

THE GREAT ADVENTURE

SMARTSTATE CENTER OF
ECONOMIC EXCELLENCE
IN TOURISM NEWSLETTER
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

As you read this newsletter, I will probably be in the middle of the ocean somewhere, waiting for the sun to go over the yard's arm before I can sip on a cocktail or two. One big plus about academic life is the sabbatical system – every six years we can take six months paid leave to travel, research and network. As part of my upcoming sabbatical, I will be sailing around the world as a faculty member for Semester at Sea, a floating shipboard campus with a mission to 'integrate multiple-country study, interdisciplinary coursework, and hands-on field experiences for meaningful engagement in the global community.' I was lucky enough to teach on a Semester at Sea voyage back in 2006 which sparked my interest in seeing how developing countries like Vietnam, Myanmar, India and Africa are increasingly opening up their arms to tourism. I was reading, just yesterday, that travel has surpassed oil as the largest revenue generator for the 40 poorest countries in the world.

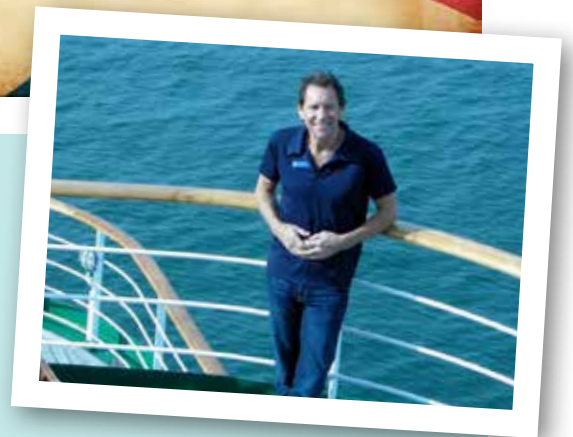
But looking back, 2015 was yet another exciting and productive year for the SmartState Center of Economic Excellence in Tourism and Economic Development. The highlight was probably our International Executive Forum on Tourism Innovation and Entrepreneurship that took place in August. The event drew over 115 participants from diverse backgrounds that ranged from academics to industry leaders and students alike. Presentations featured a fascinating line up of entrepreneurs, innovators and technology experts, resulting in two days of inspiring, enriching, and motivating experiences.

The Center has also been busy working on funded, industry projects. In March, for example, we wrapped up a study looking at potential tourism development along the Santee Cooper waterway, making a number of recommendations to stakeholders in the region. Then, in September, we completed our study examining the effectiveness of the use of hospitality tax (H-tax) dollars in the City of Columbia. Without any time to breathe, we were awarded a grant by the Economic Development

Administration to help strengthen South Carolina's brand as a competitive retirement destination, so we have only just

got cracking on that, but the prospective plan is to help rural counties strategize and position themselves to utilize their resources effectively to attract migrating retirees.

Of course, we can never forget that we live in the world of 'publish or perish' so all of us in the Center are busy writing journal articles, books, book chapters and conference papers. I myself had my seventh book published this year - 'Winter Sport Tourism' - and I continue to follow a multitude of research themes that really intrigue me. One of those is film tourism, and earlier this year I was asked by USA Today to choose 20 destinations where TV shows and movies play a major role in the tourist scene. One of those was Albuquerque in New Mexico where the hit TV series *Breaking Bad* has had a huge impact on the economy for the area, and resulted in thousands of fans visiting to discover Walter White's (the main character) city. I was fortunate enough to go there for a conference in October and took in a Breaking Bad Tour. The guide told me that he recently hosted three tourists who had flown all the way from Australia just for the tour. They turned up decked up in 'cooking' suits, took the three-hour tour, and then flew straight back to Australia. What an interesting world we live in!



**Columbia H - Tax Considered Benefit
to the Community**

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2nd Annual International Executive Forum

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South Carolina as your retirement Destination

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STUDY SHOWS THAT THE USAGE OF THE COLUMBIA H-TAX CONSIDERED BENEFIT TO THE COMMUNITY

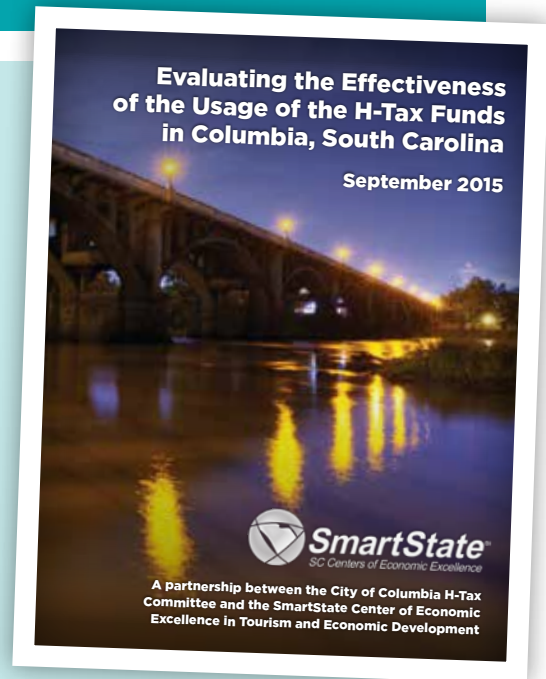
Recommendation to Refine and Grow Current Program

The City of Columbia has been collecting and allocating the hostility tax (H-Tax) for over a decade. The H-tax dollars are generated by collecting a 2% tax on all prepared food and beverages sold in the city. The funds collected are meant to promote tourism and attract visitors to the city, enhance the quality of life for residents, and generate more revenue and ultimately contribute to city's economic growth. In the Spring of 2015, the SmartState Center, in conjunction with the City of Columbia, set out to evaluate the effectiveness of the usage of the H-Tax dollars, examine the current distribution process and assess whether the usage of these funds was meeting the goals of promoting tourism and attracting visitors to the city of Columbia.

The research team embarked on an intensive literature review that revealed that investments in events and festivals promote community enrichment and can be an effective use of tax dollars. The literature review was followed by the collection of surveys from both

residents and visitors at events sponsored in part or fully by the H-tax funds. USC Students attended small, medium, and large events and collected over 400 surveys from the event participants at events such as Olympia Fest, the Black Expo and the Crawfish Festival, among others. The analysis of this data indicated that event goers, whether residents or visitors, would return to the event in the future, highly recommend the event to family and friends, and that these events enhance the image of Columbia. In fact, because of the favorable feedback, events could be considered a "selling point" to attract new residents and businesses. Finally, two focus groups were conducted with the H-Tax committee of the City Council to garner themes around the evaluation of the applicants and the effectiveness of the application process. The team made several recommendations to assist in streamlining the application process and improve the evaluation of applications for funding.

The Center recommends not only the continuation of the H-Tax funds for this usage, but the expansion of the program to further reap the economic and enrichment



benefits of the program. Additionally, a more intensive economic impact study is recommended to further justify the benefits. Overall, Columbia should keep partying! It's good for the city. More information about the results of this study can be accessed at this link:

[Insert link](#)



CONGRATULATIONS TO DR. MENG!

Dr. Fang Meng was awarded tenure and promotion to Associate Professor at the University of South Carolina effective in the Spring 2016. Her research mainly focuses on tourism destination marketing and management, tourist behavior/experience, and international tourism. Dr. Meng will serve as the Interim Director of the SmartState Center of Economic Excellence in Tourism in the first half of 2016 when Director Dr. Simon Hudson takes his sabbatical leave.

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INNOVATIVE, INSPIRING AND SUCCESSFUL: 2ND ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL EXECUTIVE FORUM ON TOURISM INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP



The SmartState Center for Economic Excellence in Tourism and Economic Development, in partnership with USC's International Institute for Foodservice Research and Education, the University of Aruba, the Aruba Management Institute for Sustainable Tourism and Economic Development (AMISTED) and Marriott International, hosted the 2nd Annual International Executive Forum on Tourism Innovation and Entrepreneurship in Columbia, SC on August 2nd-4th, 2015. The theme of the event was innovation and entrepreneurship with a focus on tourism and hospitality. The first in the series of forums was held in Aruba in October 2014. The seminar series aims to explore specialized strategies for enhancing tourism entrepreneurship by creating a shared value for tourism destinations, collaborating across public and private sectors for tourism innovation, utilizing entrepreneurship for tourism community development, using social media innovation to access new markets, developing effective business models that increase a destination's tourism

competitiveness, and creating social and technological innovations in tourism and hospitality. This event drew over 115 participants from the tourism industry, entrepreneurs, community leaders, academics, government officials and economic development experts.

The two-day event, held at the Capstone Conference Center, on the beautiful University of South Carolina campus, highlighted innovation and entrepreneurship within the hospitality industry featuring fascinating speakers

sharing inspiring words of wisdom. The plenary speakers, Matthew Von Ertfelda, Vice President of Restaurant and Beverage at Marriott International, and Darin McAuliffe, Top-side Business Innovation, provided insight into creating successful ventures by sharing their

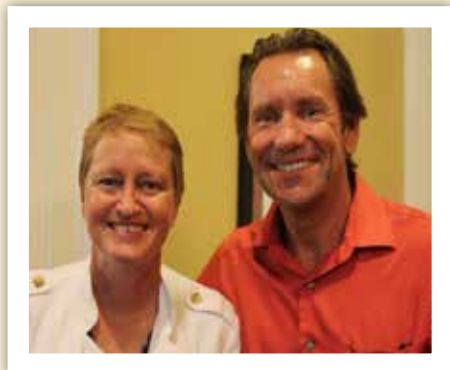
personal motivations and professional experiences. Both agreed that taking risks, thinking outside of the box and embracing challenges are the keys to successful innovation. The messages resonated with the audience. Alumni, such as John Cosgrove (Ecocaters), Frank Scozzafava (Scoot-away) and Derek Nattier (Southern Valet) and Kevin Ayers (State Street Snacks) shared their stories of hard work, long hours and living the entrepreneur's dream. Local leaders, Amy Love (DOC), Laura Corder (USC/ Columbia Technology Incubator), Dirk Brown (Faber Entrepreneur Center) and Bill Kirkland (USC office of Innovation) offered the participants wisdom into opportunities



for new business start-ups and resources available for incubation. Local business startups Royal Green Farms, started by Chip and Scott Harriford and Locomotor Technologies, LLC, Louis Smith, shared their incubation experiences and echoed the value of business incubation. Mr. Chris Stone, President of the Greenville, SC Convention and Visitor Bureau, closed out the forum by sharing his amazing journey leading the transition of Greenville, SC from a predominantly



PhD students: Hengyun Li, Rui Qi and Jeffrey Kreeger



Co-Hosts: Dr. Robin DiPietro and Dr. Simon Hudson

unknown small southern town to a highly sought after urban vacation destination. The Center will continue to support this partnership and has agreed to assist with the planning of the 3rd Annual Executive forum on Tourism Innovation and Entrepreneurship projected to be held in the fall of 2016.

CHECK OUT SOUTH CAROLINA AS YOUR RETIREMENT DESTINATION!



The Center's newest project, funded by the Economic Development Administration, focuses on assessing the potential of attracting retirees and pre-retirees to rural areas of South Carolina. The research will provide insights into retirees' relocation decision-making process, their perceptions of South Carolina as a retirement destination, and the economic impact of

the existing retirees on local communities. The aim is that the results will allow us to develop a comprehensive marketing plan to help the depressed rural counties in South Carolina better strategize and position themselves in order to effectively attract migrating retirees, with the ultimate goal of reinvigorating the local economy through job creation and small business development stemming from the retiree economy.

This year long project consists of several distinct phases that include a comprehensive literature review, a competitive analysis of the market, a stakeholder analysis, a current and potential retiree assessment, and an economic impact analysis. The research team will utilize mixed-methods data collection protocols that will include the facilitation of focus groups, retiree and potential retiree survey collection and the analysis of secondary economic impact and marketplace data.

During the fall of 2015, the team conducted the background research and preliminary data collection. The team assessed existing best practices from around the United States including, but not limited to, Wyoming Boomers and Business Initiative, Hometown Mississippi Retirement, and the Tennessee Good Life Program. The team also conducted three successful focus groups in Greenwood SC, Columbia SC, and the in Charleston SC in conjunction with the American Association of Retirement Communities annual conference. In the spring and summer of 2016, the team will begin collecting the quantitative data (survey data) and conduct the economic impacts analysis. Stay tuned for our results and if you are thinking about retiring, check out South Carolina!

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH RECOGNITION



Dr. Kevin So's research has received international recognition twice this year. Dr. So's doctoral dissertation titled "An Investigation

of the Role of Customer Engagement in Strengthening Service Brand Loyalty" has been chosen as the winner of the internationally prestigious Emerald/EFMD Outstanding Doctoral Research Award 2014 in the Hospitality Management category.

His article titled "Customer Engagement With Tourism Brands: Scale Development and Validation" coauthored with Dr. Ceridwyn King (Temple University) and Professor Beverley Sparks (Griffith University) was awarded the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research Article of the Year Award 2014 at the 2015 Annual ICHRIE Summer Conference in Orlando, Florida. Their paper developed a way to measure customer engagement in the tourism and hospitality industry.

Dr. So has recently joined the editorial board of the Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research.



Jing Li

PHD SPOTLIGHT: JING LI

The SmartState Center of Economic Excellence in Tourism and Economic Development welcomed our newest PhD student, **Jing Li**, in August of 2015. Ms. Li comes to us from Shandong University, in China, where she received her B.S. degree in 2012 in Accounting and her M.S. Degree in 2015 in Tourism Management. Ms. Li is a Ph.D. student with a particular interest in destination branding and marketing, tourist behavior and social media. She chose to pursue her PhD at USC because of the rigorous training in statistics and research methodology offered by the College of Hospitality, Retail and Sport Management. Ms. Li hopes to combine her interests and skills to develop unique tourism branding strategies and to explore risk assessment and economic models within the context of the tourism industry.



Mr. Hengyun (Neil) Li

Mr. Hengyun (Neil) Li, 2nd-year PhD student in the SmartState Center, received the Best Paper Award in the 3rd World Research Summit for Tourism and Hospitality and 1st USA-China Tourism Research Summit held in December 2015 in Orlando, Florida. His research article is entitled as "Economic development and regional inequality in China: what role does tourism play?", coauthored with J.L. Chen and G. Li.