



New Orleans Sustainable Tourism Task Force

Chronology to April 2019

The New Orleans Sustainable Tourism Task Force was founded by Meg Lousteau, former Executive Director of the Vieux Carré Property Owners, Residents & Associates and Kevin Molony, owner of Royal Insider.

VCPOA is a non-profit organization established in the 1920's to preserve the Vieux Carré as a national treasure, to maintain its quaint and distinctive character and to achieve in that historic, living neighborhood a quality of life which can be enjoyed by residents, fellow citizens, businesses and visitors. For more than 90 years, VCPOA has been a major force in sustaining the French Quarter as one of the treasured historic residential neighborhoods in the world.

Royal Insider is a culture-sustaining travel company established in 1999 to orchestrate trips that allow visitors to participate in the authentic culture of New Orleans, hosted by the people whose strivings sound out the heartbeat of that culture every day. The company affords guests otherwise inaccessible experiences while channeling resources to support the people and entities actually driving the culture. Cited in publications ranging from American Express Departures to Nieman Marcus Entrée to Time Magazine, Royal Insider is one of fewer than 30 companies in the world designated as "Ultraluxe" (providing the most elevated travel experiences in the world) by the leading global alliance of luxury and experiential travel professionals, Virtuoso.

Over the past several years, Meg and Kevin have worked together on many Royal Insider events that channeled substantial donations to support VCPOA, while engaging in regular discussions about the mounting negative impacts of unmanaged mass tourism radiating outward from the historic center of New Orleans, as well as the systemic imbalances in tourism management.

The following chronology is edited for brevity, omitting countless smaller meetings, emails and telephone calls.

August 2017 ~ At the annual Virtuoso Travel Week conference, Kevin met with Costas Christ, one of the world's leading experts in sustainable tourism and Virtuoso's Global Strategist for Sustainability, to discuss the culture sustaining model created by Royal Insider and worldwide sustainable tourism initiatives.

January 2018 ~ At one of the events Royal Insider produced for the Virtuoso Global Forum of 250 top travel agency owners from around the world (held for the first time ever in New Orleans), Kevin introduced Meg Lousteau to Costas Christ.

March 2018 ~ Meg Lousteau orchestrated a partnership between VCPORA and two other preservation non-profits, HNOC and VCC Foundation, to engage Costas Christ as a consultant to meet with city and tourism leaders and give a public presentation. Kevin and Meg conceived the New Orleans Sustainable Tourism Task Force.

9 April 2018 ~ Meg & Kevin gave a presentation to a gathering of the Friends of the Cabildo tour guide training leaders to frame the negative impacts of unmanaged mass tourism in the French Quarter and the specific issues resulting from inadequate and poorly-enforced tour guide regulations.

31 May 2018 ~ Meg & Kevin met with John Williams, Dean of the UNO College of Business and the region's leading tourism statistics expert, to frame overarching issues and strategize possible solutions and a course of action.

28-30 June 2018 ~ Costas Christ participated in a series of sustainable tourism meetings with city and tourism leaders including the mayor and two city council members, hoteliers, restaurateurs and other tourism leaders, as well as interviews with media outlets. His public lecture the final evening was followed by a dinner attended by Costas, John Williams, Council Member Kristin Palmer, New Orleans & Company VP of Communications & PR Kristian Sonnier. It was then that Meg and Kevin presented a Sustainable Tourism Vision Statement and elicited the involvement of Kristin Palmer and Kristian Sonnier in Task Force efforts.

11 July 2018 ~ The Task Force convened a leadership meeting to frame overarching issues and strategize possible solutions and next steps. In attendance: Kristin Palmer; Kristian Sonnier; Brice Miller (then-Director of the Mayor's Office of Cultural Economy); John Williams; Dana Honn (owner of Carmo Cafe and regional sustainability leader); Bob Simms (head of the French Quarter Task Force public safety enforcement program and a leader in numerous civic initiatives); Meg; Kevin.

20 July 2018 ~ The Task Force convened a panel of tour guide leaders to discuss issues, revisions to the regulatory framework and enforcement. In attendance: Robi Robichaux (President, Tour Guide Professionals of Greater New Orleans); Barbara Robichaux (President, Tour Guide Association); Frank Perez (leading tour guide instructor); Jane Molony (leading tour guide instructor); Bob Simms; Meg; Kevin. It was after this meeting that Kevin, Meg and Bob Simms first identified the need for a coordinated Quality of Life regulatory framework and a dedicated Quality of Life enforcement unit, and began research and development efforts toward those ends.

26 July 2018 ~ Kevin and Givonna Joseph (culture bearer, educator and civic leader) gave a presentation to the Mayor's Office of Cultural Economy team to frame the overarching issues and identify synergies with their efforts.

1 August 2018~ Mark Romig, CEO of the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation, convened a meeting of the city's top tourism marketing executives for Meg and Kevin to frame the overarching issues, present the need to re-brand the city of New Orleans clearly away from "Party Town 24/7" and preferentially target culture-seeking travelers. In attendance: Mark Romig (CEO, NOTMC); Kristian Sonnier (VP of Communications & PR, New Orleans & Co.); Jeremy Cooker (VP, NOTMC); three of their marketing consultants from the firm 360i, Andrew Hunter, P.J. Sibille and Doug Murray; Meg; Kevin.

7 August 2018 ~ Meg and Kevin met with Kristin Palmer, members of her staff and Tara Richard, the Mayor's legislative liaison to frame overarching issues and talk specifically about tour guide issues and solutions

11 August 2018 ~ Kevin attended the Virtuoso Sustainability Summit in Las Vegas, an invitational colloquium of 27 Virtuoso travel providers who are forging new ground in sustainable travel around the globe, leaders in the fields of ecological, economic and cultural sustainability in travel. Kevin learned that he had been nominated for the global Virtuoso Sustainable Travel Leadership Award. At Costas Christ's invitation, Kevin was one of three guest presenters in the professional development session the following day on sustainable travel that Costas led for Virtuoso agency owners and agents.

22 August 2018 ~ Meg and Kevin met with John Williams to set goals for the development of new metrics to accurately measure visitor impacts, positive and negative, and track the flow of tourism revenues to determine how much is remaining in the city and where it's going.

September 2018 ~ The Task Force deployed an online collaboration tool for tour guide leaders and other stakeholders to cooperate in the development of consensus recommendations for new tour guide licensing and enforcement in the context of the envisioned Quality of Life regulatory and enforcement framework.

September, October 2018 ~ Meetings, calls, emails continued among Task Force core leadership toward the development of a Road Map to Sustainable Tourism.

September, October 2018 ~ Emails continued between Task Force core leadership and the top tourism marketing professionals identifying global trends in overtourism and messaging strategies to re-brand the city and target upscale and culture seeking travelers.

8 October 2018 ~ The Task Force convened a meeting to explore specific tourism impacts and strategize new metrics to analyze them. In attendance: Kristian Sonnier; John Williams; Bob Simms; a Royal Street art gallery director; a long-time French Quarter bartender; a rising jazz musician; Meg and Kevin. It was at this meeting that the Task Force leadership first expressed to Kristian Sonnier the necessity of forming a community-driven council.

30 October 2018 ~ After an exchange of emails between Task Force leadership and the tourism marketing professionals relating to another incident of national media exposure for Bourbon Street, Kevin met with Kristian Sonnier to further discuss the necessity of forming a community-driven Sustainable Destination Council.

6 November 2018 ~ The Task Force convened a meeting to work on a framework for new tourism impacts metrics and a sustainability certification rating system. In attendance: Liz Shephard (CEO of Life City sustainability consulting firm); John Williams; Kristian Sonnier; Meg and Kevin.

November 2018 ~ Kevin was appointed to the Virtuoso Sustainability Council, a global networking body comprised of the owners or CEO's of 27 travel supplier companies around the world committed to sustainability efforts.

November 2018 ~ The Task Force produced an initial Road Map to Sustainable Tourism for New Orleans, an evolving document internal to the Task Force to facilitate the development of a holistic conceptual framework for the complex process of transforming tourism to better uplift our community.

14 December 2018 ~ Kevin conducted an initial phone meeting with an executive of Amsterdam Marketing to discuss tourism issues and initiatives. The issues being experienced in both cities are remarkably similar. Amsterdam is taking bold steps to address considerable overtourism issues, there, and to forge a sustainable path forward for tourism in their city.

January 2019 ~ Meg Lousteau relocated to Houston to accept a position with the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

16 January 2019 ~ The Task Force convened another meeting to work on the specifics of new tourism impacts metrics and a sustainability certification rating system. In attendance: Liz Shephard (CEO of Life City sustainability consulting firm); John Williams (head of UNO Hospitality Research Center); Allison Plyer (Chief Demographer for The Data Center); Kristian Sonnier; leading developer and hotelier Pres Kabacoff; and Kevin.

24 January 2019 ~ Kevin met by video conference with Megan Epler Wood and Sofia Fotiadou of the Harvard University International Sustainable Tourism Initiative to discuss their upcoming report, *Tourism's Invisible Burden*. That report, which they will present at ITB Berlin in March, summarizes the initial results of their work developing and deploying new metrics for quantifying tourism impacts on destination infrastructure. Synergies were identified and the potential discussed of New Orleans serving as the next destination case study in their research.

11 February 2019 ~ At their request, Kevin spoke to the board of the French Quarter Citizens, one of two key French Quarter preservation organizations, about progress and direction. The board members expressed strong support.

19 March 2019 ~ At their request, Kevin served as guest speaker at a tour guide training class at Delgado College to apprise them of the global context of overtourism, the specific issues in New Orleans related to unmanaged mass tourism and structural imbalances in tourism management, and possible solutions that have emerged in the course of research and development.

April 2019 ~ The Task Force released **Abstract: A Pivotal Moment for New Orleans Tourism**, a concise overview intended to encourage and inform a community-wide discourse about the issues facing the New Orleans tourism industry and the community at large by framing those issues in a global context, identifying correlations with challenges faced by destinations worldwide, reporting on research and initiatives being undertaken in other destinations and suggesting possible solutions to the specific imbalances faced here.

April 2019 ~ Stakeholder coalition-building meetings and other work are ongoing toward the development of suggested pillars of a draft Sustainable Tourism Action Plan, including continuing communications with sustainability leaders in Amsterdam to gauge the success of their initiatives and compare strategies, as well as outreach to the Global Sustainable Tourism Council and discussions with the Harvard ISTI researchers.