opined that the staff and facility were great. He remarked that he landed another tournament for April and October 2026 for Hickory Point with the Sand Ballers since they had outgrown the three-court facility they normally played at, noting that they planned on filling all 21 courts for two days. He commented that he ended up partnering with the Sand Ballers because he was very impressed with them. He also mentioned that he had conversations with Ms. Staley regarding this, and asked her to speak about it.

Ms. Staley opined that this was pretty impressive and seemed like a great opportunity with an expanded focus on Lake County, adding that she hoped it would be a great event.

Mr. Hendrick stated that Coalition Beach Volleyball was starting their club tour and that they were known for having outstanding coaches and ex-pro players; furthermore, this was a league versus league club, and opined that the 15 tournaments that were held during the first year had been exceptional. He related that they averaged 100 athletes per event and that the larger events drew in around 500 attendees with many of the hosts reaching maximum capacity. He said that the founders were looking at larger venues and that due to their multiple decade relationship with him, they were looking at Hickory Point and were hoping to hold their finals there. He commented that he also wanted to reach out to the Florida Region of USA Volleyball to hopefully get some more participation going forward.

Mr. Ritchie indicated that through their collaboration with the Office of Parks and Trails, the Discover Lake County branding and the County's logo could be seen on the netting and padding of the courts at Hickory Point which meant there was much exposure for them when these events came there. He said that the branding had been there for a few months now.

Mr. Christian Slupe mentioned that he had been reviewing their year over year visitation numbers for Lakeridge Winery and found that they were down 22 percent for their daily visitor taste count as compared to the previous year; however, there was an increase in spend from those same people. He relayed that they brought back their Wine and Chocolate Festival in December 2025 and that while those who attended it enjoyed it, they did not get the numbers they were hoping for, noting that they had not done this festival since before COVID-19. He commented that their drone show was very successful and that about 300 to 350 people came each night from across the State; additionally, many people were calling the winery asking for lodging recommendations noting that they were recommending Mission Resort + Club and a few other hotels. He indicated that their largest planning efforts were going towards WineFest XXXI, which was a three-day event heavily focused on arts and crafts in which they would also be celebrating 37 years of having their doors open in Lake County. He said that they were expecting to have about 60 to 70 vendors and that they were hoping for a good turnout.

Mr. David Perry stated that The Citrus Boutique Hotel had a busy holiday season and that they were busy taking down Christmas decorations.

Commr. Alan Reisman relayed that Bikefest 2026 was being held April 24 through 26, 2026, and reported that Bikefest 2025 had a \$43 million economic impact to the area with 95 percent hotel occupancy for that weekend.

Ms. Staley commented that they reopened the Conquistador Bar and Restaurant at Mission Resort + Club, which was originally the La Margarita and El Conquistador Restaurant, and noted that it looked very different than before. She said that it was currently only serving dinner, but would start also serving lunch in the following week. She indicated that they were going to have a travel writer represent Mission Resort + Club for six series that would each have a different niche to promote different areas of Lake County, such as weddings, golf, or just Lake County as a whole. She mentioned that the first series would be at the end of the month featuring the resort, Yalaha Bakery, Puddle Jumpers, and Howey Mansion; additionally, she would be happy to showcase other venues in the future.

Commr. Smith expressed excitement that Rutgers University was at Legends Way in the City of Clermont, commenting that he was predicting that facility to be busy in this year and beyond. He remarked that some exciting things were happening in Lake County with sports tourism and that they were working extremely hard on enhancing their footprint into sports tourism activities. He then mentioned that this year was the 250th anniversary of the United States of America.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to be brought to the attention of the TDC, the meeting was adjourned at 3:16 p.m.