

Municipality of Chatham-Kent
Community Development
Community Attraction & Promotion
Information Report

To: Mayor and Members of Council

From: Shannon Paiva, Supervisor Tourism Development
Audrey Ansell, Director Community Attraction & Promotion

Date: June 7, 2021

Subject: CK Tourism Sector Recovery Support & Experiential Tourism Development

This report is for the information of Council.

Background

The activities outlined in this report provide details on initiatives within the Community Attraction & Promotion – Tourism area that support tourism sector recovery, growth and sustainability in Chatham-Kent.

CK Tourism is dedicating resources to assisting operators as they position and prepare for recovery and reopening. For the summer of 2021, CK Tourism will once again focus on the “See You in CK” campaign that encourages the exploration of CK with a hyper-local audience and travel in mind. Plans to expand marketing and promotion beyond Chatham-Kent are ready for implementation when it is appropriate and safe to do so.

This report outlines the supports offered to CK’s tourism sector operators as they prepare for reopening and recovery.

Comments

Community Attraction & Promotion - CK Tourism has been working to assist operators in a variety of ways, including;

- Spark program
- Experiential tourism development
- Direct supports to tourism businesses

Spark program

“Spark” seeks to develop new tourism experiences and is operated by the Ontario Tourism Innovation Lab. The goal is to help businesses take their new tourism idea to the next level of development or implementation. The goal is to foster and support new

tourism ideas in order to enhance current tourism offerings, address gaps or challenges, motivate travel and longer stays, and increase year-round visits in the region.

In January 2020 and March 2021, CK Tourism successfully hosted two “Spark” programs to develop and grow experiential tourism. Partners have included;

- Ontario Tourism Innovation Lab (OTIL)
- Southwestern Ontario Tourism Corporation (SWOTC)
- Community Futures Development Corporation of Chatham-Kent (CFDC CK)**
- SOAR Innovation
- WEtech Alliance**
- CK Economic Development
- Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev)**
- Tourism Industry Association of Ontario (TIAO)**
- Via Rail*
- Libro Credit Union*

**2020 only **2021 only*

Through Spark, successful tourism businesses receive;

- 3-month mentorship with a tourism innovator, experienced operator, industry leader and/or sector expert
- \$3,000 grant to assist with the launch of their tourism idea
- Access to a support network of tourism innovators, entrepreneurs and leaders
- In 2021, two winners also received a \$10,000 digital grant as well as ongoing guidance and other resources

Spark 2020: A total of nineteen submissions were received and five applicants were invited to pitch their idea to a panel of judges. Three tourism ideas were then selected as the winners of a tourism grant and mentorship opportunities. Chatham-Kent Tourism invested \$5,000 dollars in the initiative.

Winners:

- Forest Bathing Experiences, Shay-D-Star Forest Therapy, Bothwell
- Indigenous Spirit Horses Experiences, TJ Stables, Chatham
- The Fresh Connection, Crazy 8 Barn, Urban Sunset Farms

Spark 2021: In March 2021, 14 Spark submissions were received. From these, five were invited to pitch their idea to a panel of judges, with three emerging as successful recipients. As a result of FedDev RRRF funding, CK Tourism invested \$10,000 in the 2021 Spark program.

Winners:

- Riverside Cabins on the Sydenham, The Crappie Store, Dresden
- Wallaceburg Kayak Experience, Downtown Wallaceburg BIA, Wallaceburg
- On Farm Wood Fired Kitchen & Experiences, The Culinary Farm, Thamesville

Businesses that have participated in Spark have recognized the benefit that it, and a focus on developing tourism experiences, have brought to their operations. Some of these businesses have provided testimonials included in Appendix A – Spark Program Testimonials.

Experiential tourism development

Partnership and the development of experiential tourism offerings in CK are key features of CK Tourism's work. Both are in alignment with the Tourism Master Plan developed in 2015 - [Tourism Destination Management Plan \(TDMP\)](#), which noted the following goal for developing tourism experiences in Chatham-Kent;

“In the context of effective destination management, tourism stakeholders within CK will move from “supply side” thinking (listing the tourism assets as places to go and things to do) to “demand side” thinking (creating an invitation to come, discover, and engage). To make the shift to a visitor-centric approach, it is important to shift from focusing on what there is for visitors to do in CK, to asking what experiences our ideal guests are seeking, how can we deliver unforgettable experiences, what can we offer our ideal guest that is uniquely ours and how do we layer on engagement and emotion?”

Experiences currently in development include;

- TJ Stables – Indigenous Spirit Horses Encounter
- Forest Connections, Shay-D-Star Forest – Forest Bathing Experiences
- The Fresh Connection – Culinary Experience
- Hat Trick Farms – On-farm experiences
- The Culinary Farm – On-farm culinary experiences

Experiential tourism development supports are available to all CK tourism operators and typically encompass the following;

- Support participation in SWOTC's Unlocked & Inspired 7 week Experiential Tourism Course
- Mentorship time to create, develop and market experiences
- Supporting plans for on-site experience pilot test runs, including professional videography and photography

TJ Stables Indigenous Spirit Horses Encounter: this experience from TJ Stables has garnered significant national attention given its Indigenous connections and the

uniqueness of the offering. TJ Stables has worked closely with Indigenous Tourism Ontario to develop the experience.

The experience entails listening to the oral stories of the Spirit Horses and the First Nations Peoples passed down by generations, being immersed into the life of the Metis and ultimately experiencing your own personal encounter with these wild ponies that were once on the brink of extinction. Chatham-Kent is the only place in all of Canada to take part in such an experience. Additional details are available in Appendix B – Spirit Horses Encounter Introduction.

Since winning “Spark”, CK Tourism has supported the operators of TJ Stables in a variety of ways;

- Supported TJ Stables’ participation in SWOTC’s Unlocked & Inspired 7 week Experiential Tourism Course
- Mentorship time to create the “Spirit Horses Encounter” Experience
- Participated in Rendezvous Canada in May 2021 to meet with international travel trade buyers
 - Eight meetings were held with various potential travel trade buyers
 - Meetings with Indigenous Tourism Ontario to promote the experience on a global stage
- Working with SWOTC to list the experience as a one-of-a-kind-in-Canada tourism gem with various national travel groups
- Supporting plans for on-site experience pilot test runs with local and provincial media, travel writers, travel trade tour group attendance, and ideal audience participants to prepare the experience for a 2022 launch

Direct supports to tourism businesses

1. Access to Grants – As various grants and training opportunities open up for tourism operators, CK Tourism shares the information and assists with the application process as needed. So far in 2021, CK Tourism has assisted 11 businesses in accessing \$99,000 in direct financial support in the form of grants:
 - \$70,000 was granted to six businesses through SWOTC’s Safe Opening Grant in January 2021
 - \$9,000 was granted to three businesses through the “Spark” Program in March 2021
 - \$20,000 was granted in digital support to two businesses through the “Spark” Program in March 2021
2. Safe Travels Stamp – In September 2020, TIAO and Destination Ontario rolled out a “[Safe Travels Stamp](#)” issued by the World Travel Council. As of early June 2021, Chatham-Kent Tourism has supported 60 local tourism-oriented businesses and operators in successfully applying for the stamp. Work continues to grow the list of Safe Travels Stamp verified locations in CK in order to ensure that CK tourism operators are ready for recovery.
3. See You in CK Itineraries – There are currently 13 [suggested CK itineraries](#) for local residents and visitors to select as they travel across CK. In these itineraries,

more than 150 different Chatham-Kent businesses are featured with links to their respective digital footprint to allow direct business-to-consumer connections. The itineraries will continue to grow, each with the focus of further increasing revenue at businesses while showcasing all the reasons to “See You in CK”. Itineraries include, but are not limited to;

- [Summer in CK](#)
 - [Instagrammable Day](#)
 - [Shore to Shore Day](#)
 - [Global Cuisine Day](#)
 - [Day on the Road](#)
 - [Buy Local Buy Fresh Day](#)
4. Digital Promotion (Website and Social Media) – Since the enhancement of www.visitck.ca in August 2020, CK Tourism continues to grow the number of businesses in CK highlighted by creating unique pages. Along with the increasing list of suggested itineraries, the following pages have been added to link directly to the many businesses that fall under activities that visitors typically enjoy;
- [Garden Centres & Locally Grown Flowers](#)
 - [Farmer's Markets, Roadside Stands & Orchards](#)
 - [Bakery Trail](#)
 - [Ice Cream Spots](#)
 - [Take-Out in CK](#)
 - [Patios](#)
5. Summer 2021 “See You in CK” Campaign – A video series will be created and digitally promoted to target audiences. Each video will tell a different story by showcasing the various “See You in CK” itinerary trails on www.visitck.ca. Local promotion of CK activities will commence in line with reopening rules and will extend regionally, nationally and internationally, once conditions permit.
6. Tourism Toolkits – Chatham-Kent Tourism continues to follow all prevailing CK Public Health Unit advice and guidelines and will support all businesses and visitors in doing likewise. As previously covered in an update report to Council in January 2021, CK Tourism issued 300 toolkits across the Municipality of Chatham-Kent in the fall of 2020. A 2021 toolkit is currently in development and will be issued to qualifying tourism operators as part of CK Tourism’s annual industry equipping activities. The goal is to help support the tourism sector and operator reopening and recovery.
7. CK Tourism Newsletter – [A monthly newsletter](#) targeted to tourism businesses is sent to operators and showcases industry-specific grants, resources and information.

Consultation

Chatham-Kent Tourism consulted with a range of partners through the Tourism Stakeholders’ Advisory Committee (TSAC) in the preparation of steps to support tourism sector recovery and on the “See You in CK” marketing plan, along with other initiatives and protocols designed to support safe opening.

TSAC provided feedback in May 2021 on the activities outlined in this report and are in agreement with the contents.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications resulting from this report.

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Attachments:

Appendix A – Spark Program Testimonials

Appendix B – Spirit Horses Encounter Introduction

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CK Tourism - Spark Program Testimonials

Terry Jenkins and John Basden, TJ Stables, 2020 “Spark” Recipient

“As a past recipient of the “Spark” Grant in Chatham Kent for our new tourism initiative “Spirit Horse Encounter” at TJ Stables, we want to express gratitude for the many other benefits besides the monetary amount of \$3,000 that we received.

The grant included a mentorship, but we were skeptical about who could possibly be an effective mentor to such a unique experience since the Spirit horses are so rare and endangered. To our delight, we were paired with the CEO of Indigenous Tourism Ontario - Kevin Eshkawkogan, who was a wealth of knowledge and felt The Spirit Horse Encounter would be a crown jewel in Indigenous Tourism in Ontario. This mentorship continues long after the commitment of the Spark initiative.

Then came COVID-19.

The beacon in the Covid storm has been amazing guidance from Chatham Kent Tourism and SWOTC. Shannon Paiva and Joanne Wolnik. Their leadership made us realize that TJ Stables wasn't just a horseback riding business, they opened our eyes to the fact that we are and have been a Tourism Business. They are helping us navigate restructuring our mindset and our business plan and marketing strategy to a much larger market beyond that little girl who wants to ride a horse.

Joanne Wolnik and Shannon Paiva, are working diligently step-by-step, guiding us thru the process of creating a premier Cultural destination experience here in Chatham Kent and developing partnerships locally. Their enthusiasm and efforts have kept us going until COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

Because of “Spark”, we received complementary memberships to CK Tourism, SWOTC, TIAO, ITO, ITAC. With those memberships came weekly newsletters advising of available funding and grant opportunities, discounted virtual courses, including Unlocked and Inspired an in depth look at Experiential Tourism, and a Digital Tourism Marketing course targeted directly to tourism operators and networking opportunities with other Tourism operators.

The Spark Grant was the catalyst behind an incredible journey but the real gift that came with the Grant was an amazing Tourism Team. They all genuinely care about Tourism and all operators in our community and our Province. This Tourism team's influence has far-reaching effects in the survival of tourism and its economic impact and is a lifeline in this Covid storm.

Spark Grant... best thing we ever did!”

Tabitha Hasting, Urban Sunset Farms, 2020 “Spark” Recipient

“We enjoyed the whole process. The excitement of pitching our idea. Tweaking our idea to better suit our audience with someone from the Sparks program, until COVID hit our area. Near the end of lockdown, our meetings were constantly rescheduled and we haven’t been able to connect since. Due to Covid we haven’t been able to complete our Fresh Connection tour but are very hopeful for the future.”

Kelsey Nydham, Downtown Wallaceburg BIA, 2021 “Spark” Recipient

“The aptly named Spark Program ignited excitement, creativity, and community support in Downtown Wallaceburg. The idea of a kayak rental to promote the over 200 km of mapped and signed water trails in Wallaceburg had been bouncing around for years. With our local businesses having an especially hard time throughout this pandemic, the Downtown Wallaceburg Business Improvement Association was watching out for opportunities that would safely bring people Downtown.

Inspired by the Spark Grant, partnerships with the Wallaceburg and District Museum, Wallaceburg Trails Committee, and Wallaceburg Canoe and Kayak Club have already taught us so much about the environment and history surrounding our water systems. We are all so excited to promote our Downtown while sharing what we have learned with the public in an exciting and immersive way, which would have never been considered without the encouragement, mentorship, and funds the grant offered.

We at the Downtown Wallaceburg BIA want to thank Chatham-Kent Tourism and the Tourism Innovation Lab for helping us through the grant application process, for being professional, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic. Whether you’re an experienced tourism operator or just have a great idea we would encourage you to start talking about it! You will never know when an opportunity will arise that will help turn that idea into a reality.”

Bria Atkins, The Crappie Store, 2021 “Spark” Recipient

“We are so grateful to be included with such an inspiring group of local entrepreneurs. Looking forward to seeing all of these great ideas comes to fruition, and building a network in the regional tourism industry.”

Paul, Sara, Joah and Vivien Spence, The Culinary Farm, 2021 “Spark” Recipient

“The Spark Grant is a truly amazing program and we hope that this program can continue on in the future to help other tourism entrepreneurs in CK for future years. On the surface this grant appears to be a small amount of money (\$3,000), however the value of this grant is in how it is constructed. Not only do you win the money to help with your project, you get paired up with a tourism mentor that adds great value through learning from others in the industry and also allows you to network within the industry. And the WEtech portion was overlooked by us until we investigated it and took

Appendix A

it seriously. Having \$10,000 in technology support, as well as a mentor from the tech industry was super helpful, especially during the time of COVID. This helps us navigate through the challenges of creating on farm experiences and having to build a virtual platform for consumers to visit our farm with during a time when they were not allowed in groups on the farm.

Our hope is this program continues and CK Tourism continues to have this asset in their tool-belt to help develop tourism businesses in CK. Tourism in general has been very hard hit because of COVID and we need all the support we can get as people slowly start to explore our region and travel locally, before taking overseas trips. Local tourism needs this!"

Awaken Your Spirit

A Spirit Horse Encounter

"Awaken Your Spirit" is a three hour Ojibwe Spirit Horse encounter that includes an opportunity to learn about the historic Ojibwe Spirit Horses and their connection to the First Nation culture and history. It also allows for a chance to learn about First Nations and Métis cultures.

The experience begins with a welcoming encampment fire, the sounds of the Métis fiddle and an introduction to the camp's Métis fur trader. Visitors will then explore the camp, the Tipi lodge and listen to the stories of the horses told through Indigenous Art of Rhonda Snow.

Visitors will enjoy shared traditional practices, songs and drumming, followed by the story of the Little Horses and their incredible bond with Mother Earth. To culminate this significant experience, visitors will be provided an opportunity to feel the immense power of these small but mighty horses as they mingle with them in the field and reflect around the fire. There is also an opportunity to book the tipi and add an overnight accommodation along with dinner and breakfast.



BOOKING INFO

This one-of-a-kind experience is proudly hosted by TJ Stables.

The experience must have a minimum of 4 people registered to run, and up to 12 people maximum. This is a 3 hour experience, that runs from 1-4pm.

The experience takes place outside year round, participants should be prepared for the weather and wear close-toed footwear. This is a day of exploration, discovery & healing.

For more information, on the Ojibwe Spirit Horses and to book:

www.spirithorses.ca

(519) 354-7517

tjhappytrails@yahoo.ca

*TJ Stables is located in Chatham, Ontario:
837 Gregory Dr. E, Chatham,
ON N7M 5J7*



Please note, COVID-19 precautions are in place, with all health and safety rules being practiced, including a maximum number of participants per booking. TJ Stables is a Safe Travels approved facility.

