

Highlands County TDC Quarterly Report



FY26 Q2: January – March 2026



Staff attended Rural Counties Day in Tallahassee in January



The Regional Tourism Leadership Team enjoyed a retreat in February



Staff presented to SFSC Lifetime Learners in January

Travel & Tourism Trends

- Travelers are increasingly booking vacations in search of a feeling, rather than by destination (*Forbes.com*)
- Shorter hotel length-of-stays are on the rise (*HospitalityNet.org*)
- 70% of Gen Zers are Embracing Solo Travel (*Reader's Digest - RD.com*)
- “Dry Tourism” Gains Traction as Travelers Seek Healthier, More Intentional Experiences (*Conde Nast Traveler - CNTraveler.com*)

Updates & Highlights

Sports Marketing with Airstream Ventures (ASV)



- For Q2, the TDC does not provide financial assistance to sports tourism events January-March
- Twenty-two (22) sports tourism new or recurring events have been recruited by Airstream Ventures for fiscal year 2026. Some of these events will not be TDC-funded events but will still bring tourism to Highlands County
- ASV has booked 19 events so far in Highlands County for FY26
- ASV is in serious talks with twenty-three (23) events for 2026 & beyond
- ASV will attend six (6) sports tourism trade shows in FY 2026 to recruit new events and represent Highlands County

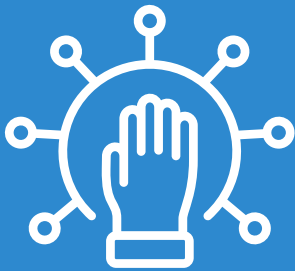
Updates & Highlights Continued

Website Traffic & Digital Marketing with Madden Media



- Engaged Sessions on VisitSebring.com – 15,707 (homepage)
- Engagement Rate for website visitors – 56.56%
- Avg. Session Duration – 2 min 5 seconds
- Guide Downloads & Newsletter Sign Ups for Q1: 2,652
- Top Web Pages for Q1: Homepage, Sebring International Raceway, and Things to Do
- Top Markets Site Visitors Originating From: Orlando, New York, Sebring, Tampa
- Total Outbound Link Clicks: 11,772, up 44%
- Total Accommodation Outbound Link Clicks: 2,163, up 16% YOY

Keeping up with Staff



- Submitted a proposal that was selected to present at the Destinations Florida conference in May, highlighting countywide collaboration efforts
- Acquired 43 acres adjacent to the Sports Complex; a “next steps” proposal is scheduled for County Commission consideration on 4/21
- Coordinated with Legal on the proposed donation of 15 acres across from Fred Wild Elementary School for development of an indoor, multi-use facility; a property survey was completed and road access planning initiated
- Presented to South Florida State College Lifetime Learners on tourism and destination development in Highlands County
- Continued coordination with True Omni to address post-installation issues of visitor kiosks
- Continued coordination with Airstream Ventures, Huddle Up Group, Synergy Sports, and the County Parks Department on sports tourism events and facility development opportunities
- Maintained ongoing collaboration with TDC consultants: Madden Media, MuchPR, Biggest Fish, and Wander Media
- Ongoing discussions with City of Sebring and Highlands County Fair Board regarding facility development based on Synergy recommendations
- Engaged with new and existing event partners (DockDogs, Inspire Dance, PFG, USA Pickleball, Prowatercross, etc.) to advance event logistics
- Worked with Legal on matters related to TDC grants and facility development
- Continued discussions with current and prospective vendors, including Threshold 360, CrowdRiff, Zartico, etc.
- Drafted and submitted FY27 Budget Outlines

Updates & Highlights Continued

Public Relations with MuchPR



- Attended International Media Marketplace in NYC on behalf of Visit Sebring. Met with 25+ outlets (NatGeo, Travel + Leisure, Southern Living, Garden & gun, Miami Herald, Robb Report, & more)
- Attended the TDC's Regional Team Retreat in February and shared insights on storytelling, media relations, and visitor engagement
- Wrote and distributed Sebring Soda Festival press release to more than 150 media. Some articles published include: [Flamingo Magazine](#), [Florida Rambler](#), [USA Today 10Best](#), [Authentic Florida](#), [Drugstore Divas](#)
- Arranging Soda Festival press trip for travel writer Jen Ruiz
- Other national earned media placements highlighting Highlands County include [Travel + Leisure](#), [Southern Living](#), [World Atlas](#), [Secret Miami](#), [Taking the Kids](#), and [Only in Your State](#), plus [Story](#) by previously hosted writer, Jill Robbins, was featured in 20 different outlets

Stakeholder & Industry Outreach



- Attended Rural Counties Day reception and exhibition at State Capitol; Reagan joined Commissioner Campbell and Sarah Beth from Economic Development Office in meetings with Senator Grall, Representative Tuck, Senator Brodeur and Representative Maggard
- Conducted audits for 200+ Bus Travel Companies & participated in 22 appointments at the American Bus Association Conference in Reno, Nevada in January
- Organized and hosted Community Stakeholder meetings in Avon Park, Lake Placid, and Sebring to initiate discussions regarding destination development in both January and March
- Delivered a presentation on "The Role of the Arts in Community Development" to the County Commission in February.
- DockDogs calls and meetings
- Hosted Tourism Stakeholder meetings in Avon Park, Lake Placid, and Sebring in both January and March
- Planned and hosted Regional Team Retreat in February
- Facilitated two (2) in-person Everyone Matters hospitality training sessions to strengthen visitor experience and service excellence across the region. (115 registrations to date)
- Held monthly meetings with Regional Tourism Leadership Team at Classic Caladiums and the Children's Museum, and a half-day Team Retreat in February
- Held a virtual meeting with "Visit Florida" to explore partnership opportunities aimed at highlighting Central Florida's smaller communities
- Participated in meetings regarding the upcoming Avon Park ProWatercross event scheduled for August 2026

Looking Forward

Below are current and future projects and initiatives you should expect to see from the TDC:

- Next TDC Quarterly Board Meeting is Thursday, April 30. Meetings are open to the public.
- 2026 Highlands County Tourism Awards & Insights will be held May 12. Program will feature awarding the winners of the 2026 Winner's Circle Awards, and a keynote presentation by Nerissa Okiye from Martin County Tourism on how the award-winning *Explore Natural Martin* initiative transformed natural resources into meaningful experiences for residents and visitors.
- Staff will be attending the 2026 Destinations Florida Marketing Summit in Palmetto, FL in May where Casey and Shellie have been chosen to present on the successes of Highlands County's countywide collaboration efforts on tourism development and marketing
- True Omni kiosks will continue to be finetuned to provide optimal user experience as a visitor information resource.
- Next steps will be presented and explored on further development at Highlands County Sports Complex post-land purchase.
- Staff is working with Legal on the proposed donation of land across from Fred Wild Elementary for the purpose of developing an indoor, multi-use facility.
- Ongoing Hospitality Training sessions will be offered, open to the public.
- Ongoing Stakeholder Meetings will be held to discuss Destination Development with communities and specific sectors of local tourism industry.

Next Quarter's TDC-Sponsored Events

- April 11-12: Dock Dogs (in conjunction with Soda Fest) – Downtown Sebring
- April: 25-26 – Prowatercross in Sebring/Veteran's Beach
- May 1-3: Inspire Dance at Alan Jay Arena
- May 2-3: USFA at Highlands County Sports Complex
- May 9-10: Premier Girls Fastpitch (PGF) at Highlands County Sports Complex
- May 30-31: GVILLE Flag Football Classic at Highlands County Sports Complex
- June 5-7: Florida Prep Lacrosse's Lax O Lakes - Boys at Highlands County Sports Complex; Girls at Lake June Park
- June 13: 5V5 Soccer at Highlands County Sports Complex
- June 13-14: USFA at Highlands County Sports Complex
- June 27-28: Florida Girls LAX Showcase at Lake June Park