FIFTY YEARS OF
LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

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First, let me congratulate you on your 32 years of service to tourism in East Texas. When you say East Texas, we all know that your territory is the largest contributor to the tourism economy of the whole state.

It is a genuine pleasure for me to be here today because I too am celebrating an anniversary. It was just 50 years ago, in 1945, back in my home state of Michigan, that my career in tourism began. It was in this post-war period that the very astute leader of the Upper Peninsula Development Bureau prophesied a boom in tourism, a boom for which no one was really prepared. Based on his experience with the Agricultural Extension Service, he pursued the Michigan legislature to launch an Extension program at Michigan State University for tourist and resort businesses and I was the first one hired. Believe me, I had no idea what I was getting into. Nor could I have predicted that this would be my life's work. How lucky I was to have stumbled into what has become one of the greatest economic and social phenomena of our time.

Today we are told that world-wide, tourism provides direct and indirect jobs for over 200 million people. One in every 9 workers is involved in tourism. It accounts for 11% of consumer spending and 10.1% of the world's GDP. And, you are already aware that travelers in Texas now spend over 22 billion dollars a year.

Looking back over these 50 years, it was exciting to be on the cutting edge of tourism research and education—some people even call me a pioneer. When I look up the word "pioneer" in my thesaurus, I find the best synonym listed is "midwife." I guess this fits because I happened to be one of the first to usher into the world the idea that tourism should be taken seriously enough to be part of university education. But, please know that as midwife, I had a lot of help from others who did the puffing and pushing!

Tourism has given me the opportunity to do research and teaching in six different universities across the land. What a thrill it has been to be asked to do consulting throughout the United States and Canada as well as over 15 countries overseas. Recently, I was brought into the Canadian Atlantic province of Newfoundland and Labrador. My assignment was to guide them into well-planned tourism development, now that their cod fishing economy has collapsed. And, in the last few months, I presented information on tourism planning at conferences on heritage tourism at El Paso and McAllen.

But, please know that these experiences over the years have demanded that I continue to learn all I can about tourism. They say that the best way to learn is to teach. When I started there were no books and no research in tourism. So my education in tourism came from the field, from people like yourselves who are the real doers of tourism development. It was here that I learned about problems as well as successes. The field was my laboratory--
for 21 years in Michigan and the last 27 years here in Texas. Over these years, Howard has called on me for assistance from time to time and has been kind enough to let me bring in my graduate students to study your interesting region.

Much of what I have learned has been put into my writings of books and articles as well as teaching. My latest has been the 3rd edition of TOURISM PLANNING, published last year. Communities, states, as well as universities, tell me that this has been helpful to them as they continue to learn more about tourism and plan for its development. But today I don't have time to read all 400 pages to you and want to focus only on three important points.

Bob Waters, my minister originally from Woodville, for years kept me awake Sunday after Sunday by limiting his sermons to only three main topics. So, for the next few minutes, let me share with you what I have learned to be the top three challenges in tourism today. I invite you to consider these seriously if you intend to foster tourism here in East Texas in the future.

POINT NUMBER ONE

When one looks at the pie charts of traveler expenditures, the biggest pieces are lodging and food service, often called the hospitality businesses. It has been my privilege to have taught in two major hotel schools--Michigan State and the University of Hawaii. Here I learned not only how important these businesses are to tourism but also the key elements of good management. But, as I kept studying tourism, I began to realize that there was more to it. These very important services are just one part of a much larger system. I like to compare it to an automobile. We all know that for the car to run, the many parts not only have to work properly but also must work together. We know what happens when the battery quits, the gas tank is empty or nowadays, the central computer dies. We go nowhere. So it is with tourism. It does not function well without the service businesses interrelating to four other components--attractions, transportation, information, and promotion.

For example, if there are no business or pleasure attractions in or around a community, there is little demand for hotel rooms. If there are attractions but no guide books, tour guides, or maps that tell the visitor about the attractions--their characteristics, location, when they are open, and their costs--the travel demand and tourism economy will be poor. If transportation and access are either decreased or increased, the impact on tourism will change accordingly. And, if attractions, access, services, and information are adequate but no promotion has been placed in the hands of would-be travelers back in their home origin, no one will know about your destination and its fine tourism offerings.

But this knowledge about the tourism system got me fired from Michigan State back in 1966. The hotel school director refused to let me talk about these things. He wanted to teach only internal management. I agreed that this was important but that we were doing a disservice to our 2000 students if we did not tell them how several outside factors would also
spell success or failure to their businesses. Fortunately for me, I had accepted a one year visiting professorship in the Travel Industry Management School, University of Hawaii, and then agreed to come to Texas A&M as the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences was being established. These new settings gave me the opportunity to continue my work to help people understand the tourism system and how they can benefit from this knowledge.

The lesson here is for all of us to work toward better cooperation among all the developers and managers of the five components of the supply side of tourism. This is my challenge to you today. How can we work more closely together, not just because it would be nice to do so but rather because it can help everyone to succeed. Too often I see in communities the lack of reaching out to the other parts of the tourism system. Frequently, our trade organizations and public agencies tend to keep us apart. There is more to hotel success than selling rooms. The hospitality businesses gain by supporting existing attractions, stimulating new ones, improving transportation, encouraging better information for visitors, and providing better support to all promotional and marketing efforts. As you look toward a better tourism future, I urge you to make a concerted effort to keep on improving the functioning of your tourism system in East Texas if you want it to grow.

POINT TWO

Again looking at tourism as a system, what really ignites the entire supply side to function? What is the main cause for people to leave their homes and spend their money on travel to some distant destination? What is the main thing you put in your advertising?

Look at your own East Texas Guide. It is the beautiful beach; it is rafting and boating; it is riding an historic train; it is golfing and horseback riding; it is viewing the scenic Piney Woods; it is attending events related to history and wildlife; and it is visiting museums and historic sites. The real power unit of the tourism system is made up of the ATTRACTIONS. You already know this simple truth, but everywhere I go I find many misunderstandings about attraction development.

In spite of our fine theme parks, the greatest growth in tourism is based on local and often special natural and cultural resources. But, just having a resource, such as water, forests, wildlife or historical background, is not enough. Unless it is owned, developed, and managed for tourists, it really does not exist as an attraction.

Let’s look at Texas and nature tourism for a moment. For this, I turn to the recent report, NATURE TOURISM IN THE LONE STAR STATE, an excellent publication that every one of you should have. It states that the American Birding Association members list Texas as the most popular destination in the nation for birding tours over the last 5 years. Texas State Parks received 25 million visitors in 1993, a 40% increase since 1983. The total economic impact of these visitors was $447 million. Hunting and fishing in Texas brings in $3.6 billion a year. Wildlife appreciation, such as viewing wildlife, nature study, and
photography, has increased by 61% in the last fifteen years. More people now photograph wildlife than play golf. Another publication everyone of you should have is TEXAS WILDLIFE VIEWING GUIDE, by Gary L. Graham, published in 1992. If you look at your markets across the country, the top ten outdoor activities in the United States are, and in this order:

- Wildlife viewing
- Hunting
- Fitness walking
- Canoeing, kayaking, rafting
- Camping
- Backpacking
- Fishing
- Mountain biking
- Hiking
- Rock climbing, mountaineering

Impressive as these visitor trends may be, my experience reveals that generally the tourism business interests are not yet active in natural resource protection. I get the impression that those of you here in East Texas are more supportive of resource conservation than those in other regions. But around the world I still see resorts dumping sewage into the recreational waters that bring them business, poor tourism support of conservation measures such as enhanced wildlife habitat, poor relationships between land owners and public agencies governing natural resources, and lack of education in the importance of nature tourism.

Now, let’s look at the cultural side. I don’t have figures on Texas cultural tourism so let me draw on information from the National Endowment for the Arts.

*Of all US travelers in the country in 1991:
  17% attended a play or concert
  24% visited a museum or art gallery
  25% visited a festival or craft fair
  28% bought local/ethnic food or crafts
  30% visited a historic site or building

*A survey by the National Endowment for the Arts showed that for the general population:
  22% visited an art museum
  17% attended a musical
  13% attended a classical musical event
  12% attended a play

*From a study of foreign visitors to the US by the US Travel and Tourism Administration we find that:
  15% attended a concert, play or musical
  25% visited an art gallery or museum
  32% visited historical places
*And a recent forecast by the Travel Industry Association of America states that:
- 42% of all travelers intend to attend cultural events
- 37% intend to visit historical sites

These are just a few of the current travel indicators that are proving the great significance of cultural tourism today. The importance of this growing segment of tourism caused the World Tourism Organization back in 1985 to create its definition of cultural tourism:

Cultural tourism can...be defined in broad or narrow terms. In the narrow sense, it includes movements of persons for essentially cultural motivations, such as study tours, performing arts and cultural tours, travel to festivals and other cultural events, visits to sites and monuments, travel to study nature, folklore or art, and pilgrimages... In the broadest sense, all movements of persons might be included in the definition because they satisfy the human need for diversity, tending to raise the level of the individual and giving rise to new knowledge, experience, and encounters.

At the same time we observe these market trends, I see a bit of stumbling on the part of local people to adapt cultural resources to tourism. Too often historic preservationists will get a building restored but forget what it takes to open it to tourists, such as adequate parking for tour buses as well as cars, toilet facilities for visitors, and tour guides that can do more than give a canned speech. Today, the descriptions at historic attractions are too often biased—they tell only one side of the story. Right now this is an increasingly important issue in Texas. It is important that you take stock of your opportunities for increasing cultural tourism in your area. For the recent heritage conference in McAllen, I prepared a list of over 40 questions important for cultural tourism development. This is available if you are interested.

A fast growing opportunity, popular with tourists, is interpretive visitor centers and museums. Here, visitors can be given exhibits, video presentations, lectures, guided tours nearby and enjoy their visit at the same time they have learned something new about the special natural and cultural features of your area. What I am trying to say is that there are tremendous opportunities for greater development of tourism based on your natural and cultural resources. It is you in the tourist business, not just those labeled as environmentalists, who should be in the front line of resource protection and development. You have everything to gain—not just the perpetuation of these resources as a noble and altruistic gesture but rather for hard tourism economics. So, I challenge you to become strong advocates of resource protection throughout East Texas if you wish to expand tourism.

POINT NUMBER THREE

I have saved this to the last because, if I have learned anything at all about tourism over the last 50 years, it is the importance of the human resources. It took me a long time to
get this through my head because I was so busy studying and teaching the technical side of planning and development. Finally, I have realized that without dedicated people like you, tourism will not happen. This is not meant to be flattery but rather a statement of fact.

There are few other businesses that continue to demonstrate the entrepreneurial spirit upon which this country was founded. As you learn about new travel market trends, such as ecotourists, nature tourists, adventure tourists, and cultural tourists, you begin to consider a location, buy a site and establish a new enterprise to meet this new travel need. No other economic activity, in my opinion, offers as many entrepreneurial opportunities as tourism.

Over the years I have never found a tourist operator who quit because he didn’t like the business. Operators keep telling me they love to help visitors have a good time. The greatest reward, so they say, is not the money—although they appreciate the employment—but rather is in seeing the expressions of joy and new understandings on the part of their visitors, especially children. Many of you have made friends with your repeat visitors.

But, in spite of this, what do I often find in communities? I find that frequently your experience in tourism is not well understood by very many others in the community. City council members are not aware of your activity when they make civic decisions and therefore may hamper you with detrimental regulations. Main street business people are often ignorant of what tourism really means to them. They often think tourism benefits only the hotels, restaurants and gas stations. Too often the general citizenry of a community gets upset when someone proposes a tourist attraction because all they have heard is the negative side.

In a sense, tourism growth can have greater impact on a community than, say, a manufacturing plant. It is true that visitors can increase traffic congestion, create litter, and even competition with local people for goods and services. A case in point is the little town of Niagara-on-the-Lake in Ontario, Canada, I visited recently. Its resident population is about 2,000 but it has over 3 million visitors a year, the majority of whom come in July and August. Some residents have put their houses up for sale because they dislike this modern invasion that is contrary to their way of life before the tourist invasion. However, the majority like the fact that the reason they have such low taxes, such well-maintained streets, and so many historic sites and other amenities is due entirely to the huge economic support from tourists.

This is my final point. It is up to you, those who represent the human resources of tourism to not only educate others of your community, but to assert leadership in guiding tourism planning and development that minimizes the stress and maximizes the benefits. It’s up to you. I know you can do it—if you want to.