SOUTH CAROLINA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND

BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM

COMMITTEE OF BLIND VENDORS

Minutes for August 28, 2015 Quarterly Meeting

Committee Members Present:

Belinda Banks, Member at Large

Ruby Bryant, Florence District Representative

Don Johnson, Columbia 2 District Representative

Olivia Messer, Greenville Spartanburg District Representative

Isiah Nelson, Columbia 1 District Representative (Vice Chair)

Joe Urbanek, Charleston District Representative (Chairman)

Agency Staff Present:

Bea Belton, Columbia 2 District Counselor

Vernette Brown, Greenville Spartanburg District Counselor

Britany Fullton, BEP Trainer

Lauren Jackson, Columbia 1 District Counselor

Kim Spears, Charleston District Counselor (by phone)

Otis Stevenson, BEP Director

The meeting was called to order at 12-35 Pm. Committee role called gallery introductions; there were 14 vendors present and 2 guests. Staff introductions.

Ted Bryant gave the invocation.

Minutes were approved.

The first item on the agenda was update of Libera Otis Stevenson:

Otis reported that problems with IT were slowing the update process. Otis asked Libera for a price to do the updating and has not heard back. The next two items to be done are the equipment inventory and vendor reporting either by phone or by web link. The vendor reporting would not be mandatory but optional. Hopefully all will be done before budget year end.

The next item on the agenda, training update, Britany Fullton:

Britany reported that a new training class began on August 10, with 2 trainees, both from Columbia. Covered so far in the class, Randolph-Sheppard Act, BEP Manual, inventory and monthly stand reports. The class is projected to end on September 7.

Britany stated that if anyone needs to take the Serve Safe test they can take it on Mondays after nine Am or on Fridays after one Pm. Britany said that she needs at least two weeks’ notice. Also, reviews can be offered on Fridays.

Otis stated that if anyone has referrals for the program, please send them in.

The next item on the agenda, RSA Buying Group, Kayla Messer:

Ms. Messer reported that RSA Buying Group is developed exclusively for Randolph-Sheppard vendors. Its mission is to develop contracts with distributors to reduce costs for BLVs. It is free to join and some distributors such as Coke, Pepsi, Hershey’s, Mars, Frito-Lay, General Mills, Lance and Kellogg’s offer rebates. Kayla said that if anyone had questions or would like to sign up, she would be available after the meeting.

The next item on the agenda, Flash Bank, George Henry:

Mr. Henry gave a presentation from Flash Bank on credit card processing, vending solutions and loyalty programs. Mr. Henry said that loyalty programs involved gift cards and other customer related offers to help keep customers coming back. Mr. Henry stated that vending solutions and credit card processing involved both equipment and the actual processing of transactions.

The Committee and staff asked questions about the type of equipment and fees and contracts. Mr. Henry said that MEI Technology makes the equipment and the devices are combo readers and can do 2 tier pricing. Fees and contracts will be negotiated with each location to hopefully provide the best price.

Bea stated that some inside locations in her district using the Flash Bank Technology and processing have seen an increase in sales.

The next item on the agenda, Visstar, Sih Rols:

Mr. Rols presented Push Beverages. Push beverages are made from the same quality ingredients, but are in a harder bottle guaranteed not to jam in vending machines if loaded properly. Bottles in 20 ounce sizes and are about $10 per case. There are 8 flavors which are: Cola, Artic Rain (similar to Mountain Dew), Orange, Grape, Peach, and Pineapple. Push has their own machines for sale or for free with a commitment of so many cases. There is also a cooler program for inside locations.

Next he discussed a device for vending machines called Pay Range. The device gives the vending machine Bluetooth capability which lets the machine talk to a smart phone app. The app allows customers to make secure purchases and is free and available on Android and I phone. The device itself is small and takes about 30 seconds to install. The device costs $50 per unit but must be purchased in lots of 12. Sih suggested that vendors could work together to purchase the units to reduce the cost for individual vendors. The cost per transaction is 3.95% per transaction. Sih stated that there is no monthly contract or fee. Once you buy the device you set up an account with Pay Range, give a bank account, from which fees are deducted and purchases deposited. Sih stated that there is a Pay Range device that will do both read credit cards and access the Pay Range app. This device cost $80 per unit.

The next item on the agenda, Agency Report, Otis Stevenson:

Otis discussed the VR strategic plan which BEP is a part of. The first item on the BEP part of the VR Strategic plan is to provide agency procedures and policies for BLVS and legally blind individuals who are in food service. The second part is to provide consulting services to BLVs in all areas of health and safe food practices. The third part is to use consumer satisfaction survey data to evaluate the quality and service delivery. Surveys have been sent out to facility management personnel. When the surveys are returned BEP Counselors will discuss the results with BLVS.

Otis stated that Stand 52, I26 Rest Area in Summerville, will have the selection soon. Stand 45, DOT snack and vending was held but no vendor was selected. We will continue to look for a vendor for that location. Stand 147 selection is to be held soon. Stand 30 which is the DOT cafeteria on Park Street will be going on the bid line soon. Stand 35 which is the Richland County Administration building was out but no one bid so it has been assigned to a temporary vendor. Stand 59 which is the Robert Mills building was also assigned to a temporary vendor. Stand 71 which is Moncks Corner vending route has not been determined to be a standalone location or attached to another location.

Otis stated that more Micro Markets will hopefully be added, 1 in each District. Otis stated that 2 renovations are being done; Richland Superior Courts building which should have been completed already and at the Brown building.

Olivia and Ruby asked about the Veterans Hospitals in Anderson and in Florence. Otis said that if he could get addresses he would begin the process for getting the locations.

Ruby asked if VR could assume the responsibility for housing and transportation for BLVS who wish to take level 4 training. Otis said that it is possible and that he would talk to the new VR director to get that worked out. Otis stated that cases would have to be reopened and that 3 services are needed to do that and that training could be one of the services.

The Committee and staff discussed ways of providing level 4 training for BLVS.

Otis stated that PRT is in the process of updating Welcome Centers starting at Fort Mill. The vending will be moved inside and hopefully this will start in October or November. The next Welcome Center to be done is at Hardeeville hopefully at around the same time. Both should be completed in the spring of 2016. Otis stated that he had asked DOT to do the Rest Areas but so far the answer is no.

Joe asked about the 73 Connector in Myrtle Beach and if there was any word on the I26 Rest Area that is now closed. Otis said that he would check with DOT about the 73 Connector and the I26 Rest Area is due to open sometime in 2016.

Olivia asked if there was news on remodeling Belinda’s location? Otis said that DOT says the space is adequate. Otis stated that he had informed DOT that the space is not adequate. Otis stated that the agency needs DOT’s permission to do the remodeling.

The next item on the agenda, Annual Meeting Report, Lauren Jackson:

Lauren reported that the Annual Meeting will be held on February 26 and 27 2016. There will be a Friday night gathering at Christ Central Ministries off of Main Street. There will be a mini Trade show held that evening at the gathering. Saturday will consist of meetings at the agency in the newly remodeled meeting room in D. building. Joe reported that there will be some seminars on Friday afternoon but the times have not been set.

Ruby reported that the reception on Friday night will feature a full course meal of Chicken Alfredo, Meatball Subs, Ham and Cheese Croissants, Salad and New York Style Cheesecake.

The next item on the agenda, Information from the RSA 15 report, Vending Facilities and Vendors on Federal, Public and Private property, Britany Fullton:

Britany read a portion of the RSA 15 report. Otis stated that if anyone wanted a copy of the report, it could be sent out.

Joe reported that at the Committee’s Thursday night meeting they discussed asking that vending facilities earn a base rate of $35000 net income per year.

Ruby made the motion that the agency work to improve facility base income to a minimum of $35,000 per year which may include combining locations where necessary. Don seconded the motion. The vote was taken and the motion carried unanimously.

The Committee also discussed taking the 10 stands which make the least per year and looking to see what could be done to bring the income up. The Committee and staff discussed having someone go to these locations to help with pricing, accurate reporting and anything else which may be needed to improve the income.

Belinda informed everyone that Jc Caldwell, former BEP Counselor, is in the hospital and not responding. The family is asking for prayer.

Otis reported that the agency is going to be working on debt collection. We are looking at all vendors both active and inactive who have debt. Otis reported that the agency is working on an inventory Buy Back plan for vendors to buy back their inventory from BEP. Each vendor would be required to pay a set amount each month until the inventory is paid for. Vendors may pay their entire inventory at once, and several vendors have already paid for their inventory.

The next Committee meeting is scheduled for Friday November 6 2015.

Mary Peters stated that her building had vending machines in competition with her stand and there are food trucks that compete with her. She stated that she really needs a phone line so that she can get a credit card reader. Otis said that she should contact her counselor and ask for the phone line and let the counselor see what could be done. Otis stated that as far as the food trucks are concerned, there is not much that can be done since the building is not a State building.

Don asked if the agency had ever considered using food trucks? Joe said that he had sent an article to Otis and Lauren from the Illinois program describing how they were working at the State fair. Joe stated that the Illinois program has changed their Little Randolph Sheppard Act to cover State Parks including cabin rentals and everything else.

Otis stated that he would like to take a look at food trucks also at vendors getting commissions from food trucks that compete with BLVS.

Ted asked why the annual meetings were being held at the agency? Otis stated that the manual, which is a part of State law, states that the annual meeting will be held at the agency.

Clifton Reeves asked why was the meeting changed now after all this time? Otis stated that it was recently brought to our attention that the manual said that the meeting should be held at the agency and the Commissioner said that those guidelines should be followed. Clifton stated that he felt it would have been more convenient for everyone if the meeting had remained at a Hotel to keep everything in one location.

Patricia Anthony stated that at a meeting with the Commissioner of a group of vendors it was discussed that things were not being done according to the Manual and in the discussion meetings came up and the Commissioner said that meetings would have to come back to the Commission.

Jimmy Davidson stated that personally, he felt that the manual needs to be rewritten because there are some items which violate South Carolina State law and especially the Commission trying to control the hours of independent contract workers. Joe asked if Mr. Davidson had a law degree and Mr. Davidson stated that he did.

There being no further discussion the meeting was adjourned.